

Time of the Telling: Affective Temporalities in the *Chansons de geste*



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This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the Modern and Medieval Languages and Linguistics Degree Committee.

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The Old French and Old Occitan epic poems, called *chansons de geste*, have long been held up as a celebration of the medieval warrior elite. Although they build a world of great deeds and noble families, the epics are nonetheless a poetry of violence whose outlook challenges prescriptive notions of ideality and perfection. This thesis problematizes the laudatory view by asking readers to reconsider the fine line the *chansons de geste* present between heroism and catastrophe. It does this by reframing how the *chansons de geste* conceive of the passage of time in their own narratives, how they move through the world as cultural artifacts, how they enter into conversation with their immediate cultural surroundings, how they straddle past and present, and how they contribute to imagined futures across eras.

The first chapter uses Roland Barthes to read repetition and death in the *Roland* tradition and in the *Chanson de Guillaume*, and contends that when death scenes are repeated, they create an echo that brings the past forward and renders time uncertain. The second chapter employs Kristevan abjection to read selections from the Old French Crusade Cycle as a locus for memory and a focus for anxieties about the extremities of violence. In a departure from previous scholarship, it frames abjection as being dependent on proximity, or temporal closeness, which relies on ‘witnessing’ as a process of repetition in which events are re-lived and re-presented. The third chapter reads the thirteenth-century *Canso de la crozada* through selections from philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy with a focus on ‘mythic thinking’ and community-formation. Through its analysis of the unfinished manuscript decorations and the presence of two politically opposed poets, it shows that the creation of myth in *chansons de geste* is the result of historical desires. The final chapter applies medieval biblical exegesis and the senses of scripture to the subgenre of *Enfances*, reading them as a philosophical exercise in which temporal layering and mythmaking come full circle when poets take up the practice of writing predictive histories for the epic heroes, turning both triumph and catastrophe into destiny.

Time in the *chansons de geste*, whether narrative, historical, or grammatical, is not neutral, nor are the myriad ways in which the passages and movements of time are marked. The experiences of time that the *chansons de geste* underpin are necessarily affective and the possible degrees of temporal affectivity are malleable depending on the content of the poems themselves and the context in which they are received. Reading these affective temporalities as signs is one way to test the limits of violence in the epic tradition, and, critically, to rethink how experiences of violence alter the role the epic poems play in either supporting or challenging historicizing narratives.

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Manuscripts Referenced

La Canso de la crozada

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fonds français 25425

La Chanson de Roland

Cambridge, Trinity College, Wren Library, MS R.3.32

Châteauroux, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 1

Lyon, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 743

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 23

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fonds français 860

Venice, Biblioteca nazionale Marciana, MS Fr. Z. 4 (=225)

Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, MS Fr. Z. 7 (=251)

La Chanson de Guillaume

London, British Library, MS Additional 38663

Mainet

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS nouvelles acquisitions françaises 5094

Raoul de Cambrai,

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fonds français 2493

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Old Words, New Meanings: The *Chansons de geste* in Time

Philoctetes.

Hercules.

Odysseus.

Heroes. Victims. Gods and human beings.

All throwing shapes, every one of them

Convinced he's in the right, all of them glad

To repeat themselves and their every last mistake,

No matter what.

People so deep into

Their own self-pity self-pity buoys them up.

People so staunch and true, they're fixated,

Shining with self-regard like polished stones.

And their whole life spent admiring themselves

For their own long-suffering.

Licking their wounds

And flashing them around like decorations.

I hate it, I always hated it, and I am

A part of it myself.

And a part of you,

For my part is the chorus, and the chorus

Is more or less a borderline between

The you and the me and the it of it.

Between

The gods' and human beings' sense of things.

And that's the borderline that poetry

Operates on too, always in between

What you would like to happen and what will—

Whether you like it or not.¹

¹ Seamus Heaney, *The Cure at Troy: A Version of Sophocles' Philoctetes* (London: Faber & Faber, 2018), pp. 1-2.

The opening lines of Seamus Heaney's play, *The Cure at Troy*, resonate strongly (if somewhat unexpectedly) with the *chansons de geste*. The notion of heroes, simultaneously licking and flashing their wounds 'like decorations', and so convinced of their own rectitude, even midway through what everyone (except, perhaps, the hero himself) can see is a mistake is a familiar trope for those who work on the corpus of Old French and Old Occitan epics. The most striking element of Heaney's opening, however, is found in its interrogation of the borderlines and the inbetweens of poetry, especially narrative poetry, with its final four lines providing a pointed commentary on the expectations and betrayals of the poetic endeavor. The question of who controls what, and indeed, what can and cannot be predicted or contained is reflected in my readings of the *chansons de geste* as a poetry of violence; one that simultaneously upholds and destroys its own generic and philosophical conceits.² These lines are also an interrogation of the time of the telling, and of the positionality of audiences related to texts related to myth related to history; they ask what is present and what is past relative to the action of the narrative, and to the readers and performers that will take it up.

Heaney's play is an object in and out of time—a rendering into modernity of the great Athenian playwright and philosopher Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, a story of lives intersecting in a time of war. *The Cure at Troy* is both a play and a poem that brings forward an ancient story in such a way that contemporary political realities glint out across its pages; as easily read as heard it transcends not just time, but public and private space. It was written in 1989, when political situations worldwide appeared to be taking a positive turn: the Berlin Wall had come down, and Nelson Mandela had, at long last, been released from prison.³ Despite drawing on these hopeful moments, Heaney's *Cure* contends with a contemporary darkness—commissioned by a Northern Irish theatre group and first performed in Derry's Guildhall in October of 1990, nearly a decade before the Good Friday Agreement would come into effect. Its impact has even been felt across the Atlantic, as lines from the end of the play have been used by President Joe Biden, himself of Irish Catholic descent, throughout his career. Rather poignantly, a campaign ad released in October of 2020 laid Biden's reading over images of healthcare workers, masked and exhausted

² The arguments to follow throughout this thesis owe much to Peter Haidu's assertions that violence is the central conceit of the Old French epic, brilliantly laid out in 'Epic and the King's Peace: *The Song of Roland* and *Louis' Coronation*', in *The Subject: Medieval / Modern* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 57-78.

³ Michael Parker, 'Back in the Republic of Conscience: Seamus Heaney's *The Cure at Troy*, its politics, ethics and aesthetics', *Textual Practice*, 31.4 (2017), 747-81.

in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic, protests following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis (my own hometown), and the deadly wildfires that were raging across California. The ad expressed a desire, as Heaney's poem says, to see that, 'once in a lifetime | The longed-for tidal wave | Of justice can rise up, | And hope and history rhyme', to reconcile past wrongs and to forge a new hope for the future of a suffering and divided nation—old words meeting a new moment.⁴ The play itself, its history in performance, and Biden's use of its words look backwards to the past and forward to the future, pointing at the imbricated, affective temporalities that are also, to my mind, a feature of the Old French and Old Occitan epics that this thesis will attempt to reframe. Like the *chansons de geste*, Heaney's take on Sophocles, and Biden's take on Heaney are mobilized for new and innovative political uses. 'Heroes. Victims. Gods and human beings' communicate from the ancient world forward, and their 'sense of things' changes in performance in different historical contexts. Crucially, this is also reflected in the *chansons de geste* as cultural objects in and out of time.

The story of Philoctetes, from a theatre in Athens, to one in Derry, to the television screens of millions of Americans, is interstitial, an object in between times and places. In their book *Anachronic Renaissance*, Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood describe the positionality of such objects in time as 'anachronic' (as opposed to 'anachronistic') in which:

The artwork is made or designed [...] at some moment, but it also points away from that moment, backwards to a remote ancestral origin, perhaps, or to a prior artifact, or to an origin outside of time, in divinity. At the same time it points forward to all its future recipients who will activate and reactivate it as a meaningful event. The work of art is a message whose sender and destination are constantly shifting.⁵

The anachronic object is representative of a certain time, and yet exists outside of time. To illustrate this concept, Nagel and Wood call upon a passage from Roland Barthes's treatise on himself, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, in which the author theorizes substitution, objects, and time using Jason's famous ship, the Argo:

⁴ *The Cure at Troy by Seamus Heaney | Joe Biden for President*, campaign ad, YouTube, 29 October 2020, <<https://youtu.be/KkCvwvcT1zE>> [accessed 10 July 2022]; Heaney, p. 69.

⁵ Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), p. 9. Nagel and Wood go on to define their terms as such: 'To describe a work of art as an "anachronism" is to say that the work is best grasped not as art, but rather as a witness to its times, or as an inalienable trace of history; it tries to tell us what the artwork *really is*. To describe the work of art as "anachronic," by contrast, is to say what the artwork *does*, qua art', p. 14.

Image fréquente: celle du vaisseau Argo (lumineux et blanc), dont les Argonautes remplaçaient peu à peu chaque pièce, en sorte qu'ils eurent pour finir un vaisseau entièrement nouveau, sans avoir à en changer le nom ni la forme. Ce vaisseau Argo est bien utile: il fournit l'allégorie d'un objet éminemment structural, crée, non par le génie, l'inspiration, la détermination, l'évolution, mais par deux actes modestes (qui ne peuvent être saisis dans aucune mystique de la création): la *substitution* (une pièce chasse l'autre, comme dans un paradigme) et la *nomination* (le nom est nullement lié à la stabilité des pièces): à force de combiner à l'intérieur d'un même nom, il ne reste plus rien de l'*origine*: Argo est un objet sans autre cause que son nom, sans autre identité que sa forme.⁶

For Nagel and Wood, this passage is a comment on the temporal instability of meaning related to objects and symbols and their 'possible historical identities' in which the Argo 'managed to function both as a marker of a great span of time [...] and as a usable instrument in a living ritual'.⁷ Thinking of Heaney's sources, his play, and the Argo as 'anachronic' is one way of parsing the very nature of how legacies are read with and against origins, how socio-cultural structures impact objects, and how these concepts might appear incompatible and yet be completely inseparable. Anachrony can also help to trace the movement of the *chansons de geste* through time. Although, they are more complex even than Barthes's assertions about the Argo, the *chansons de geste* emerge by evolution *and* substitution, as well as what Barthes calls *nomination*, in which names—of characters, places, or weapons—become symbolic entities, even in texts where they are not the protagonists.

I will use terms throughout this thesis—among them echo, ghost, reverberation, repetition—each of which describes a different manifestation of the impression of temporal instability that Barthes's Argo metaphor implies; the impression that, as Nagel and Wood say, messages are shifting. What Barthes perhaps misses in his very personal assessment of the Argo is that although form may well be the most basic root of the expression of identity, neither form nor identity need be static; as identities shift, the way that forms are understood must likewise shift. The Argo can remain outwardly as it ever was but be understood differently and stand for different things than it did when first launched, gleaming and white. This is particularly true in

⁶ Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975), p. 55.

⁷ Nagel and Wood, pp. 8-9. Nagel and Wood use the more common 'Ship of Theseus' to refer to this thought exercise. I have supplied 'Argo' to avoid confusion.

the case of cultural objects that are seen to be at least semi-historical, but which move quickly into the realm of myth as they are taken to underpin national identities. Alongside their Greek and Roman counterparts, which took up the legends of Jason and his Argonauts and mobilized them across centuries of oral and written performance, the epic poems of the Old French and Old Occitan tradition are emblematic of these processes of mythification, substitution, and shifting identities. Thinking through these layers of accrued meaning is the work of this thesis more broadly, but I will begin with a single case study of these processes in action.⁸

Raoul de Cambrai is a poem in three parts, an example of what Catherine M. Jones calls ‘textual layering’, and in subtle ways, its own sort of Argo. There is no wholesale replacement of planks, per se, but the text bears witness to continuations and reworkings just as it alludes to layered moments in history stretching from the ninth century through the reign of Philip II Augustus. Jones posits that the action of the *Raoul* is based on a series of historical conflicts that took place following the reapportionment of lands in the Treaty of Verdun in 843, and that the eponymous hero is an amalgamation of four historical men (all named Raoul).⁹ Although based on past events, ‘the poem is clearly a response to tensions between the high aristocracy and the monarchy in the late twelfth century.’¹⁰ The layering present in the *Raoul* extends beyond its historical and mythological narratives—Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS français 2493 shows the work of two scribes, and of two poets; one writing in assonanced *laissez* and the other preferring rhyme.¹¹ Scholars have identified three distinct stages of composition, of which the first is an assonanced version of the ‘Raoul’ section that likely dates to the early twelfth century. The second is a rhymed reworking of the ‘Raoul’ section undertaken in the late twelfth century to which the ‘Gautier’ section was added. These are

⁸ For a detailed discussion of the many debates that frame scholarship of the *Chanson de Roland*’s origins and how its Oxford version came to be, see: Joseph J. Duggan, *The Song of Roland: Formulaic Style and Poetic Craft* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973). My use of the *Raoul* here is by way of decentering the *Roland* as the primary example of how a *chanson de geste* came into being in the form (or forms) we now know, and because the *Raoul* might be seen as more typical of the processes of amalgamation and revision that are so present in the genre as a whole.

⁹ Catherine M. Jones, *An Introduction to the Chansons de Geste* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), pp. 100-02.

¹⁰ Jones, p. 101.

¹¹ BnF, MS fr. 2493 is by far the most complete example of the *Raoul* at 8543 lines. Two further fragments containing a combined 294 lines are held in the State Archives of Belgium, and a third fragment (now lost) containing 250 lines was copied by the antiquarian Claude Fauchet in 1555. For a more detailed accounting of these manuscripts see Sarah Kay, ‘Introduction’, in *Raoul de Cambrai*, ed. and trans. by Sarah Kay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. ix-lxxiii (pp. ix-x, xviii-xxi, xxvi).

followed by a thirteenth-century continuation, called the ‘Bernier’ section, which Jones asserts is written in assonanced form to give it a more archaic tone.¹² The story of the *Raoul*’s Barthesian Argo starts with a whisper from history, however faint, the truth of which is then remade to fit the needs of its time, or times. The composite nature of the poem is more obvious than in other examples to follow, but the general processes that caused it are by no means anomalous to the *chansons de geste* as a genre; each song is an Argo. Indeed, these epic poems are likely the result of an oral tradition which no doubt bore witness to substitutions, additions, and omissions before ever being written down.

BnF, MS fr. 2493 itself tells a number of stories. It is small and well worn; the top and bottom corners of four folia (fols 2-5) are torn in a triangle shape, creating notable lacunae. Why they should have been torn in this way is a mystery. Throughout the manuscript are examples of various types of marginalia in at least three different historical scripts; from writing practice (including two instances of someone’s abc’s), to reading notes, and to passages marked by an ‘x’ for reasons now lost to time. A personal favorite is found on fol. 96v where a note in the margin shows a nineteenth or early twentieth-century attempt to expand an abbreviation, which reads ‘pour | pour non’. On closer inspection—followed by ‘chief’—it more likely expands to ‘par mon’, testament to the difficulty historical scripts have presented across centuries.¹³ These numerous marginal interventions are absent from the scholarly editions, creating a sense of lack in which the ‘whole picture’ could not possibly be achieved. Fortunately, the advent of digitization makes them visible once more, and at great distances. There is a sense in the experience of accessing the digitized manuscript of having come full circle as this one poem bears the marks of centuries of singers and poets, of readers and scholars, of changing technologies.

Raoul de Cambrai, though adapted in the thirteenth century as *La Vengeance Fromondin*, faded from memory until interest in the *chansons de geste* was rekindled in earnest by nineteenth-century medievalists.¹⁴ Other *chansons de geste* saw a similar rise and fall from the later Middle Ages onward, as they were adapted by the French *mises en prose*, and translated into other vernacular languages—the thirteenth-century Franco-Italian epics, the fifteenth-

¹² The sections are commonly referred to by the names of their main protagonists.

¹³ *La Chanson de geste de Raoul de Cambrai*, Paris, BnF MS fr. 2493, fols 96^v-97^r, in *Gallica* <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9060526x/f103.item>> [accessed 8 November 2022].

¹⁴ Jones, p. 110.

century Italian chivalric romances, the Old Norse *riddarasögur*, as well as examples in Middle High German, and Middle Dutch¹⁵—before slowly passing into obscurity, then being found again as access to archives and great libraries increased. In each case, the Barthesian processes of substitution and nomination are at play, as performance is replaced by text, as manuscripts proliferate and move through time, eventually becoming scholarly editions. The characters that start on the lips of troubadours become monumental figures preserved as statues, as the protagonists of plays and films, even of comic books. Some songs are lost entirely, some leave behind fragmentary traces, some leave behind translations for which the original no longer exists. Each step in the development of the *chansons de geste* is a plank, as for the Argo, each version is an intermediary between worlds—between performance and text; between historical imaginations and realities; between narrative worlds; between audiences. Every *chanson de geste* that has survived is a metaphor for lack and loss, but also one of accrual and abundance.

As this thesis will show, the loss and accrual that the *chansons de geste* undergo is not purely textual, but also a question of building and shaping cultural memories, and of extracting sense from narrative worlds. The Old French and Old Occitan epics exploit the often-porous boundaries between history and legend with a view to communicating a set of evolving ideals as part of a progressive, mythmaking endeavor. There is, naturally, some overlap between ‘legend’ and ‘myth’ and many writers use them completely interchangeably—I do not, and it is therefore worthwhile to parse the differences between them. These terms have been somewhat fluid across the time periods and the contexts in which they have been used, as such, the editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary* note that despite being generally interchangeable, in scholarly use ‘myth’, ‘legend’, and ‘allegory’ are defined differently and serve different purposes.¹⁶ Historically, the *legendarium* was a book of saint’s lives, *legenda* were readings for use in an ecclesiastical setting, but a *legend* might also be a guide on a map, or a folkloric story. In the case of this last meaning, it is easy to see the overlap with ‘myth’ and how it might be difficult to discern between the two—both are stories, both are rooted in their source cultures, and both therefore engender a sense of shared experience. Being shared, however, is not enough to make ‘myth’ and ‘legend’ the same; if a legend is a well-known story with recognizable folk tropes, a

¹⁵ Jones, pp.137-45

¹⁶ ‘Legend’, in *The Oxford English Dictionary* <<https://www.oed.com/>> [accessed 29 March 2022].

myth is a story that is oriented in a specific direction, for a certain purpose. On this, Barthes agrees:

Mais ce qu'il faut poser fortement dès le début, c'est que le mythe est un système de communication, c'est un message. On voit par là que le mythe ne saurait être un objet, un concept, ou une idée; c'est un mode de signification, c'est une forme.¹⁷

Myths are *about* something—they cannot be reduced to a single conceptual symbol, but are a communicative form that sends messages, sometimes discreetly, sometimes not.

Some historical scholarship has tended to treat myth and mythologies as less serious than other forms of primary source evidence. Although they communicate a large amount of information about the cultures that performed, copied, preserved, translated, paid for, and compiled them, the *chansons de geste* are often seen as less 'historical' than chronicles (even if certain examples, composed retroactively, may well contain similar levels of objective 'truth'). This view of myth has fortunately undergone a process of reevaluation over time and is less popular than it once was, though not completely obsolete. In *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams explains this progression, and offers some distinction between 'myth' and other related terms:

Each of these references was retrospective, and myth alternated with *fable*, being distinguished from *legend* which, though perhaps unreliable, was related to history and from *allegory* which might be fabulous but which indicated some reality. However, from mC19, the short use of myth to mean not only a fabulous but an untrustworthy or even deliberately deceptive invention became common, and has widely persisted. [...] With the development of anthropology, both this last sense, of accounts of rituals, and a different sense, in which myth, as an account of origins, was an active form of social organization, were strongly developed. From each version (which in varying forms have continued to contend with each other as well as with efforts to RATIONALIZE (q.v.) myths in such a way as to discredit them or to reveal their true (other) causes or origins) a body of positive popular usage has developed. Myth has been held to be a truer (deeper) version of reality than (secular) history or realistic description or scientific explanation.¹⁸

¹⁷ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957), p. 215.

¹⁸ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana Press, 1976), pp. 211-12.

It is worth noting that ‘legend’ does not receive its own entry in *Keywords*, though ‘history’ does. Highlighting the ‘sense of inquiry’ that is necessarily tied to ‘history’, Williams goes on to say that:

it is necessary to distinguish an important sense of history which is more than, though it includes, organized knowledge of the past [...] given the stress on human *self-development*, history in many of these uses loses its exclusive association with the past and becomes connected not only to the present but also to the future.¹⁹

This definition of ‘history’ shows that all forms of historicizing narrative, from the more concrete through the fictional can be instructive—as part of a movement towards ‘self-development’ these narratives bridge past and future; past errors and successes filtered through present desires lead to future action (or inaction). All forms of historical writing trigger the ‘sense of inquiry’ that cause audiences to evaluate (to varying conscious degrees) their place in time, their views of themselves as historical or cultural actors in between past and future.

In Williams’s definition, legends are framed as a sort of historical fiction, but as this thesis shows, myths are also deeply rooted in perceptions of history. Legends might also be taken as representations of universal values that, whilst perhaps being a point of reference for community identities and relationships, are not inherently political. Myths are similarly communal, but they are always political insofar as they are informed by, and directed at social problems, desires, or needs. For example:

Le mythe a un caractère impératif, interpellatoire: parti d’un concept historique, surgi directement de la contingence (une classe de latin, l’Empire menacé), c’est *moi* qu’il vient chercher: il est tourné vers moi, je subis sa force intentionnelle, il me somme de recevoir son ambiguïté expansive.²⁰

As such, myth is a force which is directed at understandings of the world and at social actors within a desired, but perhaps unaccomplished, or unwanted world. Far from being passive, myth, through its ‘caractère impératif, interpellatoire’ confronts audiences and holds up a multi-directional mirror that points inwards and outwards, backwards and forwards. To experience myth is thus to ask (if not attempt to answer) questions about what interactions with characters,

¹⁹ Williams, pp. 146-47.

²⁰ Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 232.

events, or artifacts (historical, present, or otherwise) in a world moving through time *mean* to us. If legends are universal, myths are pointed.

In reading the *chansons de geste*, their legendary quality might be closest to the historical reading, with myth falling more easily into figural readings of the text in which the stories are about something beyond what is explicitly on the page. As such, if the characters and events portrayed in the *gestes* are legendary, they reflect an impulse towards historical narrative based on known names and characters. These then enter into myth once they are transposed and mobilized for political use, and insofar as their meaning is capable of change through time as they interpellate audiences with changing values and desires. This is true of the way the core set of *chansons de geste* are received through time, but also in the drive towards continuation and expansion that their later iterations and additions manifest. Along these lines, Barthes describes entry into myth as a process of inflexion: ‘Le mythe ne cache rien et il n’affiche rien: il déforme; le mythe n’est ni un mensonge ni un aveu: c’est une inflexion.’²¹ I take ‘il déforme’ here not to mean that myth mutilates or ‘deforms’, but rather that it actively alters and changes the forms by which meaning is presented and received. For example, Roland, in the context of the *chansons de geste*, passes from legend into myth because his actions (including his death) are always pointed at something deeper that shifts through time. As such, because his story has many variations (versions, images, translations) Roland is also an example of the process of inflexion or bending and reorienting myth undergoes—that which makes it mobile, that which allows it to operate differently from legend. Roland, in his altered representations throughout the Old French and Old Occitan traditions is de-formed; transcendent and yet deeply rooted in the needs and desires of the cultures that translate him from text to text.

I would certainly not be the first to consider how history and memory interact to shape cultural myths and mythologies, though perhaps under other names. Using Pierre Nora’s neologism *lieu de mémoire*, Jane Gilbert has suggested that the *Chanson de Roland* is just such a locus of memory. This assessment can be extended to the genre as a whole, though the *Roland* (and its Oxford version in particular) is the most prominent example in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century imagination. In the grand scheme of nation-building and cultural identity, this puts the *Roland* and the *chansons de geste* in the same realm as buildings on a national historical register, or of monuments such as statues or tombs. Although Gilbert goes on to say that, ‘The

²¹ Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 237.

national memory invested in the *Song of Roland*, as in any *lieu de mémoire*, represents a retrospective fantasy serving a modern audience's sense of its own identity rather than an accurate reflection of the medieval past', Nora's framework is nonetheless a productive way of understanding how myth and mythmaking are multidirectional, extending backwards and forwards across audiences at different moments in time.²² Certainly, the *lieux de mémoire* as both Nora and Gilbert conceive of them are political articulations of cultural myths and memories, and therefore extend past mere legend as Williams frames it. Much of Nora's conception of what makes a *lieu de mémoire* is seen through the lens of what was seen to have informed the particular Frenchness of the earliest iterations of the Republic, the narrowness of which has not escaped criticism, but which is nonetheless useful for my purposes.²³ By way of an 'official definition', Nora offers the following:

a *lieu de mémoire* is any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community (in this case, the French community).²⁴

Throughout the original volumes, there appeared to be an assumption on Nora's part that there was a clear consensus about the meaning of symbols. Indeed, it bears noting that, as the world has opened up and the capacity for travel has increased, so have the distances between communities that might claim the same 'memorial heritage'. Nora attempted to correct this in the preface to the English edition by saying that he hoped that going forward, the category could be opened up in order 'to follow the natural articulations of memory itself' more than focusing on the cultural 'sites' thereby removing 'symbolic unity' from the equation in favor of 'exciting new

²² Jane Gilbert, 'The *Chanson de Roland*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*, ed. by Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 21-34 (p. 21).

²³ Nora's focus on hexagonal France has been criticized by scholars working on post-colonial studies and the broader francophone world. These criticisms have no doubt been exacerbated by the narrowed focus of the English translation of *Les Lieux de mémoire, Realms of Memory*, which proposed a much-reduced edition of the original French volumes. For a discussion of how Nora's *lieux de mémoire* might be expanded, see: Étienne Achille, Charles Forsdick, and Lydie Moudileno, 'Introduction: Postcolonializing *lieux de mémoire*', in *Postcolonial Realms of Memory: Sites and Symbols in Modern France*, ed. by Étienne Achille, Charles Forsdick, and Lydie Moudileno (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), pp. 1-20.

²⁴ Pierre Nora, 'Preface: From *Lieux de mémoire* to *Realms of Memory*', in *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, ed. by Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer, 3 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), I, pp. xv-xxiv (p. xvii).

vistas.²⁵ Nora derived his neologism from what he calls the ‘classical art of memory’ which relied on an inventory of *loci memoriae*, or *lieux de mémoire*.²⁶ Of this, Nora says:

In French, the association of the words *lieu* and *mémoire* proved to have profound connotations—historical, intellectual, emotional, and largely unconscious (the effect was something like that of the English word ‘roots’). These connotations arise in part from the specific role that memory played in the construction of the French idea of the nation and in part from recent changes in the attitude of the French toward their national past.²⁷

To catalog these *loci*, or places, is to engage in the retrospective search for ‘roots’ all whilst presenting artifacts to explain and to justify attitudes and identities; going backwards and bringing forwards. In some ways, this operates like a genealogical tree on a national scale. And indeed, ‘Le Lignage’—a chapter detailing the growing impulse towards memorializing ancestries, family names, and genealogies from the tenth through the thirteenth centuries—was the renowned medievalist Georges Duby’s contribution to *Les Lieux de mémoire*.²⁸ Although not without the problems of anachronism that Gilbert noted, the *chansons de geste* are well suited for such a framework, as lineage, as cultural heritage, as root system, as we can see by focusing in on one of the genre’s great protagonists, Charlemagne.

In his book on Charlemagne, Robert Morrissey traces depictions of the great emperor from his earliest appearances in the historical record through late nineteenth-century imaginings of the man as ‘figure de la nation’. Morrissey’s impressive catalog reflects a similar desire to track and uncover the developing roots of a cultural identity as Nora’s *lieux*, though centered instead on a single figure who takes many forms. Morrissey shows Charlemagne’s extraordinary plasticity over the course of a thousand years, as a figure with both legitimating force and subversive potential; a figure whose symbolic potency lives at the junction of national myths, histories, and poetics within and beyond what is now France.²⁹ In the following passage,

²⁵ Nora, ‘Preface’, pp. xvii-xviii.

²⁶ This thesis is not particularly concerned with the cognitive science of memory, but there are nonetheless resonances between my work, Nora’s, and Paula Leverage’s, especially where memory and community formation are concerned, see: Paula Leverage, *Reception and Memory: A Cognitive Approach to the Chansons de Geste* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), especially pp. 275-96.

²⁷ Nora, ‘Preface’, pp. xv-xvi.

²⁸ Georges Duby, ‘Le Lignage: Xe-XIIIe siècle’, in *Les Lieux de mémoire II: La Nation**, ed. by Pierre Nora (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1986) pp. 31-56.

²⁹ Robert Morrissey, *L’Empereur à la barbe fleurie: Charlemagne dans la mythologie et l’histoire de France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), p. 11.

Morrissey establishes some of the frame for his work, and indeed, four gestures that are key to my own understanding of mythico-historical figures:

Casser et restaurer, voir et cacher, ces mêmes gestes reviennent dans les trois configurations de cette scène que nous avons prise comme emblème de la relation à un passé originaire. Nous les verrons constamment à l'œuvre dans l'itinéraire que nous allons tracer. Sous-tendant ces gestes, les motivant en quelque sorte: le désir et le mouvement de la recherche et de la transmission. On recherche des traces et des données de l'histoire, des documents et monuments qui permettent de voir, qui donnent une prise sur le passé. Transmission de ce qui a été trouvé et de ce qu'on en a fait, de la vision qu'on s'en est forgée.³⁰

Morrissey is keenly aware of the peculiarities of time and how his subject moves through its different historical and narrative layers. Although Morrissey is specifically concerned with Charlemagne as *topos*, this framing lends itself nicely to the broader practices of mythmaking in which the *chansons de geste* are some of western medieval literature's primary participants.³¹ The four gestures encompassing the simultaneous acts of breaking with and restoring are rooted in relationships with the past, and in practices of transmission that link the search for origins with visions of the future, as images and texts are passed between generations. Transmission is thus viewed as an interpretative gesture—at once active and reflexive—motivated by a desire to know, to trace, and to see. As part of his work on transmission and history Morrissey introduces what appears to be a bit of a throwaway term, but which is both pointed and poetic: *miroitement*, or mirage. Crucial to understanding representations of Charlemagne as founding father, 'le miroitement de la légende ne cesse de se mêler à l'image de l'histoire.'³² A *miroitement* as projectional, and the notion of mental mirroring that is inherent to mirage is an apt metaphor for the simultaneous search for and rejection of origins, as well as the incredible plasticity of a

³⁰ Morrissey, *L'Empereur*, p. 23.

³¹ Another significant contribution to scholarship of Charlemagne as *topos* is Dominique Boutet's *Charlemagne et Arthur, ou le roi imaginaire* (Paris: Champion, 1992) which explores these kings as 'imaginary' in that they are constructed and reconstructed as literary inventions throughout the medieval period (and beyond). Boutet asserts that both Charlemagne and Arthur are part of a process wherein historical 'fact' (even if nebulous) is transformed into fictions through which social and ideological realities can be confronted. Boutet's framing of both literature as a means of constructing and contending with 'origins', as well as his theorizing of literature as a mythological agent foreground my own work in this thesis. Although not explicitly framed as such, I see Boutet's intervention as one that takes anachrony as literary tool quite seriously and which challenges earlier assertions that would seek to silo 'history', 'literature', and 'myth' rather than seeing them as co-participants in cultural movements across time.

³² Morrissey, *L'Empereur*, p. 24.

‘personnage mythico-historique’ (in this case Charlemagne) throughout the construction of national identities across Europe.³³ *Miroitement* implies repetition, even if in flux or out of focus, and indeterminate distance from viewer to ‘subject’; an image that guides, but that does not remain static, one that is open to a variety of interpretations as identities change and evolve. This identity is therefore found (a été trouvé) but also one which is made (qu’on s’en est forgé) at what Morrissey calls ‘la charnière’ of history, myth, and poetics, which he characterizes as a ‘lieu stratégique’ where the tensions between traditions and contexts and ‘un individu écrivain’ are laid bare.³⁴ The image that Morrissey presents of the writer at the forge-point of traditions—those inherited, and those being made—is easily transferred to the *chansons de geste* as a means for contemporary poets and audiences to explore their own changing social norms and the limits of power.³⁵ This is all the more true as the *gestes* move through time; what starts as a way for medieval people to explore the implications of their own changing worlds becomes, in the nineteenth century and beyond, a search for origins.

There is, however, a certain timelessness, or uncertainty seated within the mirage that butts up against the place of the *chansons de geste* as historical objects in historical time. To address this temporal uneasiness, I turn to Reinhart Koselleck’s useful argument for the superimposition, or layering, of time. In *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, Koselleck acknowledges the difficulties of marking and discussing historical time without relying on ranges of dates, the advents of new technologies, or critical moments in military and political history—the coronation of a monarch, the dates of key battles. As an alternative, he suggests that examining relationships arising from these ‘events’ naturally transcends certain temporal determinations, which he positions in the following terms: ‘How, in a given present, are the temporal dimensions of past and future related?’³⁶ He then frames these relationships as based on considerations of experience and expectation. It will always be challenging to separate the *chansons de geste* from their own ‘critical moment’ in chronological, western historical time. We should however, like the *Argo*, see them as Koselleck suggests, not as being representative of a single time, but of a superimposition of times—as being multi-temporal (or anachronic) and

³³ Morrissey, *L'Empereur*, p. 24.

³⁴ Morrissey, *L'Empereur*, pp. 26-27.

³⁵ Jones, p. 148; Morrissey, *L'Empereur*, p. 72; Luke Sunderland, *Rebel Barons: Resisting Royal Power in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 6.

³⁶ Reinhart Koselleck, ‘Preface’ in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. by Keith Tribe (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), pp. xxi-xxvi (p. xxiii).

therefore belonging to different, simultaneous pasts and presents, as a record of experience and expectation. Furthermore, theorizing how audiences might experience the harmonies and the disconnects between times and temporalities plays out in fascinating ways when we imagine their interactions with the *chansons de geste*. In these texts past moments are, in a sense, brought forward to each audience; pastness becomes slippery when present-ed in the space of performance. This is necessarily tied to what Morrissey describes as the simultaneous desire to break with and restore origins within discussions of how what is foundational carries through into the ‘present’ of the seeker. One way of digesting this is by differentiating past-future relationships through either prophecy or prognosis. For Koselleck, ‘prophecy transgressed the bounds of calculable experience,’ where ‘prognosis remained within the dimensions of the political situation’.³⁷ In other words, prophecy is an experience of past-future relations that cannot be calculated, whereas prognosis is rooted in what is determined to be ‘real’ or quantifiable experiences. The key difference is perhaps that prophecy is seen to look backwards whereas prognosis looks forward:

The prognosis is a conscious element (Moment) of political action. [...] The prognosis itself, then, continually radiates time in a generally predictable but actually uncertain fashion. [...] From the point of view of prophecy, events are merely symbols of that which is already known.³⁸

To view the *chansons de geste* along these lines would be to remove them from fixed time entirely and instead read them as examples of both cultural prophecy and prognosis, with characters and places as avatars for how each audience in time might be called to see themselves, their origins, and their futures. Indeed, as Koselleck aptly states, ‘prognostication also had a static temporal structure insofar as it operated in terms of natural magnitudes whose potential repeatability formed the cyclical character of its history. The prognosis implies a diagnosis which introduces the past into the future.’³⁹

Returning to Barthes’s metaphor of the Argo, and to Nagel and Wood’s ‘anachronic’ artifact, it might be equally useful to view the *chansons de geste* themselves and their primary protagonists as a *topoi*, similar to the Charlemagne as *topos* that Morrissey

³⁷ Reinhart Koselleck, ‘Modernity and the Planes of Historicity’ in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. by Keith Tribe (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), pp. 3-20 (p.13).

³⁸ Koselleck, ‘Modernity’, p. 14.

³⁹ Koselleck, ‘Modernity’, p. 17.

suggests. That is, as a body that evolves and develops or as the site of cultural memories that shift through time—*le nom est nullement lié à la stabilité des pièces*—wherein the characters and stories are unstable in their different iterations while the whole maintains a certain symbolic stability as a cultural vessel moving through human time. All the same, they should be seen as indicative of their own kind of time that is at once historical and prophetic, existing at the interstice or *charnière* between experience and expectation, prognosis and prophecy. As such, as for Morrissey's Charlemagne, the positive (or negative) values of the epic heroes (or their enemies) are neither fixed nor static but equally subject to change—this is as true of the period in which they are being recorded as it is for later interpretations, which cannot and should not be taken at face value. Although imperfect, Nora's view of the incredible malleability of *lieux de memoire* serves this view of the *chansons de geste* as wonderfully unstable cultural vessels:

En revanche, il est clair que si l'histoire, le temps, le changement n'intervenaient pas, il faudrait se contenter d'un simple historique des mémoriaux. Lieux donc, mais lieux mixtes, hybrides et mutants, intimement noués de vie et de mort, de temps et d'éternité; dans une spirale du collectif et de l'individuel, du prosaïque et du sacré, de l'immuable et du mobile. Des anneaux de Moebius enroulés sur eux-mêmes. Car s'il est vrai que la raison d'être fondamentale d'un lieu de mémoire est d'arrêter le temps, de bloquer le travail de l'oubli, de fixer un état des choses, d'immortaliser la mort, de matérialiser l'immatériel pour—l'or est la seule mémoire de l'argent—enfermer le maximum de sens dans le minimum des signes, il est clair, et c'est ce qui les rend passionnants, que les lieux de mémoire ne vivent que de leur aptitude à la métamorphose, dans l'incessant rebondissement de leurs significations et le buissonnement imprévisible de leurs ramifications.⁴⁰

In one way or another, the chapters that follow take a similar view of the *chansons de geste* as hybrid places where the space between the temporal and the eternal comes to life. Within each *chanson*, within each protagonist's journey is an attempt to reckon with death, and within each manuscript is an attempt, as Nora says, to 'materialize the immaterial'. Each *chanson* is, like Barthes's Argo, a mirage, an impression, a ghost of what once was launched, gleaming and white, for each successive audience. These characteristics no doubt ring as true for their earliest

⁴⁰ Pierre Nora, 'Entre Mémoire et Histoire: La problématique des lieux', in *Les Lieux de mémoire: I La République*, ed. by Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), pp. xv-xlii (p. xxxv).

performers, as for the scribes who penned the manuscripts, as they do for me as a reader. And indeed, who among us hasn't related one of these stories to the uninitiated, reveling in our own favorite moments. Barthes called the Argo 'un objet éminemment structural', a vessel both literally and metaphorically, for a variety of meanings as its planks were replaced over time; so too are the *chansons de geste*, a highly formulaic genre whose horizons of expectations may have seemed fairly fixed, but which have shifted as time intervened. Similar to the *lieux de mémoire*, the *gestes* stop time; they memorialize and conceptualize the collective and the individual—they immortalize death. It is, as Nora says, the 'immutable and the movable' that these poems preserve, that makes them exciting. As *lieux de mémoire*, and insofar as the Argo is such a *locus*, these processes are also deeply affective, meaning that we are not free of the ties that we bear to the past, nor of the positive and negative affects that encompass each audience as they experience them.

This thesis will treat the *chansons de geste* as distinct from other medieval vernacular genres. Though this is hardly revolutionary, following important work that has been done to complicate the rigid generic boundaries often applied to medieval literatures, it does merit explaining. According to Simon Gaunt, genres offer 'imaginary resolutions to problematic contradictions and tensions' that are constructed through textual production at various moments over time. Different genres therefore do not emerge and develop according to 'unwritten rule-books'. Rather, they are creative articulations of confrontations with 'historical circumstances' expressed in a recognizable form that adheres to norms and standards that make events or cultural shifts easier to digest. Because they evolve over time, what makes one genre different from (or similar to) other genres is not rigid, but rather flexible, and we should not only accept, but embrace the points at which they touch up against one another.⁴¹ Although it will not be the focus of the pages to come, I nonetheless contend that the *chansons de geste* propose different resolutions (if, indeed, we might name them such) to the problems and tensions of their worlds than the chronicles, hagiographies, or romances that are their contemporaries. Following Sarah Kay, I consider the *chansons de geste* to be a set of narrative poems sharing a 'common form (the assonanced or rhyming *laisse*), and a common content: they are representations of the conflictual character of French history, in a mode and with a narrative shape not shared by

⁴¹ Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 6-8.

vernacular historiography'.⁴² Unlike Romance, wherein 'the self or subject of quest is what is primarily at issue', the *gestes* focus on the parties to endemic, unresolved (and perhaps unresolvable) violence where conflict is presented as 'an ongoing and irreducible dualism (or pluralism) without necessarily prescribing a position from which to view it'.⁴³ Part of my argument, however, will rest on the degree to which these poems do, in fact, offer a positionality with regard to epic violence, however ignored or obfuscated it may have ended up being. In this sense, my work follows that of R. Howard Bloch, who calls the Old French epic tradition 'a panoramic view of contemporary institutions' and 'a virtual catalog of medieval military practice', wherein the views the *gestes* present are both shaped by, and an active commentary on, a Capetian world in crisis.⁴⁴

Kay assembles her corpus from those epics composed during the time when Romance was being cemented as a prestige genre.⁴⁵ Because this thesis is a meditation on what the *chansons de geste* do broadly across time and separately from other genres, I have taken a somewhat different approach. I will tend to follow heroes more than generic markers, and as such my examples are drawn from the foundational cores of the most famous epic cycles, then from their continuations, regardless of their date of composition. That said, it does bear noting that the bulk of these come from the period shaped by great demographic shifts, and the rising power of the monarchy over the aristocracy that took place 'between the reign of Philip the First and that of Saint Louis' which 'was an era of crucial importance for the development of the French state, the first in a series of discontinuous stages in France's growth as a nation'.⁴⁶ This has allowed me to present a cross-section of the *gestes* across their historical articulations, taking a broad view of their mythological resonances and dissonances. The narrative arc of this thesis traces the *chansons de geste* through time, starting with the earliest and ending with some of their latest manuscript examples. It begins and ends with three of the genre's major heroes—Charlemagne, Roland, and Vivien—and touches on two of the most 'historical' episodes the genre preserves, both iterations of Crusade. In its structure and its ordering, the goal is to reflect

⁴² Sarah Kay, *The Chansons de geste in the Age of Romance: Political Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), p. 8.

⁴³ Kay, *Political Fictions*, pp. 50, 53.

⁴⁴ R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval French Literature and Law* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 1-2, 7-8.

⁴⁵ Kay, *Political Fictions*, p. 6.

⁴⁶ Bloch, p. 8. For a historical overview of this period oriented specifically towards kingship, see: Elizabeth E. Hallam and Charles West, *Capetian France, 987-1328* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

both the linear and the circular impulses of the *gestes* and to embrace the temporal uncertainties they present—this is one of the guiding principles behind putting the medieval theory, and indeed, the very childhoods of the heroes last, rather than first. One of my theoretical gambits is to follow narrative and cultural reverberations outwards, and to bring them full circle by thinking about the impact of different cultural contexts on the composition and preservation of the *chansons de geste* in both French and Occitan, and how these different cultural and temporal contexts impact how the central heroes of the *gestes* are perceived. This manifests most obviously in my interrogation of the presumed perfection of heroes like Roland and Vivien, and what reframing heroic death reveals about the *chansons de geste* as a cultural system. One of the ways I do this is by thinking seriously about the work that interlocking temporalities do in these texts generally, and by reframing any assumed temporal neutrality on a very granular level. Put broadly, this thesis will forge a new theory of the borderlines, as Heaney puts it, between what later eras have wanted the *gestes* to say, what they appear to have said in their own time, and what meaning can be extracted from the dissonance between the two.

In my view, a wide range of potential disconnects are present in the character of Roland, and in the manner of his death at Roncevaux. As such, my first chapter uses Barthes's *La Chambre claire* to read repetition and death in the Old French *Roland* tradition and to put it in conversation with Vivien's similarly complex death in the *Chanson de Guillaume*. In both cases I contend that when poets repeat death scenes, they create an echo in line with Koselleck's assertion that temporal layering is, in part, the practice of bringing the past forward. Barthes's *Chambre claire* is an apt means to do this work insofar as it theorizes memory and reception and helps to frame the affectivity of our relationship with objects through time; an examination of how moments of death in the *gestes*, like photographs, open anticipatory spaces that endow the subject with a multiplicity of possibilities that extend backward and forward in time. My second chapter employs Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject to read selections from the Old French Crusade Cycle as a locus for memory and a focus for anxieties about the extremities of violence that both upholds and threatens the warrior-noble mythologies in which these texts and their audiences participate. In a departure from previous scholarship, I frame abjection as being dependent on proximity, or temporal closeness. Similarly, I investigate the audiences the Crusade Cycle creates to include 'witnessing' as a process of repetition in which events are re-lived and re-presented. My third chapter reads the thirteenth-century Old Occitan *Canso de la*

crozada through selections from philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy with a focus on ‘mythic thinking’ and community-formation. Through its analysis of the unfinished manuscript decorations and the presence of two politically opposed poets, this chapter questions how historical-literary writing versus historiography versus mythmaking can be interpreted through reframing the creation of myth as the result of historical desires. Finally, in the spirit of bringing the complex temporal outlooks of the *gestes* back on themselves, the closing chapter reads selections from the *Enfances* of the main epic heroes through Henri de Lubac’s medieval exegesis, and the four senses of scripture. I read these texts as both retrospective and predictive exercises in which temporal layering and mythmaking come full circle as later poets contend with an epic world trending towards Apocalypse by writing histories for the epic heroes, and in so doing, turn catastrophes into destinies.

The progression of the chapters’ *gestes* move from earlier to later examples, along what are more or less chronological lines (both narratively and historically), as do the contemporary theorists in question: *La Chambre claire* was first published in 1980, as was *Pouvoirs de l’horreur*, with Nancy’s *La Communauté desœuvrée* and *Être singulier pluriel* following in 1983 and 1996 respectively. Following this linearity, it might seem odd to put both the *Enfances*, or childhoods last, and even more unusual to hold the most explicitly medieval of the theoretical approaches until the end—like jumping, unprovoked back in time. I note, however, that even from text to text, cycle to cycle, the chronological logic of the *chansons de geste* is far from simple, and certainly far from linear. My ordering takes into account the overarching structures of time, memory, and myth, and the ways the *gestes* transmit those structures to audiences. It is true that, although the twelfth century was the great period of composition for these poems, the majority of their extant manuscripts were produced in the thirteenth century, with a new crop of *gestes* composed in the fourteenth century.⁴⁷ With some of the earliest extant examples coming from the Anglo-Norman realm, and with many *mises en prose* and adaptations arriving much later, it is clear that there is not one ‘sweet spot’ in time or space for understanding how the *chansons de geste* operate as a quasi-historical genre. Luke Sunderland explains this phenomenon using Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s ‘rhizome’, wherein a rhizomatic text is one that ‘is a multiplicity rather than a whole’:

⁴⁷ Sunderland, *Rebel Barons*, p. 3.

Chansons de geste are rhizomatic texts because, from an early stage, they invited continuation and revision [...] Crucially, however, no *chanson* exists in a definitive version; rather each *chanson* is a multiplicity of versions (although modern editions generally reduce them to one version).⁴⁸

I will not rely heavily on the rhizomatic approach that Sunderland puts forward, but to think of the way these texts proliferate and adapt through time in terms of a great system of roots is as descriptive of the phenomenon of the *gestes* in and out of time as it is poetic. Placing the *gestes* within the sort of ‘root system’ that the rhizome implies is a way showing how memory and myth as a form of historical memory continually develop, rather than being seen as ‘fixed’, or simply reproduced. Furthermore, the notion of ‘roots’ is integral to the *chansons de geste*; insofar as ‘*geste*’ can mean family, or lineage, or deed in equal measure, and insofar as they form part of the structure upon which views of the past are built throughout their literary and symbolic lives. Certainly, as Peter Haidu has shown, the content of the *gestes* themselves cannot be entirely removed from the society that made them. This is in itself an argument for anachrony over anachronism, wherein the *gestes* are at once literature and something else that cannot be excised from the realities of a real, social, historical world.⁴⁹ The narratives themselves are overwhelmingly concerned with dynastics and with consigning deeds to memory. As such, to frame the *gestes* within a rhizomatic system of ‘roots’ equally implies a system of memories intertwined with historical fact for which each text provides an identifiable locus, and one that is at once linear and always circling back on itself. A shift backwards is productive precisely because, as Sunderland has shown, the *gestes* were written rhizomatically and they build on each other as part of a mythological worldbuilding exercise meant to deal with very real social and political problems.

The *Chanson de Roland* and the *Chanson de Guillaume* are both at the vanguard of a world that is, as I will show, showing serious foundational cracks. The *Chansons d’Antioche* and *Jérusalem* contend with the limits of extreme violence and the place of the Christian hero within it, and the *Canso de la crozada* presents a very different view of both crusading as a

⁴⁸ Luke Sunderland, *Old French Narrative Cycles: Heroism between Ethics and Morality* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2010), p. 26.

⁴⁹ Peter Haidu, *The Subject of Violence: The Song of Roland and the Birth of the State* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993). This is a thematic thread throughout *The Subject of Violence* but is most clearly elucidated as regards the *chansons de geste* as a whole (and not specifically oriented towards the *Roland*) in Haidu’s introduction, pp. 1-16.

concept, and of the Old French heroes as adapted for an Occitan worldview. The *Enfances* are among the last epics to be written, and therefore contend with creating a unifying message for the epic world as a whole (which is, by this point, in full decline). Lubac's work on biblical exegesis provides a means by which to think through what medieval audiences and poets thought historical writing was, how understandings of the Bible and its multitemporal, multidirectional messaging informed the structure of the *chansons de geste* in their later stages, and how the various iterations of the heroes across narratives are reflections and echoes of themselves. Understanding how exegesis and childhood in the *chansons de geste* are enmeshed can also reveal much about how writing predictive history creates a theory of the case for the circularity of the genre's narrative progression and its mythmaking endeavor in real time—how writing a new, further past imposes new orders of meaning on the core set of epic poems. As such, returning to the medieval view after a thoroughly modern reckoning is not only responsible, but crucial to understanding what these texts were seen to do in their own time. This type of study can also reveal how they utterly undermine certain nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century nationalist views of how medieval heroism worked. Ultimately, this reading 'out of order' is anachronic, out of time, but fully within the representational logic of the *chansons de geste* as a genre.

In the broadest sense, this thesis is an attempt to peel back the layers of time and meaning that have accrued on and around the *chansons de geste* and their heroes. It similarly aims to parse the roles that poets, audiences, and critics have played in receiving and shaping that meaning from manuscript to printed edition, from text to art object. It will unpack the degree to which the self-regard of the heroes 'shining like polished stones' balances against their 'own long-suffering', and whether wounds can ever be decorations within the world the *chansons de geste* construct. Perhaps most importantly, I will, like the chorus in Heaney's *Cure at Troy*, reimagine the part that critics and criticism play in making the epic world. After all, the texts themselves are not neutral. I am not a neutral reader. This is as it should be.

Momentary Deaths: Catastrophe and Repetition in the *Chanson de Roland* and the *Chanson de Guillaume*

Before the great medieval cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris stands a bronze statue of a man on horseback flanked by two men on foot. The statue, *Charlemagne et ses leudes*, was erected in 1878 during the reign of Napoléon III, but was first proposed in 1852, the year before Baron Haussmann was tasked with remaking Paris.¹ Roland, posing with his sword Durendal and his *olifant*, or horn, holds the reins to Charlemagne's horse. On the other side, also holding the reins is Roland's fighting companion, Olivier. All three, lean and muscular in their chain mail, are the image of the ideal Frankish warrior as seen from the nineteenth century. The great emperor is historical, but the statue is a curated fiction whose figures are rooted more in the *chansons de geste* than in Einhard's or Nottker's chronicles. Although the sculptors Louis and Charles Rochet may have perceived little difference between these versions of Charlemagne, that they chose to immortalize his epic version is nonetheless important. Roland and Olivier are virtually unattested in the historical record, and yet the Rochet's statue gives them pride of place. This is due in large part to the fact that Francisque Michel's edition of the Oxford version of *La Chanson de Roland*, published in 1837, had been very well received.² The Oxford *Roland* quickly became a favored text in the creation of a mythologized France—the one to which this statue belongs.

Charlemagne et ses leudes is hardly a one-off in the genre; only a few years prior another statue sculpted by Louis Rochet was erected at Falaise, in the Calvados.³ This time it is William the Conqueror in command of his war horse, rearing up. Around the plinth on which the warlord stands are the preceding six dukes of Normandy all the way back to the fabled Viking, Rollo, purported to be the first to hold the title. During this period Napoléon III commissioned yet another statue, this time of the Gallic warrior Vercingétorix, which stands at Alise-Sainte-Reine in Burgundy.⁴ The unifying theme of these statues is revealed, in part, by the inscription on the

¹ Charles and Louis Rochet, *Monument à Charlemagne et ses leudes*, 1878, monument, Paris <<https://anosgrandshommes.musee-orsay.fr/index.php/Detail/objects/5050>> [accessed 8 June 2021]; Morrissey, *L'Empereur*, p. 408; Stéphane Kirkland, *Paris Reborn: Napoléon III, Baron Haussmann, and the Quest to Build a Modern City* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013), pp. 83-89.

² Joseph J. Duggan, 'General Introduction: Editing the Song of Roland', in *La Chanson de Roland — The Song of Roland: The French Corpus*, ed. by Joseph J. Duggan, 4 vols (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), I, pp. 5-38 (pp. 7-8).

³ Louis Rochet, *Statue de Guillaume le Conquérant*, 1851, monument, Falaise <<https://www.pop.culture.gouv.fr/notice/merimee/PA14000067>> [accessed 8 June 2021].

⁴ Aimé Millet and Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, *Monument de Vercingétorix*, 1865, monument, Alise-Sainte-Reine <<https://www.pop.culture.gouv.fr/notice/merimee/PA21000061>> [accessed 8 June 2021].

plinth of the Vercingétorix Monument. It is a single sentence adapted from Julius Caesar's commentaries on the Gallic Wars: 'La Gaule unie formant une seule nation animée d'un même esprit peut défier l'Univers.'⁵ This is emblematic of the well-documented effort that begins in earnest in the nineteenth century to assert a singular, continuous lineage of France whose Enlightenment values were rooted in a unified and unique national spirit. Speaking of the *lieux de mémoire* and of the nineteenth-century nationalist project that was the driving force between many such monuments, Nora says, 'Plus les origines étaient grandes, plus elles nous grandissaient.'⁶ These monuments have power and a good part of this power rests on the way their legends have been represented through the rediscovery, dissemination, and adaptation of medieval chronicles and poetry; the myths on which they draw. It is important to note that, as *lieux de mémoire*, these monuments are anachronic, or interstitial, insofar as they are at once backwards looking and aspirational. For Nora, these *lieux* lean heavily on the 'culte des morts' that they venerate and on the 'présence du passé' for which they serve as a reminder.⁷ Through these monuments, the past is reimagined and made present, both in time (eternally present tense) but also physically present in public spaces.

These monuments (as *lieux de mémoire*) serve as a powerful metaphor for the moment of arrestation a spectator experiences when figures emblematic of a mythic past—Nora's 'cult of the dead'—are brought forward into their present moment. This arrestation is at once philosophical and personal, one that is tied to the affectivity of such monuments and the moments of pause that they bring about. In order to parse these phenomena, I propose another work by Barthes—*La Chambre claire*—which introduces two terms that are useful in assessing and describing these moments of arrestation that a spectator experiences when observing an image. Although Barthes's subject is photography, the terms he coins—*punctum* and *studium*—strike to the core of the critical experience of reading the seemingly ephemeral relationship between spectators and objects more broadly. *La Chambre claire* is a work that theorizes memory and reception and in so doing explores the affectivity of our relationships with objects

⁵ The citation is adapted from a speech that Caesar reports giving to the assembled Gauls: 'Nam quae ab reliquis Gallis civitates dissentirent, has sua diligentia adiunctorum atque unum consilium totius Galliae effecturum, cuius consensui ne orbis quidem terrarum possit obsistere' [He would by his own efforts bring to their side the states which disagreed with the rest of Gaul, and establish one policy for the whole of Gaul, whose unanimity not even the world could resist]. Julius Caesar, 'Book VII', in *The Gallic War*, trans. by H.J. Edwards, Loeb Classical Library 72 (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1917), pp. 379-511 (p. 422).

⁶ Nora, 'Mémoire', p. xxxi.

⁷ Nora, 'Mémoire', p. xxxvii.

as they are being received. Although photography might seem quite distant from the *chansons de geste* which are the focus of this thesis, as *lieux de mémoire* and therefore cultural objects, the framework that Barthes establishes opens new avenues for understanding how they conceive of and move through time. *Punctum* and *studium* represent two sides of interest in an image—the immediate and the ongoing; the *punctum* as the initial prick of interest, and the *studium* as that which lingers.

There are several ways that these two terms might be applied in readings of the *chansons de geste*. As Barthes explains:

Reconnaître le *studium*, c'est fatalement rencontrer les intentions du photographe, entrer en harmonie avec elles, les approuver, les désapprouver, mais toujours les comprendre, les discuter en moi-même, car la culture (dont relève le *studium*) est un contrat passé entre les créateurs et les consommateurs.⁸

On the surface, both academic work and the *chansons* themselves obey this principle; the *studium* is, in part, a contract the critic enters into with the work to be principled in their suppositions and explanations. On a textual level, the *studium* governs the tropes that dictate how narratives unfold, what makes an enemy bad and a hero good, all the boxes that are ticked with regard to genre. The *studium* is the quiet comfort of expectations met. The *punctum*, however, is the domain of the unexpected and the accident. Whether the result of generic anomaly or a character that challenges norms, the *punctum* is the inciting incident; that which troubles or delights. In this sense, *punctum* and *studium* might be framed as speeds or intensities, though Barthes describes them thus:

En 1865, le jeune Lewis Payne tenta d'assassiner le secrétaire d'État américain, W. H. Seward. Alexander Gardner l'a photographié dans sa cellule; il attend sa pendaison. La photo est belle, le garçon aussi: c'est le *studium*. Mais le *punctum*, c'est: *il va mourir*. Je lis en même temps: *cela sera* et *cela a été*; j'observe avec horreur un futur antérieur dont la mort est l'enjeu. En me donnant le passé absolu de la pose (aoriste), la photographie me dit la mort au futur. Ce qui me point, c'est la découverte de cette équivalence [...] Que le sujet en soit déjà mort ou non, toute photographie est cette catastrophe.⁹

⁸ Roland Barthes, *La Chambre claire: Note sur la photographie* (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma/Gallimard/Éditions du Seuil, 1980), pp. 50-51.

⁹ Barthes, *Chambre*, pp. 148-50.

Reading the *chansons de geste* is similar in that the audience is forced to confront the face of a handsome youth who is both dead and about to die, and there is something in the way death interrupts these narratives, and is then repeated, that replicates this phenomenon. At the center of every poem, of every protagonist's arc is just such a catastrophe.

Barthes's *punctum* and *studium* depend on the relationship between the *operator* (the photographer) and the *spectator* (the audience) and on three practices of which the photograph is the object: doing, undergoing, and looking. These relationships revolve in turn around the subject of the photograph itself. Barthes explains:

Et celui ou cela qui est photographié, c'est la cible, le référent, sorte de petit simulacre, d'*eidôlon* émis par l'objet, que j'appellerais volontiers le *Spectrum* de la Photographie, parce que ce mot garde à travers sa racine un rapport au "spectacle" et y ajoute cette chose un peu terrible qu'il y a dans toute photographie: le retour du mort.¹⁰

The way that Barthes conceives of 'spectacle' and specter is important to understanding how *punctum* and *studium* function in the *chansons de geste*. *Eidôlon*, from the Greek, means ghost, or shade, and like Morrissey's *miroitement* or Nora's 'cult of the dead', *punctum* makes past events present—the dead return.

As in the photograph, the *operator* of the *chanson de geste* offers up their subject as spectacle. Although Barthes describes *punctum* in photography as a largely individual experience that exists outside of what can be named or coded, his use of terms like 'spectacle' and 'catastrophe' introduces a public element that is fitting for epic as a performance genre. For Barthes, regardless of whether a photograph is exhibited in a gallery, printed in a magazine, or pulled from a dusty box in an attic, the experience of being pricked by it (*punctum*) is necessarily always individual. And yet, 'spectacle' is commonly used to describe stagecraft or pageantry; something offered up to the public.¹¹ Similarly, 'catastrophe' is a term commonly used in classical drama, but which has broader implications for the experience of bringing traumatic or tragic events into a present moment. As Juliette Cherbuliez explains:

Catastrophe's first usages among ancient writers are quite close to its etymology: 'sudden turn', 'conclusion', 'upheaval', or 'resolution' appear in both historical and dramaturgical texts [...] We note that three words crucial to the dramaturgical

¹⁰ Barthes, *Chambre*, pp. 22-23.

¹¹ 'Spectacle', in *Oxford English Dictionary* <www.oed.com> [accessed June 2021]

transmission of violence— tragedy, horror, and catastrophe— today belong to the lexicon of historical thinking. This vocabulary generally accounts for that which is not survivable.¹²

Punctum as a force of interruption in the *chansons de geste* must then be viewed as both individual and collective; a singular moment captured in time and preserved, but that is in no way static, or purely ‘historical’. Similarly, although the spectator knows the moments after which young Lewis Payne was captured on film were not survivable (he is dead), the photograph allows a moment of anticipation (he is going to die). Insofar as any public, cultural artifact (like the epic poems) is anachronic, the meanings of these moments will necessarily be altered by repetition and as they move into the realms of memory; each poem therefore exists both inside of and outside of time, a series of upheavals and resolutions, catastrophes. This finds yet another parallel in Barthes, who claims that, ‘Au fond la Photographie est subversive, non lorsqu’elle effraie, révolte ou même stigmatise, mais lorsqu’elle est *pensive*.’¹³ This chapter will take *punctum* as an opportunity to pause for reading, as moments presented for reflection; this body of poetry, as it exists inside of language and as it constructs and subverts time and space, will be *pensive*. This chapter will examine both the spectacle of the genre and its specters, in their specificity and in their multiplicity. Perhaps most importantly, this chapter will read *punctum* as a particular feature of two narratives within the Old French epic tradition made evident by the repetition related to the deaths of two of the genre’s better-known heroes: Roland and Vivien.

Roland Dies Again

There are few protagonists in the medieval French literary tradition that better reflect Nora’s ‘cult of the dead’ than Charlemagne’s nephew, Roland, whose death is one of the most famous in the French literary canon writ large. The oldest version of the *Chanson de Roland*, preserved as Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 23, and known as MS *O*, has, in its own way become a *lieu de mémoire* for scholars of the medieval period and for the wider public. Since Francisque Michel first published his edition, a further two-dozen have followed, of which half were

¹² Juliette Cherbuliez, *In the Wake of Medea: Neoclassical Theater and the Arts of Destruction* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), p. 185.

¹³ Barthes, *Chambre*, p. 65.

intended for classroom use.¹⁴ The Oxford version has, in part due to this large number of editions, become the default; the ‘standard’ version to which scholars and lay-enthusiasts refer. Although many of the narrative moments that I will describe in terms of *punctum* and *studium* ostensibly begin with MS *O*, they often also occur across the poem’s other six extant manuscripts. Because it is the oldest, I will continue to use the Oxford version as a base for comparison, but it is my aim to show that aspects of its uncertain temporalities, and the way it contends with the catastrophic, punctal moments related to the hero’s death, are in fact a feature of the broader *Roland* tradition.¹⁵

The seven *Roland* manuscripts (and two small fragments) are testament to an ongoing, international, and intergenerational interest in the eponymous hero, his famous uncle, and the intrigue that surrounds them. Although the Oxford version—an Anglo-Norman copy dating from the second quarter of the twelfth century—is the oldest extant version, Ian Short proposes that it was itself very likely copied from an even older, probably Norman manuscript.¹⁶ The next two manuscripts chronologically are the closely related Châteauroux, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 1 (MS *C*) and Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, MS Fr. Z. 7 (=251) (MS *V7*), both of which date towards the end of the thirteenth century. Duggan describes MSS *CV7* as preserving ‘the linguistic mixture of Old French and Old Northern Italian that has come to be called Franco-Venetian or Franco-Italian’.¹⁷ These are followed by Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français MS 860, a decasyllabic, rhymed copy which Annalee C. Rejhon localizes to the region of the Ardennes somewhere between 1265 and 1290.¹⁸ Although MS *P* is part of a compilation of several texts copied by a single scribe and bound together, the *Roland* portion of the codex is incomplete. Rejhon posits that the first quire of the *Roland* was lost somewhere in the mid to late sixteenth century when the codex was unbound (for reasons

¹⁴ Duggan, ‘General Introduction’, I, pp. 36-37.

¹⁵ In showing that the various versions of the *Roland* adapted to changing social atmospheres, William W. Kibler has made a compelling argument for study of the tradition beyond the Oxford version, see: ‘The “Roland” after Oxford: The French Tradition’, *Olifant*, 6.3&4 (1979), 275-92. Although I use the Oxford version as a base for comparison, I see my work as belonging to this now well-established scholarly tradition.

¹⁶ Ian Short, ‘Introduction to Part 1: The Oxford Version’, in *La Chanson de Roland — The Song of Roland: The French Corpus*, ed. by Joseph J. Duggan, 4 vols (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), I, pp. 13-107 (pp. 19-20, 39).

¹⁷ Joseph J. Duggan, ‘Introduction to Part 3: The Châteauroux-Venice 7 Version’, in *La Chanson de Roland — The Song of Roland: The French Corpus*, ed. by Joseph J. Duggan, 4 vols (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), II, pp. 13-110 (pp. 17-22, 29-32, 55).

¹⁸ Annalee C. Rejhon, ‘Introduction to Part 4: The Paris Version’, in *La Chanson de Roland — The Song of Roland: The French Corpus*, ed. by Joseph J. Duggan, 4 vols (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), III, pp. 13-111 (pp. 68, 100-02, 104).

unknown).¹⁹ Lyon, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 743 (MS *L*) is also rhymed and was copied in the late thirteenth, or early fourteenth century in Burgundy (possibly in the immediate region of Lyon). It appears to be a complete example, with no missing leaves or obvious lacunae.²⁰ As such, Kibler asserts that any material from the earlier versions that does not appear in MS *L* ‘has been deliberately suppressed’.²¹ Kibler also notes a progression in spirit towards romance in this version, although ‘its form remains that of a *chanson de geste*’.²² Venice, Biblioteca nazionale Marciana, MS Fr. Z. 4 (=225) (MS *V4*) has an unknown date of composition, though Robert F. Cook posits that, ‘its decoration almost certainly dates from the early to mid-fourteenth century, and no earlier.’²³ The hybrid of French and Italian found in MS *V4* is even more marked than in *CV7*, which prompted Cesare Segre to call it ‘a language that does not seem to care whether or not it is understood’.²⁴ Cook refers to the narrative content of *V4* as a compilation in three distinct parts—rather than a *remaniement*, or reworking—with the first third bearing striking resemblance to *O*, whereas the final third has more in common with *CV7*. Finally, Cambridge, Trinity College Wren Library, MS R.3.32 (MS *T*) is a rhymed copy in French dating from the fifteenth century. It appears to have been in England as early as the late fifteenth century and has been in Trinity’s holdings since 1672; as with the Paris version it is ‘acephalous’, though Wolfgang Van Emden does not identify any physical evidence of lost leaves.²⁵

As these manuscripts show (to say nothing of later renderings in other languages), the *Chanson de Roland* has undergone a series of changes throughout the centuries. The poem has been adapted to its surroundings and to its immediate audiences, as is evident in its linguistic variations, and in its narrative features. The Oxford version is decidedly Norman, whereas the Paris version might have appealed particularly to certain noble families in the Ardennes, and the

¹⁹ Rejhon, pp. 19-20.

²⁰ William W. Kibler, ‘Introduction to Part 6: The Lyon Version’, in *La Chanson de Roland — The Song of Roland: The French Corpus*, ed. Joseph J. Duggan, 4 vols (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), III, pp. 13-17.

²¹ Kibler, p. 18.

²² Kibler, p. 20.

²³ Robert F. Cook, ‘Introduction to Part 2: The Venice 4 Version’, in *La Chanson de Roland — The Song of Roland: The French Corpus*, ed. Joseph J. Duggan, 4 vols (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), I, p. 13.

²⁴ Cited in Cook, p. 20.

²⁵ Wolfgang G. Van Emden, ‘Introduction to Part 5: The Cambridge Version’, in *La Chanson de Roland — The Song of Roland: The French Corpus*, ed. by Joseph J. Duggan, 4 vols (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), III, pp. 19, 25. Van Emden gives two possibilities for this, the first that the poem was simply copied this way, or that the beginning portion of the poem was bound in a previous volume, pp. 25-26.

linguistic characteristics and decoration of *CV7* and *V4* are notably Italian.²⁶ A similar adaptation is at play in *T*, of which Van Emden says:

The most immediately striking textual characteristic of the Cambridge text is the desire to modernize, to make the poem more easily comprehensible to fifteenth-century readers, if not to the contemporaries of François Villon or even of Clément Marot [...] Archaic words are constantly being replaced by more modern ones, often to the detriment of syllable-count or rhyme.²⁷

The narratives throughout the French corpus also expand on the Oxford version, which is rather short by comparison. The motivations for this aren't completely evident, except insofar as they reveal evolving interests on the part of its audiences through time. *V4*, for example, adds an episode featuring the conquest of the city of Narbonne following which Charles hands over control to Aimeri, thereby tying the Roland narrative explicitly to the Guillaume cycle. Perhaps the most notable change throughout the wider corpus is that the character Aude, Roland's betrothed and Olivier's sister, is more developed in the other extant manuscripts than she is in the Oxford version. Ganelon's trials and punishment are similarly more developed in the later versions, showing a desire to build on and digest the implications of his actions.

The *Roland* narrative is being interpreted as time progresses, but there are striking commonalities that that were quite clearly seen as inherent to the *chanson* and therefore did not undergo significant change. As I will show, the most apparent of these are related to Roland's death, beginning with key revelations in Ganelon's story arc. In the Oxford version, Ganelon first appears in the twelfth *laisse*, as part of a list of those attending Charlemagne's council:

Li empereres s'en vait desuz un pin,
ses baruns mandet pur sun conseil fenir:
le duc Oger, l'arcevesque Turpin,
Richard li velz e sun nevuld Henri,
e de Gascoigne li proz quens Acelin,
Tedbald de Reins e Milun, sun cusin,
e si furent e Gerers e Gerin;
ensembl'od els li quens Rollant i vint

²⁶Rejhon suggests that 'an impetus for its compilation could have been the betrothal of Jeanne de Rethel with Louis de Nevers in 1277', p. 68.

²⁷ Van Emden, p. 30.

e Oliver, li proz e li gentilz.
Des Francs de France en ad plus de mil.
Guenes i vint, ki la traïsun fist.

Dés or cumencet le cunseill qui mal prist. AOI (lines 168-79)

All the assembled noblemen are here referred to in either neutral or positive terms, save Ganelon, who committed treason. This early association between Ganelon and treason is not unique to the Oxford version; in the later manuscripts that preserve the beginning portions of the *Roland* poem, this association is made in the first *laisse*. In the Châteauroux and Venice 7 versions, which largely follow the Oxford version's first *laisse*, the following lines are added:

Ne puet durer qe Karles ne l'ataigne,
qar il n'a home de lui server se faigne
fors Guenelon, qil trahi par engaigne (lines 11-13)²⁸

In the Venice 4 version, whose first *laisse* varies significantly from *O* and *CV7*, we are given: 'Des or comença li traïment de Gayne | e de Rollant li nef de Çarle el Mayne' (lines 6-7). In all three examples Ganelon's treason is past tense; a perfect past or *passé simple*, which seems to be an aspectual past and not one that is immediately relative to its narrative moment. The use of an aspectual past to signpost Ganelon's treason—in the latter two cases in the first *laisse* of the poem—opens an anticipatory space from the earliest possible instance. This tension remains unresolved until Charlemagne and his Twelve Peers are forced to decide who will be sent on an embassy to the Pseudo-Muslim King Marsile in Saragossa. After much back and forth they settle on Ganelon, who is hesitant to undertake such a dangerous mission. After already having been rejected, Roland then steps forward a second time in attempt to take his stepfather's place. In the Oxford version:

Guenes respunt: 'Pur mei n'iras tu mie!
Tu n'ies mes hom ne jo ne sui tis sire.
Carles comandet que face sun servise:
en Sarraguce en irai a Marsilie;
einz i ferai un poi de legerie
que jo n'esclair ceste meie grant ire.'

²⁸ Duggan asserts that the Châteauroux and Venice 7 versions were likely copied from the same model and suggests that they may have even been copied in the same scriptorium. I will cite from the *V7*, which Duggan uses as a base (listing variants from *C* where necessary), 'Châteauroux-Venice 7', p. 29.

Quant l'ot Rollant, si cumençat a rire. AOI (lines 296-302)

This is the *punctum*. This is the catastrophe to which Barthes refers and it brings with it the full weight of both; the sting, the prick, the cast of the dice—the moment *charnière* (to borrow Morrissey's term) that assures the final event, the signal for disaster. The audience, already aware that Ganelon is associated with treason, sees what that might entail: the *legerie* to be carried out in the future tense. This is repeated in the other three manuscripts that preserve this early part of the narrative.²⁹ In *V4* Ganelon says:

‘Ançi li faro un pocho de felonie,
si esclarero mon talento e ma ire’
[...]

Quand Rolland l'olde, non po star de rire' (lines 245-48)

In *CV7*, Ganelon says:

‘Ainz i ferai auques de legerie
vers trestoz cels qi ceste m'ont bastie.’

Rollant l'entent, ne puet müer n'en rie' (lines 434-36)

In all four versions, Ganelon's anger rhymes with the laughter that it elicits; a pairing that creates an echo between cause and effect, and manifests the narrative tension between the characters via versification and language. Laughter here becomes an intensity that will propel Ganelon's rage to action; the *punctum* that becomes the fulcrum for the trouble to come—death assured. Roland's laughter and Ganelon's rage will impact the physical bodies of the characters and the textual body of the narrative *tel quel* in ways that bring the past forward, and that are therefore present in this moment of performance. In this way, the *punctum* is an affective moment, tied to the anger and the laughter that act as signals within the text. Just so, Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth describe the space of affect as being 'inbetween', as a passage of forces and intensities.³⁰ In this case the intensities that pass between Roland and Ganelon are also inbetween: present, and yet also chillingly future.

The intractability of Roland's laughter and of its fallout is related to the intractability of violence writ large insofar as it can be neither controlled, nor managed: in the Oxford version, he simply begins to laugh, in the other versions he is unable to stop himself from

²⁹ For the juridical implications of this passage, see: Haidu, *Violence*, pp. 71-76.

³⁰ Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, 'An Inventory of Shimmers', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 1-25 (p. 1).

doing so. The spectator therefore experiences the space between the knowledge of Ganelon's treason, Roland's laughter, and the inevitability of Roland's death. Across the versions, the *laissez* end by following Ganelon's rage with Roland's rhymed laughter; as such Ganelon's anger is already well underway, his *legerie* or *felonie* already in the planning before Roland even begins to laugh. In the telling, the fateful deed—the treason—is accomplished, although it is not yet so in the narrative timeline. And yet, it tells as Barthes's photograph does, of death in the future. We observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake.³¹ The *punctum*: *they are dead and they are going to die* and we have only to experience time unfolding between the moment of laughter and death.

Along these lines, the moment where Roland's laughter contextualizes the treason to come is also the moment in which his fate is sealed; a place of potential and change. The *punctum* is also where time collapses, Barthes's *intersum*:

Le nom du noème de la Photographie sera donc: 'Ça-a-été', ou encore, l'Intraitable [...] 'interfuit': cela que je vois s'est trouvé là, dans ce lieu qui s'étend entre l'infini et le sujet (*operator* ou *spectator*); il a été là, et cependant tout de suite séparé; il a été absolument, irrécusablement présent, et cependant déjà différé.³²

For Barthes, photography cannot tell us what is no more (*ce qui n'est plus*), but only what has been (*ce qui a été*) and, as such, photography is a space of both delight and discomfort as the spectator is forced to confront the state of being in between representations of life and death in uncertain time.³³ As Barthes goes on to explain, 'Ce *punctum*, plus ou moins gommé sous l'abondance et la disparité des photos d'actualité, se lit à vif dans la photographie historique: il y a toujours en elle un écrasement du Temps: cela est mort et cela va mourir.'³⁴

Within the *chansons de geste* as a genre, some of the uncertainties that arise from the inbetweenness of the narrative events is linked to the language of the songs themselves.³⁵ Scholars of Old French literature have long remarked on the shifts in tense that occur across genres, but that are particularly common in the *chansons de geste*. In a pattern that Suzanne

³¹ I owe some of this wording to Richard Howard in Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 96.

³² Barthes, *Chambre*, pp. 120-21.

³³ Barthes, *Chambre*, p. 133.

³⁴ Barthes, *Chambre*, p. 150.

³⁵ Duggan asserts that the Oxford *Roland's* paratactic structures create similar uncertainties, see: *Formulaic Style*, p. 105.

Fleischman characterizes as ‘seemingly idiosyncratic’, Old French conventions often differ from those tense/aspect relationships that modern readers expect of past narration.³⁶ This holds true for the earlier *chansons de geste* and for the Oxford *Roland* in particular, where the ‘basic reporting tense’ tends to be the present, and where the relationship between tense, aspect, and reported event are not always sequential.³⁷ According to Fleischman, *tense* is the ‘grammaticalization of location in time (location of situations predicated in a sentence or discourse relative to a reference in time)’, whereas *aspect* is not ‘about time, but rather about how a speaker profiles the action (a question of perspective)’.³⁸ The tenses used should therefore be considered insofar as they relate to one another within the text and less as a marker of how a performer or audience might localize the events in historical, or in narrative time. Further to this, Fleischman describes ‘perception, memory, and tense’ as mechanisms by which audiences locate and find relationships between events in either the immediate (‘direct sensory perception’) or in the past (‘surface memory’, ‘shallow memory’, or ‘deep memory’). Each of these memory layers are ‘categories that describe how easily an event experienced can be called back into consciousness’, and all of which relate to the positioning of events via performance within the *chansons de geste* as an expression of ‘memory’.³⁹ As such, for Fleischman, ‘Epic is a genre in which the events of story-worlds detach themselves from their historical origins and become, as it were, timeless.’⁴⁰

The term ‘timeless’ as Fleischman proposes it is worth unpacking as it relates to shifting tenses, how narrative is memorialized by audiences and performers, and also via multiple manuscript examples (as is the case for the *Roland* tradition). The question this raises is precisely one of tense and aspect that relates directly to the Barthesian *intersum*, and whether a state of ‘timelessness’ is one that is fully outside of time. In the case of the *Roland*, although rendered grammatically timeless by tense-switching and the use of the present, the text nonetheless constructs its own temporality. As such, I propose that timelessness as Fleischman proposes it is aspectual; a way of framing texts that are, like the *intersum*, seen inside of and

³⁶ Suzanne Fleischman, *Tense and Narrativity: From Medieval Performance to Modern Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. xi.

³⁷ Fleischman, p. 196. In the Oxford *Roland* Anna Granville Hatcher finds 325 uses of the preterite and 375 uses of the perfect, compared to roughly 1600 uses of the Present when referencing narrative events, in ‘Tense-usage in the *Roland*’, *Studies in Philology*, 39 (1942), 597-624 (p. 599).

³⁸ Fleischman, pp. 15, 19.

³⁹ Fleischman, pp. 37-38.

⁴⁰ Fleischman, p. 265.

outside of the time in which they are experienced. It is also, as Fleischman explains, necessarily fragmented:

The discourse of epic cannot properly be characterized as narrative; it is more accurately a circumspection. The time of the telling moves in circles, not in a straight line. The primary building block of narrative—the event—is typically fragmented into its constituent acts, which are not narrated but described, as if seen through the lens of a video camera. The epic poet sings what he sees, bringing the past to life in dramatic performance, where it becomes imbricated with the present.⁴¹

For lack of a better term, I will continue to refer to the events that the *chansons de geste* present as ‘narrative’, but Fleischman’s framing of the narrative act as a form of ‘circumspection’ is nonetheless valuable to my reading. As she shows, the telling of events in the *Roland* (and as I will later show, in the *Chanson de Guillaume*) is not fully linear. Quite the opposite, events are very often fragmentary and circular which contributes to *punctum* insofar as the present telling is grammatically between past and future, but also insofar as the moment of *punctum* is an ‘écrasement du temps’ where these three aspects meet. Circumspection is also a form of pensiveness where events are dwelled upon and repeated as though this might help them to make sense on a deeper level.

Just as photographs captured Barthes’s attention, and Fleischman was pricked by tense usage, the *chansons de geste* have inspired scholars to break these highly structured poems down to their smallest constituent parts in a bid to better understand the forces that move both narrative and spectator. Chief among these are the beautiful and detailed ruminations on the *studium* of the *gestes* provided by Edward A. Heinemann and Jean Rychner. Both scholars devote considerable time to recurrent verses, verbal forms, and rhymes and assonances, but I am particularly interested in their work on repetition at the level of the *laises*. It is to Rychner that we owe the twin concepts of *laises parallèles* and *similaires* that have become one of the preeminent ways of contextualizing repeated scenes in the *chansons de geste* writ large.⁴² Rychner asserts that neither type of *laisse* need be properly identical, but they must render action that can be juxtaposed, i.e., that is roughly the same. In a *laisse parallèle*, the characters concerned can be interchanged, whereas in a *laisse similaire* they must remain the same.⁴³

⁴¹ Fleischman, p. 273.

⁴² These terms have provoked some resistance from later scholarship, Heinemann included.

⁴³ Jean Rychner, *La Chanson de geste: Essai sur l’art épique des jongleurs* (Geneva: Droz, 1955), pp. 83-93.

Although he claims that certain repetitive qualities in the form of *refrains* and *enchaînement* may have been used as a memory aid for performers, Rychner theorizes a somewhat different purpose for the *laissez similaires* in the Oxford *Roland*:

C'est incontestablement l'auteur du *Roland* qui a tiré le meilleur parti de la vertu lyrique des ensembles de *laissez similaires*; ses groupes de trois *laissez similaires* arrêtent le récit aux moments les plus dramatiques, les plus décisifs, formant comme des barrages, de hautes haltes lyriques, avant que de nouveau la narration reprenne son cours.⁴⁴

This view is very much in line with comparisons that have been made between the Oxford *Roland* and camera effects in contemporary cinema. For Gaunt, the Oxford *Roland's laissez similaires* have a similar effect to the use of slow motion, and for Anna Granville Hatcher, the placement of the *Roland's* 'cameras' is a means to 'telescope in' on the action and is directly related to the temporal aspect of the scene each *laisse* depicts.⁴⁵ In each case, the repetition found in the *laissez* serves a poetic function where form helps to zero-in on and slow the movement of the text, thereby increasing the tension of its most catastrophic moments.

Gaunt and Hatcher are right to note the cinematic qualities of the Old French epic tradition. After all, these are poems of great action that move easily between scenes of diplomacy, intimate personal moments, and sweeping battles that moving pictures would seem uniquely capable of bringing to life. There is, however, something that a photographic analysis of the *chansons de geste* can do that one rooted in film theory cannot; something born of the way that a photograph, or a series of photographs captures (stops or arrests) movement in time. One of the major criticisms that Barthes's work on photography and cinema has attracted is that he draws too hard a line between them. And yet, for Barthes, they are different insofar as:

the film spectator is obliged to incorporate or to *eat* the image without pause or relief, to be *fed* by it in a manner strictly parallel to the way the film strip is *fed* into the projector [...] the unrelenting *demand* imposed by the moving image on the screen [...] disables

⁴⁴ Rychner, p. 93. Rychner designates the following *laissez* of the Oxford *Roland* as *similaires*; a list that is generally accepted (albeit with some small variations) by scholarship: 40-42, 83-85, 132-37, 170-75, 204-09.

⁴⁵ Simon Gaunt, 'The Oxford *Roland's* "Oral" Style', in *Retelling the Tale: An Introduction to Medieval French Literature* (London: Duckworth, 2001), pp. 25-37 (p. 31); Hatcher, pp. 617-22. In a similar vein, Leverage notes that epic's *enchaînements* and repetitions at episodic boundaries result in slowed processing times and feelings of deceleration, pp. 205-06.

the space of reading, the element of seduction of the text which desires but does not demand to be read.⁴⁶

This ‘feeding’, as Patrick ffrench puts it, relies on continuous narrative; one that is without the pauses and returns that are so jarringly present in both the *Roland* tradition and, as I will later show, the *Chanson de Guillaume*. The moving image of cinema blurs and renders imperceptible the gaps between its negatives, obfuscating the differences between each individual image on the strip. Although the *chanson de geste* as an overarching structure forms a cohesive narrative, each *laisse* also constitutes its own clear unit: a snapshot of the action. Instead of ‘feeding’ the audience, the *laissez similaires* in the *Roland* tradition starves them of resolution and causes them to dwell on—to relive—the past and future horror of the hero’s death. Photography is uniquely suited to a meditation on this moment of catastrophe, through it, as Barthes says, ‘*La Vie/La Mort: le paradigme se réduit à un simple déclic, celui qui sépare la pose initiale du papier final.*’⁴⁷ It is not the state of being dead or alive alone that pricks the audience, but rather the separation and repetition of events—the space between individual poses—that the *punctum* lays bare. Barthes’s use of *décllic* here is also revealing as it implies both the physical clicking of the camera’s mechanism as the image is captured and also the punctal moment of realization that pricks the spectator. Because the *laissez similaires* are distinct interruptions in an otherwise continuous narrative, they are less like Gaunt’s slow motion and more like pieces of filmstrip cut apart. Each piece causes the spectator to pause and evaluate it as its own photograph, no longer part of the contiguous narrative, but as its own small catastrophe.

With this in mind, the view of repetition as it relates to the *Roland* should be revisited. To this end, Heinemann provides a more holistic view of such repetition than Rychner by describing it in terms of a series of interrelated or complimentary echoes, the boundaries between which ‘ne sont pas étanches’:⁴⁸

Le mètre constitue un premier écho, un fond récurrent plus accusé que la répétition du vers dans d’autres formes de la versification française. Trois autres espèces d’échos, toutes dues à la rencontre des fils métrique et verbal, se construisent sur ce fond: disjoint,

⁴⁶ Patrick ffrench, *Roland Barthes and Film: Myth, Eroticism and Poetics* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), p. 215.

⁴⁷ Barthes, *Chambre*, pp. 144-45.

⁴⁸ Edward A. Heinemann, *L’Art métrique de la chanson de geste: Essai sur la musicalité du récit* (Geneva: Droz, 1993), p. 224. Another way of understanding this process of echo might be via Leverage’s ‘resonance model’ in which the depiction of one event triggers the memory of another event, pp. 247-51.

consécutif, et externe ou allusion à la tradition. Les deux premières espèces renvoient à un passage précis à l'intérieur du même texte, tandis que la dernière renvoie de façon plus vague à l'extérieur du poème.⁴⁹

Rychner's *laissez parallèles* and *similaires* thus become Heinemann's *écho disjoint*, whereas *enchaînement* becomes *écho consécutif*, and intertextual references become *écho externe*. Just as Rychner ascribes significant importance to repetition, Heinemann's *écho* is presented as being fundamental to both the lyric and the narrative organization of the *chansons de geste*, and to the *Roland* and *Guillaume* material in particular. In the context of this chapter, the notion of an echo as returning or reflecting takes on a Barthesian aspect—the echo as a specter, the means by which death is repeated within the text as a unit, and as it is interpreted across the centuries. This phenomenon has been experienced at its most poignant in the Oxford *Roland*, though, as I will show, *punctum* and the returning dead is a feature of its broader tradition, and of the *Guillaume*, if in a slightly different way.

Throughout the *Roland* manuscripts the *laissez similaires* or *échos disjoints* are, as Rychner and Gaunt both suggest, a slowing of the action at key moments of the narrative. It is worth insisting however, that those key moments are, not at all coincidentally, those where Roland's death is foreshadowed or arranged, in course, or being lamented. Beyond the slowing of action, Rychner identifies changes in temporal aspect that are inherent to these scenes of repetition, which come to the fore in his analysis of *enchaînement* in MS O:

Disons plus simplement que la pâmoison de Roland, envisagée d'abord sous l'aspect de son déroulement, l'est ensuite sous celui de son achèvement, et que les deux aspects, le premier penché sur le futur, le second retourné sur le passé, souligne très exactement la ligne de démarcation qui sépare les *laissez*.⁵⁰

Just as Rychner draws attention to the alternation between past and future aspect, Katja Haustein describes the experience of photography as depending on temporal deferral.⁵¹ The experience of reading (or hearing) the repeated assurance of Roland's death is made all the more catastrophic by the rigidity of the genre's form (*studium*)—the alternation between past and future aspect is akin to Barthes's *intersum/interfuit*; the *ça-a-été* that informs the experience of *punctum*.

⁴⁹ Heinemann, p. 37.

⁵⁰ Rychner, p. 78.

⁵¹ Katja Haustein, *Regarding Lost Time: Photography, Identity, and Affect in Proust, Benjamin, and Barthes* (London: Legenda, 2012), p. 137.

If Roland's laughter signals the *futur antérieur* that Barthes places at the center of *punctum*, the *laissez* that echo his death are also part of this mechanism, as are the repeated deaths across the French corpus and beyond (via Heinemann's *écho externe*). The first set of *laissez parallèles* that Rychner identifies in MS *O* shows the passage to the act of Ganelon's betrayal, in which the true target of the impending ambush of the rear guard is identified. In each *laisse*, as part of a discussion of the formidable Charlemagne's many military accomplishments, Marsile asks 'quant ert il mais recrëanz d'osteier?' (lines 528, 543). The answer across the three *laissez* is fundamentally the same, though with each iteration there is a closing in from unnamed, to named target. In the third occurrence, a slight variation to the word order occurs, 'quant iert il mais d'osteier recrëant?', which allows for Roland to be named:

Guenes respunt: 'Carles n'est mie tels.

N'est hom ki l' veit e conuistre le set

que ço ne diet que l'emperere est ber.' (lines 529-31)

'Ço n'iert', dist Guenes, 'tant cum vivet sis niés;

N'at tel vassal suz la cape del ciel.' (lines 544-45)

'Ço n'iert', dist Guenes, 'tant cum vivet Rollant;

n'ad tel vassal d'ici qu'en Orient.' (lines 557-58)

This sequence occurs nearly verbatim in *V4*, but is condensed into a single *laisse* in *CV7*; it is absent from the remaining manuscripts that do not preserve this early portion of the narrative. As the first set of *laissez similaires*, or *échos disjoints*, these are also the first to prick the spectator. The repetition of the scene has the effect of slowly revealing the nature of the *traïsun*, that *poi de legerie* that Ganelon swore to commit some two-hundred lines earlier. First, Charles will not stop conquering lands because it is in his nature to do so, then, because being without fear, he is able to rely on *sis niés* along with Olivier and the Twelve Peers. Finally, Roland is named. This internal reference, like an echo, needs its reflections in order for its meaning to be fully apparent. The deferral that such an echo creates from the first *laisse* in *O* and *V4*, results in a mounting anticipatory tension as the spectator waits for the passage to the act of Ganelon's treason. In this case, Barthes's *intersum* is space between the anticipation of the death Ganelon here sets in motion, and the eventual fruition of that betrayal that will see Roland's death repeated some two-

thousand lines later. The slow building of tensions here relies on a system of internal referents, or echoes, as Heinemann explains:

La récurrence est un procédé de valorisation. Dans le déroulement du discours, une première occurrence n'est pas une *première* occurrence, c'est plutôt une occurrence quelconque et neutre. C'est la première *récurrence*, la deuxième *occurrence*, qui en fait une *première* occurrence. La première récurrence opère un retour en arrière pour insister sur l'élément récurrent. La première occurrence devient ainsi, après coup, une anticipation de la deuxième en même temps que la deuxième se fait rappel de la première. Et ce jeu de valorisation et de renvois réciproques, en marquant un élément du récit, y confère une sorte de cohésion interne: l'élément accède à une importance que nous associerons aux grades métriques privilégiés.⁵²

Just as Fleischman noted that the time of the telling is circular in epic, the *retour en arrière* to which Heinemann refers—that film theorists might term ‘flashback’—‘me dit la mort au futur’ in a way that intensifies as the narrative progresses, and indeed, as the *Roland* tradition progresses. If Barthes was pricked by the future anteriority of young Lewis Payne’s portrait—*he is dead and he is going to die*—so also is the spectator’s discomfort pricked by each reoccurrence of Roland’s assured, but unaccomplished death. Repetition, as Heinemann says, accentuates this discomfort. The impact of such repetition on the tension of the piece is clear in the famous horn scene, in which Olivier asks Roland to sound his olifant, thereby alerting Charles to their dire situation. For Gaunt, the *laissez similaires* that are a feature of the Oxford version, and this scene in particular work in concert to call into question whether we are given different versions of a single event, or a series of concurrent events. This temporal confusion, Gaunt says, allows the Oxford version to suspend judgment by supplying alternate readings of the same moment, and by allowing different sets of values to come to the fore with each repetition.⁵³ For Jean-Pierre Martin, the suspense relies on whether death will be averted or completed:

⁵² Heinemann, p. 229. Trask Roberts has very compellingly adapted Benjamin’s *reine sprache* (as ‘pure narrative’) to read the repetition of the Oxford *Roland’s laissez similaires* as ‘types of translation for an inexistent, and impossible, original’, see: ‘Evoking Pure Narrative in *La Chanson de Roland’s Laissez Similaires*’, *Exemplaria*, 34.4 (2022), 322-40 (p. 322).

⁵³ Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, pp. 28-29, 31-33. For Gaunt, the values that each horn scene reveals are the desire for glory, fear of shame, and the primacy of Christians over pagans, pp. 31-35.

Dans les trois *laissez* successives où Olivier invite Roland à sonner du cor, il insiste sur le fait que le retour de Charlemagne est encore possible. Mais quand il lui apparaît clairement que son ami s’y refuse définitivement, le délai permettant ce retour est aussi définitivement passé.⁵⁴

According to Martin, whereas a more realistic use of time would calculate the gravity of the delay’s effects in proportion to its length, in practice the three *laissez* move from a possibility of rescue to a certainty of disaster—death assured; in so doing MS *O* increases the pathos of the event.⁵⁵ The alternate readings—indeed, the alternate possibilities—that both Gaunt and Martin propose are moments where time stills and action reproduces itself. This is Barthes’s *intersum*; locus of a strong affective tension between text and spectator as the event is simultaneously deferred and folding in on itself—time collapsing. Although Gaunt ascribes this phenomenon specifically to the Oxford version, Olivier’s request for Roland to sound his horn is similarly repeated in most of the other extant manuscripts, and rather strikingly, in sets of three *laissez* that broadly follow the pattern established by MS *O*.⁵⁶

These different versions across manuscripts function as the *échos disjoints* do within each individual example, but on a macro-level. The tension that Gaunt describes therefore arises from the calling into question of whether repetition constitutes a series of distinct but related possibilities, or whether a single event has been memorialized in a fragmentary way. Just as contemporary war films often use choppy editing techniques to render combat scenes, replicating the phenomenon of memory under stress, the presence of different versions casts doubt on the fidelity of textual representations of the echoed events. Haustein takes the difficulties that Gaunt raises as they relate to *punctum* a step further, in saying that:

Barthes is not interested in using the photographic process as a metaphor that helps to explain the workings of memory. His fascination with the photographic is not so much derived from the temporal structure of the future perfect as deferred retrospective

⁵⁴ Jean-Pierre Martin, ‘Les structures temporelles de la narration dans l’épopée médiévale’, in *Temps, mémoire, narration (Discours de l’épopée médiévale 2)* (Paris: Champion, 2020), pp. 11-37 (p. 30).

⁵⁵ Martin, ‘Les structures’, p. 31. Another way that repetitive structures within Oxford *Roland* (and indeed, the *gestes* more broadly) serve to communicate mounting threat is by way of the *vantances* that take place between combatants as part of the normal course of preparation for battle, see: Duggan, *Formulaic Style*, pp. 122, 124-25.

⁵⁶ MS *V4 laissez* 79-81, in MS *C laissez* 117-119, MS *V7* 108-110, MS *P* 17-19. MS *T* condenses the request to a single *laisse*, 27, and MS *L* lacks this portion of the narrative.

cognition, but rather from the disconcerting experience of simultaneity which the act of looking at the photograph as product may cause.⁵⁷

Although I would argue that the ‘deferred retrospective cognition’ of future perfection does play a role in the uncertain temporality of the *Roland* material even though audiences are processing language and not images, I am particularly interested in what Haustein terms ‘the disconcerting experience of simultaneity’. Part of what renders death in the *Roland* so catastrophic—insofar as Cherbuliez has framed it as that which is not survivable—is precisely the experience of simultaneity that repetition creates, as well as the alternate possibilities it presents. As Martin highlights, the spectator is confronted with the possibility of salvation and survival that sounding the horn could offer balanced against the condemnation to death guaranteed by Roland’s refusal. The catastrophe of this also hinges on the fact that salvation is not guaranteed—the uncertainty of whether Charles could make it in time still permeates this part of the narrative.

The ‘disconcerting experience’ that Haustein describes is heightened when Roland finally sounds his horn, albeit too late. The first *laisse* of the sequence in MS *O* shows Roland lifting the horn to his lips and sounding it; Charles and his men hear it a full thirty leagues away. The second *laisse* opens with a description of the intense, desperate force behind his breath. Roland’s temples are rent by his brain and his blood runs thick from his mouth; Charles hears it as he moves through the pass. In the third *laisse*, again, Roland’s mouth is bloody and his brain has burst through his temples as he sounds his horn with great suffering; Charles and his Frenchmen hear it. The events unfold in all the manuscripts in the same sequence, and in *V4* the wording is very nearly verbatim. That said, there are some variations; *L* condenses this event down to two *laises*, whereas *C* and *V7* add a fourth *laisse*. In all cases, the *laises* are divided into two parts; the first half where Roland sounds his horn, and the second where Charles and his men hear the call. The hearing, which occurs immediately after the sounding, is generally expressed in the present tense, along the lines of ‘Karles l’oït, e ses Franceis l’entendent.’ (line 1788). The division of the *laises* into these halves is key to the experience of simultaneity wherein repetition serves to heighten the degree to which each is ‘disconcerting’. The spectator is effectively in two places at once throughout this sequence—with Roland at Roncevaux and with Charles many leagues away. As the *laises* progress, the

⁵⁷ Haustein, pp. 141-42.

location of the spectator and the order of the events is rendered uncertain as the poet alternates between Roland and Charles.

Some time passes in the Oxford version, then, after battling on for thirty-some *laissez* before collapsing, Roland wakes to an enemy attempting to take his sword; the repetition of his final moments now comes in quick succession. In the next set of *échos disjoints*, Roland attempts to break Durendal on a large stone so that no enemy can use it. Over the course of three *laissez* he praises his sword for its beauty, lists their many conquests together, and describes the relics held in its pommel, smashing all the while. Again, the breaking of Durendal appears in at least two *laissez* (though more generally three) across the manuscripts. In *V4* the list of places conquered varies slightly, whereas *T* shortens the list significantly and *CV7* omits the *laisse* listing conquests entirely.⁵⁸

Immediately following this set of *laissez* in MS *O* is the final sequence of Roland's death, in which the death previously assured is finally accomplished. These are also, perhaps, the *échos disjoints* that show the most variation in the manuscript tradition. The sequence remains largely the same, but with some details having been altered and adapted over time. In all but *CV7*, Roland feels death taking him with some variation of 'Ço sent Rollant que la mort le tresprent' (*O*, line 2355), then that 'de sun tens n'i ad plus' (*O*, line 2366).⁵⁹ He then says his *mea culpa*.⁶⁰ Roland then lies down to die and, in all examples but *V4*, he turns his head towards Spain in the second line of the *laisse*. This moment shows significant variation across the versions, whereas in *O*, *V4*, and *T* he echoes the 'cunseill qui mal prist' by lying down beneath a pine, in other versions he selects a leafy tree (*P*), two flowering trees (*L*), or a hilltop (*CV7*). Finally, the catastrophe comes full circle at the point of resolution, where across all versions the repetition related to Roland's death halts with a *laisse* beginning with the half-line: 'Morz est Rollant'.

Although the repetition that Rychner calls *laissez parallèles* is often framed as a feature of the Oxford version, it should be considered as a feature of the Old French *Roland*

⁵⁸ In *CV7* and *T* Roland finishes by throwing Durendal into a nearby stream.

⁵⁹ *P* and *T* reverse the order of these two *laissez*.

⁶⁰ *CV7* reads: 'Quant voit Rollant que si est deceü, | en Rencesvaus a paié grief trëu.' (lines 4202-03) Roland then regrets the anger of the king and the deaths of the Twelve Peers, and says the *mea culpa*.

tradition as a whole.⁶¹ The variations that appear between versions are a testament to the desire to maintain the *échos disjoints* from copy to copy as well as an attitude that allows for changes to be made within what was clearly seen as a system of *échos* that was integral to the story. The effect of the repeated *laissez* within each text is an example of Heinemann's *écho disjoint*, but they are not limited to this framing. Given that the repetitions echo each other across the body of manuscripts, they should also be termed *échos externes* insofar as they refer to the wider tradition, by reflecting one another. Heinemann does allow for an echo to be both *disjoint* and *externe*, though he uses the *Charroi de Nîmes* as his primary example.⁶² The system of references between texts is an example of the ways in which meaning within and between the texts as *lieux de mémoire* is adaptable. Repetition therefore does not mean a lack of variation either internally (within the *échos disjoints*), or externally (between copies, as *échos externes*). These variations also raise the possibility, for those familiar with the wider tradition, of different outcomes—repetition thus ramps up the excitement, but in doing so also increases the catastrophe. In all versions, Roland is ultimately confronted (as is the spectator) with something that cannot be survived. Although tragic, there is some comfort in the resolution of events—as Roland's story progresses through time and across manuscript versions, the *échos* are the fulfillment of an expectation; catastrophe in this case is also a feature of the *Roland's studium*:

That is, finally, the nature of catastrophe: It is not the terrible, unanticipated event that we barely survive, but the logical resolution of something we knew would happen (and one that allows great hardship to occur), but that also accrues meaning through our subjective relationship to its history. Working temporally both backward and forward, figured as layers of meaning that must be uncovered even as they are already known [...] tragedy dramatizes the relation between overliving and catastrophe, placing us forever on the move toward both renewed living and bloody destruction.⁶³

The experience of the *écho disjoint*—of watching Roland die, only to live again—is the same one that made Lewis Payne's photograph so striking for Barthes. In each instance, the subject is held in limbo between life and death; rendered eternal by the form. This is akin to watching the

⁶¹ Indeed, further repetition is found in the episodes concerning both Aude's *songes* and her death in all versions except MS *O* (the scope of which is too large for the present chapter). The later translations into other vernaculars such as Occitan and Norse have lost these internal repetitions entirely.

⁶² Heinemann, pp. 320-21.

⁶³ Cherbuliez, p. 196.

ça-a-été that so marked Barthes establish and re-live itself through repetition—the catastrophe that cannot be survived, and yet, whose image lives on. Curiously, the image of the young man condemned to die that captivated Barthes was not the only one that Alexander Gardner took of Lewis Payne that day. There are four glass negatives preserved in the archives of the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.⁶⁴ The boy is no less beautiful, no less condemned in the other three images, and yet, the version that struck Barthes is the only one where the young man looks directly into the camera and assesses his audience. The catastrophe is not dulled by the repetition of the image, and this is as true for Roland as it is for Lewis Payne. In the case of the Old French corpus of the *Roland*, repetition denies both life and death; this is where time collapses, the *punctum*, where everything and nothing is possible.

Punctum and Resurrection

Representing death is a key component of the *chansons de geste*, as is the formulaic means by which this is accomplished. Alongside the Oxford *Roland* Heinemann and Rychner both make much of repetition in the *Guillaume* cycle, the presence of which is considered by both to be fundamental to the poem's art.⁶⁵ The *Chanson de Guillaume*'s repetitive qualities are most obvious in its use of refrains: *lunsdi al vespre, joesdi al vespre, lores fu mecredi* (or *dimercres*). Rychner compares these to the sporadic *AOI* that punctuates the ends of certain *laissez* in the Oxford *Roland*, though he acknowledges that the *Guillaume*'s refrains are more integral its form and narrative progression.⁶⁶ For François Suard, the *Guillaume*'s refrains serve a clear dramatic function, rather than simply marking the ends of *laissez*. Appearing at moments of particular pathos, they help to mark the passage of time:

soit une durée mythique—celle d'une souffrance interminable—, soit le passage d'un temps quantitatif (la date du combat) à un temps affectif (les souffrances des trois

⁶⁴ Alexander Gardner, *Washington Navy Yard, District of Columbia. Lewis Payne in sweater, seated and manacled*, 1865, four glass (wet collodion) negatives, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2018667106>; <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2018672091>; <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2018672092>; <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2018672094> [accessed 6 November 2022].

⁶⁵ Heinemann, p. 237; Rychner, pp. 83-35.

⁶⁶ Rychner, p. 70.

survivants, puis la mort de deux d'entre eux, *joesdi al vespre*), enfin l'importance dramatique capitale de certains faits (*lores fu mecresdi*).⁶⁷

Repetition here, as in the *Roland* tradition, draws attention to moments where speed and narrative order in time are made uncertain. Suard also highlights three epic temporalities that are layered (as Koselleck might say) to incorporate Fleischman's 'time of the telling', alongside 'un temps affectif' into which *punctum* no doubt falls. The key element here is that although those three temporalities might just as easily apply to the *Roland* tradition, the passage of time is nonetheless marked differently in the *Guillaume*. Catastrophe is not uniform in its expression—violence and death alter the way spectators experience time insofar as violence troubles the integrity of relationships with the present and renders the future illegible.⁶⁸ This has an impact on perspectives within the text, and as the text moves through time; punctal moments will therefore reveal themselves in different ways.

That said, just as Barthesian inbetweenness and uncertainty (as *intersum/interfuit*) are revealed through repetition in the *Roland* tradition, these phenomena are similarly apparent in the *Chanson de Guillaume*. This is, once again, made most evident through the death of a major character in the poem, that of the eponymous Guillaume's nephew, Vivien. Like Roland at Roncevaux, Vivien's death at Larchamp is also suspended; repetition and death, discomfiting echoes, are also integral to Vivien's heroic arc.⁶⁹ Just as Roland's death is foretold from the earliest part of his narrative, Vivien's fate is sealed from the first *laisse* of the *Chanson de Guillaume*:

Plaist vus oïr de granz batailles e de forz esturs,
De Deramed, uns reis sarazinurs,
Cun il prist guere vers Lowis, nostre empereür?
Mais dan Willame la prist vers lui forçur,

⁶⁷ François Suard, 'Introduction', in *La Chanson de Guillaume*, ed. and trans. by François Suard (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 2008), pp. 9-72 (p. 35). The meaning of the *Roland*'s repeated *AOI* remains a mystery, and thus the reason for its inclusion.

⁶⁸ Cherbuliez, p. 178.

⁶⁹ Vivien is often considered as an analog for Roland; for Jean Frappier, 'Guillaume est comme un petit Charlemagne, dont le Roland est Vivien, et le Roncevaux la bataille de l'Archamp ou des Aliscans', in *Les Chansons de geste du cycle de Guillaume d'Orange: I. — La Chanson de Guillaume, Aliscans, La Chevalerie Vivien* (Paris: Société d'Édition d'Enseignement Supérieur, 1955), p. 11. For Suard and Bennett, though the similarities between the two heroes are palpable, they do not extend so far as to make Vivien analog to Roland beyond certain surface qualities, see: Suard, 'Introduction to *Guillaume*', pp. 38, 49-50; Philip E. Bennett, 'Introduction', in *La Chanson de Guillaume (La Chançon de Willame)*, ed. and trans. by Philip E. Bennett (London: Grant & Cutler, 2000), (pp. 9-32) p. 15.

Tant qu'il ocist el Larchamp par grant onur.
Mais sovent se cunbati a la gent paienur,
Si perdi de ses homes les meillurs,
E sun nevou, dan Viviën le preuz,
Pur qui il out tut tens al quor grant dolur.
Lunesdi al vespre.
Oimas comence la chançon d'Willame. (lines 1-11)⁷⁰

Martin has compared this feature of the *chansons de geste*, where a summary of the action to come is given (and with it, what we might now call 'spoilers') to 'l'amateur d'opéra' entering the theatre already knowing the arias and the themes of the piece they are about to see, but where seeing how each company will interpret the opera is part of appreciating the genre.⁷¹ The blurring of narrative time around the pronouncement of Roland's fate is echoed here once more; the song will be sung of battles accomplished, and yet, here, now in this moment—*oimas*—begins the telling. The refrain, a much shorter line situated between Vivien's promised death and the beginning of the song provides a moment of pause—a breath—in which time slows and is reset. Once again, this past thing tells the spectator of death in the future, the *punctum*: *Vivien is dead and he is going to die*.

In many ways, repetition in the *Guillaume* is much less systematic than in the *Roland* tradition, and as such, more disconcerting. The echoes that return to the audience often do so with significant delay, amplifying the discomfort that repetition causes in the case of Roland's death. Gilbert, through Freud, explains this phenomenon:

Repeating a word too often, as everyone knows by experience, produces the vertiginous effect not only of making it seem meaningless but of making one doubt language as a vehicle of sense. *Laisses similaires* as a stylistic strategy invoke that kind of repetition which, for Freud, shatters the illusion of mastery, in part through the destruction of coherent meaning. The recurrent and bewildering accounts of critical moments deepen the trauma of Roland's loss for the audience.⁷²

⁷⁰ Citations from the *Guillaume* are taken from Suard's 2008 edition, the introduction to which is cited above.

⁷¹ Jean-Pierre Martin, 'Dire l'avenir', in *Temps, mémoire, narration*, pp. 301-18 (pp. 302-04).

⁷² Jane Gilbert, *Living Death in Medieval French and English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 49.

This echoes Gaunt's assertion about the Oxford *Roland* that repetition renders the audience unsure which version of events to trust, and yet, as I will show, in the case of the *Guillaume* it is no longer a case of slight shifts in aspect, but of significantly different depictions of the death in question. The 'illusion of mastery' is shattered as the spectator is forced to search back in their memory to find the first occurrence, the echo's point of origin. The trauma of Vivien's loss is thus heightened by the deepening doubts that the repetition of scenes, words, or lines instills in the audience. For Heinemann, each *reoccurrence* of echo within the system of repetition in the *Chanson de Guillaume* relies on the jarring familiarity of passages that fall within what Rychner terms *la reprise bifurquée*, in which two narrative strands beginning at the same point diverge: 'cette forme exerce une influence sur la narration, puisque, brouillant le progrès chronologique, elle fait découler deux futurs du même présent'.⁷³ The events that repeat in the *Guillaume* are often separated by a number of *laises* which serves to blur the sequence of narrative time. Because the *reprise bifurquée* does not require verbatim representations of either characters or events, the result in the *Guillaume* is something that feels familiar, but which needs its *reoccurrence* to make sense. As such, the first occurrence—the first of Rychner's two possible futures—takes on a predictive, but disconcerting quality as the spectator is forced to simultaneously look backwards and forwards in the narrative. The *reprise bifurquée* attempts to write a future that remains illegible until the echo bounces back and is 'completed'. The illusion of time doubling back on itself becomes pressing, as Gilbert says of the *Roland*:

The effect is one of narrative disturbance, since the audience is unsure how to make sense of what it has heard [...] Audience members are thus obliged to decide not only which interpretation of Roland's character but which version of events to credit.⁷⁴

The temporal uncertainty that the *reprise bifurquée* raises puts it firmly within the realm of *punctum* insofar as both are examples of an inbetween space; the one of potential futures, the other of a future anterior horror. The first example of this occurs when Vivien remains on the battlefield at Larchamp, while his cousin Girard goes to alert their uncle Guillaume to the increasingly volatile situation. Halfway through the *laisse* that shows Girart riding away is the line: 'Grant fu li chaud cum en mai en esté' (line 709). Shortly after, Girart's horse falls dead underneath him and the exhaustion he suffers as he walks causes him to divest himself of his

⁷³ Rychner, p. 81.

⁷⁴ Gilbert, p. 45. Gilbert's primary focus is the Oxford version of the *Roland*, though her analysis also touches on the *CV7* and *V4* versions.

armor. As each piece falls to the ground, he laments that it ‘n’en aidera a Vivien’ until he finds himself in such a pitiful state that he is using his sword as a cane to keep himself upright. Back on the battlefield, Vivien has received a mortal wound. The first *laisse* in the series that narrates his demise begins: ‘Grant fu le chaud cum en mai en esté’ (line 838). A few lines later, Vivien also finds himself exhausted, covered in blood, and using his sword to support his weight as he tries to find the strength to fight on. The two passages that transmit this dire state constitute in themselves an *écho disjoint* (as *laises parallèles*) insofar as the characters change but the language is strikingly similar:

Totes ses armes out guerpi li frans,
Fors sul s’espee, dunt d’ascer fu li brant,
Tote vermeille des le helt en avant,
L’escalberc plein e de foie e de sanc;
Nue la porte, si s’en vait suz puiant (lines 731-35)

Viviën eire a pé par mi le champ,
Chet lui sun healme sur le nasel devant,
E entre ses pezs ses boals trainant;
Al braz senestre les vait cuntretenant.
En sa main destre porte d’ascer un brant,
Tut fu vermeil des le holz en avant,
L’escalberc plein e de feie e de sanc;
Devers la mure s’en vait apuiant. (lines 884-91)

Whereas the audience might hope that Girard will survive his ordeal, for Vivien, holding in his bowels with his left arm, this moment recalls the *punctum* of the poem’s premonitory first *laisse*. Not only has Vivien’s death been assured from the beginning, but Girard’s repeated claims that his various pieces of equipment won’t help his cousin lend a doomed aspect to his mission—the spectator first anticipates, then witnesses ‘une catastrophe qui a déjà eu lieu’.⁷⁵ The relative closeness of these two passages within the text once again raises Haustein’s ‘disconcerting experience of simultaneity’ within the frame of the *reprise bifurquée*. As with the *Roland*, the spectator is effectively in two places at once contemplating two possible futures: salvation and

⁷⁵ Barthes, *Chambre*, p. 150.

survival, or death assured. This ‘disconcerting experience’ is heightened once the second passage begins and the spectator understands the degree to which Vivien’s catastrophic injury (which cannot be survived) renders Girard’s mission futile.

The *reprise* of the line, ‘Grant fu le chaud cum en mai en esté,’ followed by the *écho disjoint* of the sword-cum-cane above creates a temporal stacking which manifests a fold in time. The speed at which the narrative moves is heightened and simultaneously flattened by the repetition, which serves as a reminder that Vivien and Girard’s suffering is concurrent, yet separate—they are alone and together in this enterprise that can only lead to death. As such, this mirroring has an element of *punctum*, through which Vivien’s demise is the necessary outcome and the similarity of their sufferings is a harbinger of Girard’s own death. Indeed, hopes for Girard will be short lived—he will return to the Larchamp with Guillaume and he too will become part of this horror ‘dont la mort est l’enjeu’.⁷⁶ This repetition, though often in less rapid succession than the *laises similaires* of the *Roland* tradition, is a feature of Vivien’s death. Again, the structure of the repetition is somewhat less systematic in the latter than the former, but there are nonetheless lines and events that reoccur with a similarity that heightens the temporal blur between instances. As for Roland, the repetition and its aspectual shifts halt the narrative in time; a Barthesian snapshot that calls into question the moment of death, and suggests the temporal layering of the living body onto the cadaver, and vice-versa:

Dans la Photographie, la présence de la chose (à un certain moment passé) n’est jamais métaphorique; et pour ce qui est des êtres animés, sa vie non plus, sauf à photographier des cadavres; et encore: si la photographie devient alors horrible, c’est parce qu’elle certifie, si l’on peut dire, que le cadavre est vivant, *en tant que cadavre*: c’est l’image vivante d’une chose morte.⁷⁷

In the first *laisse* that will constitute Vivien’s death-echo, he acquires the catastrophic wound discussed above, creating (in the Barthesian sense) the living image of a dead man:

Un Barbarin vint par mi un val,
Entre ses quisses out un ignel cheval,
En sun poig destre portad un trenchant dart;
Treis feiz l’escust, a la quarte le lançad,

⁷⁶ Barthes, *Chambre*, p. 150.

⁷⁷ Barthes, *Chambre*, p. 123.

E fiert li en la broine de la senestre part,
 Que trente des mailles l'en abat contreval.
 Une grant plaie li fist el cors del dart,
 La blanche enseigne li chaï del destre braz;
 Ne vint le jur que unc puis le relevast,
 Lunsdi al vespre,
 Ne vint le jur que puis le relevast de terre. (lines 773-83)

The presence of the refrain 'Lunsdi al vespre' flanked on either side by the assertion that Vivien will never again raise his banner here fulfills the functions that Suard proposed; to mark the passage of time in the text and to highlight a moment of particular pathos, a moment of pause. The recurrence that completes the set comes some one-hundred lines later, in which Vivien receives the final, mortal blow not once, but twice:

Un Barbarin vint par mi un val
 Tost esleissant un ignel cheval;
 Fiert en la teste le nobile vassal,
 Que la cervele en esspant contreval.
 Li Barbarins i vint eslaissé,
 Entre ses quisses out un grant destrer,
 En sa main destre un trenchant dart d'ascer.
 Fert en la teste le vaillant chevaler,
 Que la cervele sur l'erbe li chet;
 Sur les genoilz abat the chevaler:
 Ço fu damage quant si prodome chet. (lines 913-23)

In both *laissez*, the poem presents a fearsome pagan who gallops over the hill and strikes Vivien with such extreme force that first his banner, then his brains are propelled to the ground. Any of these three instances could constitute an insurmountable injury; that which could not possibly be survived, and yet, in each instance Vivien begins on his feet. He is, much like Roland, between life and death for a short time—an image of the cadaver yet living. Finally, following the third blow, a group of pagans descends on the young hero and carries him away from the battlefield in order to conceal him from Christian eyes.

In a return to what appears to be more linear time, Girard returns to Guillaume, who in turn rushes to aid his nephew on the battlefield at Larchamp. All the while, the audience knows that Vivien's death, promised in the first *laisse* of the poem has already been accomplished; Guillaume's journey will be for naught. Using similar language, three successive *laisse*s describe the discovery of Vivien's body: the cadaver is found next to a spring, the catastrophic wounds it endured are listed in great detail, and Guillaume laments the lost beauty of the dead youth. In the first two *laisse*s, explicit references to Vivien's deceased state are made:

Quant tu es mort, mes n'ai bon parent;
N'averai mes tels en trestut mun vivant.
[...]
Ci vus vei mort en Larchamp en la presse,
Trenché le cors e les blanches mameles,
E les autres od vus qui morz sunt en la presse. (lines 1999-2008)

In the third example, Vivien wakes only to die once more—the once and future corpse:

Al quons revint e sen e volenté,
Ovri les oilz, si ad sun uncle esgardé,
De bele boche començat a parler
[...]
Il [Guillaume] curt a l'eve ses blanches mains a laver,
De l'almosnere ad trait le pain segré,
Ens la boche l'en ad un poi doné,
Tant fist le cunte que le col en ad passé:
L'alme s'en vait, le cors i est remés.
Veit le Willame, comence a plurer ;
Desur le col del balçan l'ad levé,
Qui l'en voleit a Orenge porter. (lines 2031-55)

This is curious, given that Guillaume seems to have had no doubt in the previous *laisse*s that Vivien was dead (and not unconscious). The bifurcation of the first and second instances provides two narrative possibilities; a Barthesian 'futur antérieur' in which what will have been cannot come to pass and is replaced with a second, alternative future. In either case, Vivien is dead, but with two possible futures: in the first, the pagan enemies are successful in hiding his

body which molds undiscovered on the battlefield. In the second, he receives the final sacrament and his soul ascends to heaven. The *punctum* in this case is a cast of the dice whose *enjeu* is not only death, but resurrection:

What the *punctum* adds to the otherwise immobile and dead image is the dimension of life and intensity, rather than that of continuity or visual persistence. This evocation of the life of the being in the photo also provokes the motif of *resurrection*—the resurrection of the loved face, as distinct from remembrance, or anamnesis [...] Barthes extends the effect of resurrection beyond the lived experience of the subject to the ‘essence’ or being of the loved one.⁷⁸

In the case of Vivien’s death (and Roland’s), resurrection, as an element of *punctum* is not, as ffrench says, fully separate from remembrance or anamnesis. Not only does the possibility of resurrection form at least part of the ‘essence’—*eidôlon*—of the heroic archetype in these two *chansons de geste*, but the representation of sacrificial death is central to their narratives. This is true insofar as anamnesis is—like *punctum*—an inbetween space; one that is both reflective (as a call to remember Christ’s passion) and premonitory (the bringing forward the memory of past existence). This is akin to Fleischmann’s assertions that the ‘time of the telling’ in epic is circular, ripe for the series of resurrections that we find in both the *Guillaume* and the *Roland*. In fact, the repetitive qualities of both poetic traditions and their potential to recall past events (as well as the eucharistic implications of those resurrections) are inherent to Vivien and Roland’s character arcs, and to the most basic elements of their manuscript traditions. This is true of the *Roland* manuscripts insofar as Roland’s death is, when the corpus is considered as a whole, predicted by the earlier manuscript in a sequence, and then repeated (further guaranteed) when the next manuscript is produced, and so on, even into later depictions in other art forms.

Although Vivien’s resurrection is limited to a single manuscript, the same mechanisms are at play as in the *Roland*, if on a somewhat smaller scale. The *Chanson de Guillaume*, as we know it, is preserved in a single manuscript known as London, British Library, Additional MS 38663. Although Suard dates the poem itself to the mid twelfth century, Phillip Bennet describes a manuscript that was likely copied in England in the mid thirteenth century. Although the poem has long been considered an amalgam of two *Guillaume* poems with the point of compilation placed at line 1980, just before Guillaume finds Vivien’s body, Bennett

⁷⁸ ffrench, p. 231.

nonetheless asserts that the version preserved by BL Additional 38663 appears to be ‘a continuously composed unit’.⁷⁹ Whether this amalgam is the creation of the BL Additional 38663 scribe, or whether it was a longstanding feature cannot be known, but the version that has come down to us is one that shows two songs essentially ‘stacked’ one on top of the other; echoing the temporal stacking created by the repetition of the *laissez* following ‘Grant fu le chaud cum en mai en esté’. We are, effectively—as for Roland and Charlemagne at the time of the former’s death—in two places, and possibly, in two narratives (or songs) at once. This creates a ‘fold’ in time that is a feature of both the narrative of the manuscript; an inbetween and punctal space in which repetition renders the speed and order in which time progresses uncertain. Although it is telling, as with the broader Roland tradition, that this double death was not seen as an immediate fault by the copyist of BL Additional 38663, the ‘disconcerting experience’ of recurrence preserved by the Anglo-Norman *Guillaume* appears to have been smoothed out in the wider *Guillaume* tradition.⁸⁰

Part of what contributes to the ‘fold’ in time that repetition engenders is a seeming disconnect between how death, once accomplished, is perceived within the narratives. To this end, much of Gilbert’s monograph *Living Death in Medieval French and English Literature* focuses on theorizing corporeal death and non-corporeal, or symbolic, death through the Lacanian framework of the *entre-deux-morts*. Gilbert’s reading of the *entre-deux* is in some ways similar to my application of *punctum* (as an inbetween space) to the deaths of Roland and Vivien insofar as a person (character) can be physically dead, but not symbolically, hence the need for burial sites, etc., through which death is sanctioned by the collective (spectator). The inverse is also possible—Gilbert offers Antigone as example: she is symbolically dead from the moment she defies the order not to bury her brother Polyneices (who is, Gilbert explains, physically but not yet symbolically dead, having been denied a proper burial).⁸¹ In the *chansons de geste* that this chapter examines, it is possible for Roland and Vivien to experience both symbolic *and*

⁷⁹ Bennett, p. 10; Suard, ‘Introduction to *Guillaume*’, pp. 16-17, 27. For a detailed discussion of BL Additional 38663’s features as well as its provenance, see the first volume of Jeanne Wathelet-Willem, *Recherches sur la Chanson de Guillaume*, 2 vols (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1975).

⁸⁰ Vivien only dies once in the version of the story presented in *Aliscans*, both in the Old French and in its Franco-Italian iteration. The same is true of the much later prose rendering of the *Chanson de Guillaume*. See: Claude Régner, ed., *Aliscans* (Paris: Champion, 1990); Günter Holtus, ed., *La versione franco-italiana della ‘Bataille d’Aliscans’*: *Codex Marcianus fr. VIII [=252]*. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1985).

⁸¹ Gilbert, *Living Death*, p. 18. In her use of Antigone as a figure *entre-deux-morts*, Gilbert cites Lacan’s *Séminaire VII*.

physical deaths as a feature of *punctum*: they are dead and they are going to die. In their cases, it is less a question of being purely *entre-deux* regarding the physical and ritual states of death, and more of an ontological resurrection which is not only *between*, but a state of ongoing return. Insofar as Vivien's death is explicitly promised from the beginning of the *Chanson de Guillaume*, his death is sanctioned by the text (and therefore symbolic) before his eventual physical death is witnessed by the poem's spectators. This type of symbolic death, however, remains impossible outside of the future anterior space of the *punctum* as evidenced by the way that Roland's two deaths (physical and symbolic) rely on one another to make sense. The same is true of Ganelon's treason and the death it engenders across the *Roland* tradition; both are at once promised and accomplished, physical *and* symbolic, within each iteration of the poem, and between them. This is perhaps the fundamental difference between *punctum* as I conceive of it, and both Gilbert and Gaunt's theories of death in the *chansons de geste*. Where I do see significant overlap between Gilbert's reading of the *entre-deux-morts* and the experience of *punctum*, is here:

Entre-deux-morts [...] serves at once and in varying degrees as crisis and partial solution; it powerfully undercuts ideological constructs, but that very power can be exploited in the service of other ideologies [...] in the *entre-deux* between which the Real arises: two states whose definition, place in the world and relationship to each other are regarded as closed or 'dead' questions. To be *entre-deux-morts* is therefore to disturb a settled vision of the world.⁸²

If, as Gilbert says, the *Chanson de Roland* constitutes 'an exposition of core ethical values', one that Gaunt claims is part of a genre that 'exemplifies a literary tradition born of a feudal society in crisis', then the capacity for repeated death to disrupt these settled visions of the society they are said to enshrine is rendered all the more powerful.⁸³

Afterlives⁸⁴

⁸² Gilbert, *Living Death*, pp. 16-17

⁸³ Jane Gilbert, 'The *Chanson de Roland*', p. 21; Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, p. 17.

⁸⁴ I am grateful to Dr. Emily Guerry at the University of Kent for her generosity in taking the time to give me a primer on medieval glass, and for encouraging the exploration that follows.

At the easternmost ambulatory of the great medieval cathedral at Chartres, in the north choir, is a stained-glass window that tells the story of an unusual subject. Rising from a sill twenty-five feet off the ground and continuing a further thirty feet in the air, the window is a meditation on embassy and conquest, on sin and redemption, on the sacred and the profane, all in the imposing and beautiful, fragile yet durable medium of glass set in lead and stone. Paid for by the city's furriers, the *Vie de Charlemagne* is at once the genealogy of Chartres's most important relic—the Virgin Mary's *sancta camisa*—and a powerful political metaphor.⁸⁵ In a cathedral, setting matters—the easternmost part of the cathedral gets the most light, thereby illuminating (quite literally) key subjects within the overall glazing program. Whereas the more public nave might boast the narratives of popular saints, the choir is often reserved for the most sacred subjects.⁸⁶ The location of the *Vie de Charlemagne* in the choir is therefore heavily symbolic, rendered all the more so because it is paired with the *Vie de saint Jacques*, and is located parallel to the *Vie de saint Sylvestre*, on the opposite end of the choir chapel.⁸⁷ According to Colette Manhes-Deremble, the placement parallel to *Sylvestre* is particularly potent, insofar as it implies that Charlemagne is a *novus Constantinus*, a fact amplified by his placement to the right of the Apostle windows—Charlemagne's glory therefore surpasses that of the 'empereur fondateur'.⁸⁸ Although the cathedral was first consecrated by Bishop Fulbert in 1037, it was heavily damaged in a fire in June of 1194. Reconstruction began in 1195, with the vast glazing program completed in two major campaigns by the end of 1230—the Charlemagne window most likely dates from the second campaign. The cathedral and its glass have suffered very little damage in the intervening centuries, and thanks to a series of restoration efforts from the nineteenth century onwards, what we see there now largely reflects what visitors would have seen in the thirteenth century.⁸⁹ Far from being a purely liturgical endeavor, Manhes-Deremble describes a program that mingles the political and the religious and that served at once to inspire and to instruct:

⁸⁵ Elizabeth Pastan, 'Charlemagne as Saint? Relics and the Choice of Window Subjects at Chartres Cathedral', in *The Legend of Charlemagne in the Middle Ages: Power, Faith, and Crusade*, ed. by Matthew Gabriele and Jace Stuckey (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 97-135 (pp. 119-122).

⁸⁶ Pastan, p. 102.

⁸⁷ Pastan, p. 103.

⁸⁸ Colette Manhes-Deremble, *Les Vitraux narratifs de la Cathédrale de Chartres: Étude iconographique*, Corpus vitrearum France (Paris: Le Léopard d'Or, 1993), p. 61.

⁸⁹ Claudine Lautier, 'Chartres: Glazing the Cathedral', in *Investigations in Medieval Stained Glass*, ed. by Brigitte Kurmann-Schwarz and Elizabeth Pastan (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 49-60 (pp. 49-50, 56, 58).

Il n'est guère de temps où le politique et le religieux soient aussi intimement mêlés. Les verrières parlent des rois, parlent aux rois. Elles écrivent un vaste 'miroir des princes' où les problèmes de la succession du pouvoir, bien d'actualité au temps de Philippe Auguste, celui des rapports du prophétisme et du gouvernement, celui de l'héritage carolingien ou de l'image idéale du prince cheminant de verrière en verrière, et finissent par tisser une théorie.⁹⁰

The *Vie de Charlemagne* also stands out because, as Elizabeth Pastan notes, the window's progression of events does not conform to the standard (which would follow the saint from conversion to ascension, through good works and martyrdom) leading her to call its presentation 'disjointed', more a collection of 'recognizable stories [...] than a narrative in its own right'.⁹¹ Pastan is correct that the Charlemagne window is less a unified narrative than a compilation; the window's scenes draw on several traditions, including the *Historia Karoli Magni et Rotholandi*, or *Pseudo-Turpin* (which is roughly contemporary with the Oxford *Roland*), the *Descriptio qualiter Karolus Magnus clavum et coronam Domini a Constantinopoli Aquisgrani detulerit* (dating from the end of the eleventh century, sharing much with the mid-to-late twelfth century epic *Pèlerinage de Charlemagne*), and the Latin *Vita* of Saint Gilles.⁹² This amalgam—far from being a narrative fault—is interesting in and of itself as an example of Heinemann's *écho externe* in material culture. Furthermore, what Pastan identifies as 'disjointed' may in fact be related to temporalities transmitted by the glass, and how they relate to the *punctal* temporality of memory transmission and *écho* discussed throughout this chapter. This is in line with Wolfgang Kemp's description of the genre into which the Charlemagne window falls, in saying that, 'It is doubtless true that the Gothic stained-glass window gives us—literally—only shards, fragments that themselves consist of fragments.'⁹³ As such, the scenes depicted in stained glass broadly, but notably in the *Charlemagne* are not unlike photographs, or like the *laissez* found in the *Roland* tradition or the composite *Chanson de Guillaume*. This might cause them to appear fragmentary, or 'disjointed' when compared to more the continuous narrative styles when they are perhaps just obeying a different narrative logic. Kemp further describes reading stained glass (versus other

⁹⁰ Manhes-Deremble, p. 7.

⁹¹ Pastan, pp. 99-100, 116.

⁹² Pastan, p. 116; Manhes-Deremble, p. 258; Dates cf. Morrissey, pp. 81, 91-92.

⁹³ Wolfgang Kemp, *The Narratives of Gothic Stained Glass*, trans. by Caroline Dobson Saltzwedel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 4.

medieval art forms) as requiring the student ‘to concentrate on the narrative that transcends the image, the narrative logic of many images, as a sequence *and* as an argumentative device’.⁹⁴

Alyce A. Jordan notes that Kemp observes:

the degree to which narrative windows, while recounting stories unfolding over time, simultaneously function outside of time, enabling the viewer to visually construe the story in multiple, non-linear ways. Devices of division and repetition facilitated narrative, thematic, and argumentative structuration; they also served a mnemonic function for audience and performer.⁹⁵

This bears a striking resemblance to the work of reading repetition in the *chansons de geste* that I have laid out in this chapter, and as such, the Charlemagne window and its literary sources do more than share similar events. They also share an attitude towards repetition and memory, to memorializing death.

The first panel shows a furrier offering an item of clothing to a client, a nod to its donors. The first set of narrative panels, read from bottom to top and right to left, is most likely drawn from the *Descriptio qualiter*: Charlemagne, in full armor, upright on his horse and carrying a spear, appears to Constantine in a dream. Charlemagne, seated between two bishops, receives a letter from Constantine. Charlemagne engages in a battle and is greeted by Constantine at Constantinople. Constantine offers Charlemagne relics, including the *sancta camisa* draped over three sumptuous cases. Back in France, Charlemagne offers relics to the church at Aix. The second and thirds sets, likely drawn from the *Pseudo-Turpin*, open with Saint James appearing to a slumbering Charlemagne. The emperor is then shown the Milky Way (leading to Compostela), and sets out on horseback (unarmed), accompanied by the Archbishop Turpin and others. Charlemagne is then shown praying before taking the city of Pamplona in the next panel. In the last panel of the second set, Charlemagne establishes a church.⁹⁶

The third set marks a narrative turn away from Charlemagne as protagonist, towards his nephew, Roland. It includes scenes of battle, including the Pseudo-Turpinian victory of Roland over the giant Ferragut. The window also shows Charlemagne crossing the Pyrenees

⁹⁴ Kemp, p. 4.

⁹⁵ Alyce A. Jordan, ‘Stories in Windows: The Architectonics of Narrative’ in *Investigations in Medieval Stained Glass*, ed. by Brigitte Kurmann-Schwarz and Elizabeth Pastan (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 189-201 (p. 192).

⁹⁶ These descriptions are based on those given by Manhes-Deremble, p. 308. Color images and descriptions of the window can be found under ‘Charlemagne Window’, in *The Online Stained Glass Photographic Archive*, ed. by Painton Cowen <<https://www.therosewindow.com/pilot/Chartres/w7-38.htm>> [accessed 5 August 2021].

whilst conversing with Ganelon. This set opens with a depiction of the miracle of the flowering lances; an episode absent from the Old French *Roland* tradition, but that fits nonetheless with the Barthesian experience of *punctum*. The legend, which appears twice in the *Pseudo-Turpin*, says that the lances of those who will die in battle flower as they sleep—they are dead, and they are going to die.⁹⁷ Although the flowering lances are not present in the epic versions, their presence in the window—along with the *songes* of Constantine and Charlemagne—reflects a series of predictive dreams throughout the *Roland* tradition, insofar as Charlemagne and Aude have similarly premonitory visions across the versions. The Charlemagne window therefore plays on the same doomed anticipation that brings Roland’s impending death into such stark focus in the *chansons de geste*; an anticipatory tension that mounts as the spectator’s eyes progress upwards through the window’s narrative. Roland—who is not a saint—wears a halo throughout, sanctioning his sacrificial death even if not rising to the level of a true martyrdom. As such, the repeated *songes* within the window itself constitute an *écho disjoint*, whilst also following the logic of the *écho externe*, especially when considered alongside the final panes the window presents. In a shared scene, on a field covered in bodies, Roland attempts to break Durendal on a stone. The same panel shows Roland, his helmet now removed, sounding his oliphant; the hand of God appears between the two depictions, blessing the scene. Above and to the left, Roland lies down, mortally wounded. Above and to the right of the double-Roland, Charlemagne receives word of his nephew’s death. At the very top of the *Vie de Charlemagne*, flanked by censuring angels, Saint Gilles gives the mass pardoning Charlemagne’s great sin.

Although the sources for the Charlemagne window at Chartres are not uniquely tied to the *chansons de geste*, it is nonetheless significant that these scenes are among those that are repeated (as *écho disjoint*, or *laisses similaires*) across the Old French corpus of the *Chanson de Roland*. If, as Heinemann says, a method of validation in which scenes of particular importance are taken up and reused then the reappearance of these scenes in a thirteenth-century stained-glass window would seem to underpin their importance within the texts as they move through time, and within the cultural processes of memorialization in which each artifact participates. Furthermore, the placement of these final panes constructs a temporality that echoes that of the epic tradition (even if filtered through other sources, like the *Pseudo-Turpin*). Roland

⁹⁷ For more on the *Pseudo-Turpin* in the context of the wider Roland tradition see: François Suard, ‘Le *Pseudo-Turpin* et la tradition rolandienne à la fin du Moyen Âge: quelques exemples’, in *Le Livre de saint Jacques et la tradition du Pseudo-Turpin*, ed. by Jean-Claude Vallecalle (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2011), pp. 111-35.

breaking Durendal and sounding the horn occurs first in the bottom-to-top reading of the window, and between his final moment on the left (lying down to die) and his death announced on the right (Charlemagne receives the news). This opens an interstitial temporality between death promised and death completed, but also one in which the spectator's gaze can move across the events, much as one might search back through memory. Similarly, in the pane that combines the breaking of Durendal with the famous horn scene, Roland is depicted back-to-back with himself, facing towards both his death and the announcement of his death. As with the repetition in the *Chanson de Guillaume*, the way the window can be read both in and out of order engenders a sense of temporal stacking allowing the spectator to be in multiple places at once. At the same time, the spectator reads narrative images that are quite literally stacked one on top of the other, from multiple textual traditions that are similarly overlaid.

Jordan has explained much about the perhaps artificial separation between scholars of medieval literature and those of material culture when it comes to the *Vie de Charlemagne* in saying that it:

has long puzzled scholars, given Charlemagne's contested sainthood, problematic personal history, and lack of liturgical veneration at Chartres. Its narrative awkwardly juxtaposes Charlemagne's journey to the Holy Land with the story of Roland [...] and from which Charlemagne himself is conspicuously absent.⁹⁸

I cannot speak for practices of liturgical veneration but taken as part of a literary whole concerning the Old French tradition of Charlemagne narratives, there is nothing awkward about the juxtaposition of the stories found in the window. Roland is a major player in the *Pèlerinage* or *Voyage de Charlemagne à Jérusalem et à Constantinople*, and the window aptly reflects the tension of Charlemagne's absence from the pass at Roncevaux during Roland's death. The window therefore recalls the tension that repetition brings out in the textual tradition; Charlemagne is spectral yet present in the minds of those concerned about Roland's fate. The layout of the window as we see it also reminds the viewer of Charlemagne's tragic closeness; Roland striking Durendal on the stone and blowing the horn is adjacent to Charlemagne crossing the Pyrenees and hearing of his nephew's death. As such the *Vie de Charlemagne* is perhaps not typical of stained glass, but it certainly follows the temporal and spatial logic of the textual tradition of the *Roland*, which is important in and of itself. The catastrophe shines through the

⁹⁸ Jordan, p. 195.

glass as it does from the page: ‘the logical resolution of something we knew would happen [...] uncovered even as it is already known.’⁹⁹ Manhes-Deremble expands on this, citing the wider cultural implications of the window, beyond the scenes it depicts:

En choisissant d’illustrer, dans le déambulatoire du chevet de leur cathédrale, une histoire profane, les maîtres chartrains introduisent l’épopée au sein du sacré, se réclamant de l’héritage des moines de Saint-Denis, renforcent la position de Philippe Auguste qui se déclare dépositaire de la gloire carolingienne: le choix est littéraire, il est politique.¹⁰⁰

Manhes-Deremble makes clear that the political value of Charlemagne and the *Roland* (broadly understood to include all of the window’s sources) is obvious from the early thirteenth century insofar as the performance has been pulled out of the realm of courtly performance and been given pride of place in one of the era’s holiest spaces. Although some contemporary scholars have struggled with the logic of this, it would seem that medieval people were more flexible in their use of such echoes.¹⁰¹ I therefore propose that the *chansons*, the Chartrain glass (and its sources), and the statue *Charlemagne et ses leudes*, are all part of a process of memorialization in which the spectator contends with death and with the political messages it implies (for better or worse). As *lieux de mémoire*, the culture of epic as transmitted through the representations this chapter discusses is a cult of the dead—this is especially apt for cathedral glass, for whose subjects martyrdom (in between earthly death and life everlasting) is a prerequisite for such memorialization. As I have shown, a *lieu de mémoire* is a site where *punctum* and *studium* combine. In this case, the *studium* is tied to cultural expectations, as Barthes says, as a compact between creators and consumers, and the *punctum* is that which has been and which will be; the past brought forward and made present.¹⁰² As a system of echoes, the *chansons* I have discussed are both backwards-looking and aspirational, yet each experience of them is eternally present-tense. Like the memory layers that Fleischmann described in her discussion of the *gestes*’ grammar, each echo is a layer in memory, time, and meaning; each *lieu*

⁹⁹ Cherbuliez, p. 196. The grammar of the second portion has been altered.

¹⁰⁰ Manhes-Deremble, p. 268.

¹⁰¹ Zrinka Stahuljak notes that the reasons nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars struggled with the narrative order of the panels (and the placement of the Mass of St. Gilles in particular) are related precisely to their more aggrandizing conception of Charlemagne as a national figure, for whose image the association with incest would be immensely damaging. By contrast, medieval people understood that ‘the window cannot be read without the disruption of the sin’ but that it is the pardoning—the redemption of sin—that makes this disruption tolerable, even instructive, in *Bloodless Genealogies of the French Middle Ages: Translatio, Kinship, and Metaphor* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), pp. 5-9.

¹⁰² Barthes, *Chambre*, p. 51.

a reminder of these layers. As such, reading the *Roland* tradition and the *Guillaume* for *punctum* is to acknowledge the ways in which they exist both inside and outside of time, not as a singular culture preserved, but as an example of how these stories are timelessly inbetween. Just so, *punctum* is as much a temporality as it is an affective moment, or a theoretical approach to reading images and the world; a moment of arrestation where time stops and collapses, but also one where the work of reflection begins. *Punctum* is a means to read approaches to the passage time impacts readings of death in these two texts, but it could be readily applied to other texts, or, as I have shown, other disciplines entirely. It is also an apt way of framing the very specific affectivity of the *lieux de mémoire* through time, or as public representations of historical thought driven by affective ties (or alternately, whose affectivity is deeply altered or rejected by changing social mores). In the *Roland* tradition through time each *écho externe* functions as both a concatenation and a crescendo whose impact is progressive in time from its earliest medieval iterations, through the Chartrain glass, through the nineteenth-century *Charlemagne et ses leudes*, into the present day: a way of marking the place of the nation and its leaders in time, but also a way of contending with the intractable realities of heroic death.

Roland and Vivien are important within the genre, and in later representations precisely because they die, and there are constant reminders of this across the corpus. One such example comes in the Old French *Chanson d'Antioche*, and draws a parallel between the heroes of the *chansons de geste* and Bohemond of Taranto, Tancred, Hugh of Vermandois, Godfrey of Bouillon, Robert II of Flanders, and their armies during the final push towards Antioch:

Les grans paines que ot Oliviers ne Rollans
 Ne celes que souffri Iaumons ne Agolans
 Ne li bers Vivïens quant fu en Aliscans
 Ne valut a cestui le pris de trois bezans. (lines 8614-17)¹⁰³

The list of examples is long and branches out beyond the central core of the *chansons de geste*; the narratives built around Roland and Vivien, and their narrative afterlives cannot be separated from the fact that they are dead, and they are going to die. As such, the ongoing cultural and scholarly interest in the *Roland* and the *Guillaume* is its own ‘cult of the dead’. Though, as Manhes-Deremble claims that the *Vie de Charlemagne* window at Chartres is, in part, a reinforcement of Philippe Auguste as ‘dépositaire de la gloire carolingienne’, it is also a

¹⁰³ *La Chanson d'Antioche*, ed. and trans. by Bernard Guidot (Paris: Champion, 2011).

rumination on death and catastrophe. For all their grandeur and glory, Roland and Vivien die alone, their bodies broken in combat. There is no doubt in either *chanson* that violent death—horror—is the natural outcome for this particular class of heroes; the favored nephews of great warlords, full of youth and vigor, keen to prove themselves in battle. Although they are without doubt sweeping tales of dynastic heroics, the *Roland* and the *Guillaume* poems present a rather grim view of what it means to serve the noble causes of great men.

These outcomes are part and parcel of what Haidu characterizes as the ‘paradox’ of epic in which violence is inevitably visited upon both heroes (like Roland) and traitors (like Ganelon) and in which ‘feudalism self-destructs’.¹⁰⁴ This destructive tendency no doubt stems, in part, from what both Bloch and Gaunt identify as the crisis of violence and aristocratic decline that permeates the social and political atmosphere into which the *chansons de geste* are born, and in which they continue to develop. As Gaunt notes, ‘the chivalric heroism of *chansons de geste* is thus part of an escapist fantasy in which kings need knights [...] but the impossibility of the fantasy is constantly re-enacted in the death of heroes like Roland.’¹⁰⁵ The paradox that Haidu raises, however, is also deeply rooted in what Duggan identifies as the mixed feelings and uncertainties that surround heroic death in the *Roland*, of which he says: ‘No other *chanson de geste* is permeated to this degree by a sense of the loss suffered when great heroes die.’ The *Roland* is not, however, according to Duggan, entirely pessimistic; deep loss and regret are mingled nonetheless with admiration and defiance. Even amid ‘the havoc in the cosmos’ regret, loss, and defiance nonetheless ‘contribute to the mythification of Roland, a transcendent hero whose death causes a hundred thousand men to weep, a woman to die, and a whole nation to stand in wonder’.¹⁰⁶

Barthes closes *La Chambre claire* with the following lines, and there is something summative to be found here with regards to the work of this chapter, and in the way that Roland and Vivien’s deaths prick audiences:

Folle ou sage? La Photographie peut être l’un ou l’autre: sage si son réalisme reste relatif, tempéré par des habitudes esthétiques ou empiriques [...] folle, si ce réalisme est absolu,

¹⁰⁴ Haidu, *Medieval / Modern*, pp. 61-62. Robert Francis Cook also reads the *Roland* as firmly rooted in, and reflective of, the social values of its time. For Cook, Roland’s behavior throughout, but especially at Roncevaux follows closely the expectations and responsibilities of a man in his position, see: *The Sense of the Song of Roland* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987).

¹⁰⁵ Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, p. 43; Bloch, p. 11.

¹⁰⁶ Duggan, *Formulaic Style*, pp. 182-83.

et, si l'on peut dire, originel, faisant revenir à la conscience amoureuse et effrayée la lettre même du Temps: mouvement proprement révoltif, qui retourne le cours de la chose, et que j'appellerai pour finir l'*extase* photographique. Telles sont les deux voies de la Photographie. À moi de choisir, de soumettre son spectacle au code civilisé des illusions parfaites, ou d'affronter en elle le réveil de l'intraitable réalité.¹⁰⁷

The notion that photography has two paths, madness and wisdom, presented without judgment, and that the choice of which it follows falls not necessarily with the artist, or with the object itself, but with the *spectator* is also key to understanding these two *chansons* as part of a system of *lieux de mémoire*. If *punctum* in this case is an interruption of the expected norms of the genre (the *studium*, or the form), then it is also a chance for reflection. As I said in my introduction, *punctum* is *pensive*; presenting the choice to read repetition and death—to use Barthes's words—as either a perfect illusion, or the awakening of an intractable reality. As much as they are songs of noble deeds and great bloodlines, Roland and Vivien preserve the utter intractability of violence. To be a hero of the Old French epic is, in one way or another, to be a dead man walking. To read these texts is to experience the apex of *punctum* and *studium*; the masterful interplay of form and feeling, to witness death and time folding over on one another and to be powerless before both. As such, the experience of *punctum* is also one of individual and collective reckoning; of witnessing the ultimate frailty of heroes and the fragility of the world they inhabit.

¹⁰⁷ Barthes, *Chambre*, pp. 183-84.

Abject Witnesses: Closeness, Time, and the Crusade Cycle

Abject—from the Latin *abiectus*—is a participle of *abicio*, formed of the prefix *ab* and the verb *iacio*: to be thrown away from. To experience the abject is to be hurled from the comfort of norms and order into disorder. Much of Kristeva’s work on the abject focuses on the disgust that arises from encounters with spoiled food or from dead and decomposing bodies, but it is not simply these feelings of disgust that define abjection. The abject is also that which is defiantly outside, or inbetween. In this sense, abjection can stem as much from moments as from things; there are punctal instants tied up in the ‘temps affectif’ that is the time of suffering.¹ In studying the abject it can be difficult to separate it from feelings of embodied disgust, but some reorientation is needed in the case of the texts this chapter discusses. In the passages that follow there will be events that are objectively ‘disgusting’ to modern eyes, but to be most effective my readings will rely less on individual feelings and more on what William Ian Miller characterizes as ‘a moral and social sentiment’ that ‘ranks people and things in a kind of cosmic ordering’. For Miller, disgust is less a question of nausea (brought on by the sights and smells of decomposition) than of the uneasiness and panic that ‘attends the awareness of being defiled’ resulting in a horror that traps the subject between fight and flight.² In a similar vein, Sara Ahmed asserts that disgust requires proximity and contact between the disgusted subject and the disgusting object, which is felt as an unpleasant intensity.³ Although Ahmed is more likely referring to physical proximity—closeness of touch and smell—my reading asks whether temporal proximity also impacts experiences of the abject. In *Pouvoirs de l’horreur*, Kristeva, like Ahmed, describes the abject as an embodied phenomenon. It is notable, however, that throughout *Pouvoirs* the limits of the abject can be ephemeral, not dictated solely by bodily contacts. The unpleasantness and unease, the panic, and the acute awareness of being between are, in part, the result of intangible and unnamable fears blurring into language like a rising damp:

¹ Suard, ‘Introduction to *Guillaume*’, pp. 35-36.

² William Ian Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 2, 25-27.

³ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), pp. 84-89.

Mais ce mot ‘peur’—brume fluide, moiteur insaisissable—, à peine advenu s’estompe comme un mirage et imprègne d’inexistence, de lueur hallucinatoire et fantomatique, tous les mots du langage. Ainsi la peur mise entre parenthèses, le discours ne paraîtra soutenable qu’à la condition de se confronter sans cesse à cet ailleurs, poids repoussant et repoussé, fond de mémoire inaccessible et intime: l’abject.⁴

As such, the abject is an unpleasant awareness of the alteration of one’s place in a world that has taken a menacing turn. Here, Kristeva captures something that wraps around Suard’s affective moment in which fear is both close and yet inaccessible; a phenomenon rooted in memory in which the language of fear and suffering is *brumeux*, hazy, ghostly—like a mirage. If fear is a necessary component of the abject relationship between subject and object, then it stands to reason that physical proximity is less a direct requirement than an intensifier. Generational fears and traumas can, therefore, still be rooted in abjection. The *chansons de geste* are an exercise in memorialization, but they are also one of reckoning. As the mirage of past glories is rendered into language, whispers of catastrophe, fear, and panic also emerge.

The abject unpleasantness that Miller and Ahmed describe is, in the *chansons de geste*, most closely related to political tensions and violence—an order that vacillates between divine mandate and human failing. This is a narrative world built on violent confrontations between bodies and, as such, preserves many moments that merit a term such as ‘abject’. Within the genre, there is a set of texts whose depictions of violence on an extraordinary scale lends itself particularly well to a Kristevan reading: the *Chanson d’Antioche* and the *Chanson de Jérusalem*. These two lengthy poems were likely composed in the later part of the twelfth century, around the time of the Third Crusade of 1189-1192. With *Les Chétifs*, they form the anchoring trilogy of the Old French Crusade Cycle, which recounts the events of the First Crusade from the call to crusade at Clermont in 1095 through to Godfrey of Bouillon’s coronation in Jerusalem in 1099.⁵ The cycle then later expands to include the foundational myth of the *Chevalier au cygne* and his descendants, among whom the Bouillon family and the early rulers of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem are the most prominent. According to scholars of the

⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l’horreur* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), p. 14.

⁵ ‘Chronology’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the Crusades*, ed. by Anthony Bale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. xi-xvi (pp. xi-xii). *Les Chétifs*, which forms an interlude between the *Antioche* and *Jérusalem*, follows a group of Christian captives after the capture of Antioch. It is thematically and narratively quite different from its companions, and as such I will not be including it in this discussion, though it is no less valuable to the corpus for its exclusion.

cycle, these texts hold a particular place in the social history of the *chansons de geste*. Speaking specifically of the *Chanson d'Antioche*, Bernard Guidot describes a complex poem that differs from the rest of the genre in its realism; a text whose heroes are worthy of epic, but whose fantastic elements might cause readers to nonetheless question the limits of its veracity.⁶ For Magali Janet, there is a specific social purpose to be drawn from the poetic deployment of historical elements mixed with fantasy:

Cette proximité avec l'Histoire, tantôt majeure tantôt anecdotique, et sa recomposition dramatisée par le recours à la forme épique accentuent l'intensité des récits. [...] Le resserrement temporel autour du présent de la composition, entre le passé immédiat de la première croisade dont le cycle témoigne et le futur imminent des croisades ultérieures auxquelles il invite à participer, permet de viser deux objectifs : informer des faits passés certes, mais aussi inspirer une (ré)action des auditeurs/lecteurs, les persuader de la nécessité et de la légitimité de poursuivre l'entreprise spirituelle et militaire. L'œuvre littéraire devient à la fois 'témoin et acteur de l'histoire'.⁷

The narrow historical gap of roughly one-hundred years speaks to an immediacy in recording cultural memory that is less marked in other examples of the epic genre. As I will later show for the Old Occitan *Canso de la crozada*, proximity matters, as does the positioning of the poets as both recorders of past events and motivators of future outcomes. Wrapped up in this are the parallel desires of the *chansons de geste*, and of the Crusade Cycle to, as Janet proposes, to inform, persuade, indoctrinate, and please or entertain,⁸ reflecting the role of epic poetry in constructing and maintaining a worldview that is breaking down even as it appears to reach its apex. The objectives that Janet identifies support this, though in the case of the crusading material 'plaire' might in fact be more fraught than it seems at first glance. Most terms that imply entertainment might seem, to modern eyes, rather more positive than the experience of reading epic texts—with all their violence, with all their abjection—is or was. We are lacking a term—in

⁶ Bernard Guidot, 'Introduction', in *La Chanson d'Antioche*, ed. and trans. by Bernard Guidot (Paris: Champion, 2011), pp. 9-165 (pp. 108-09).

⁷ Magali Janet, *L'Idéologie incarnée: Représentations du corps dans le premier cycle de la croisade (Chanson d'Antioche, Chanson de Jérusalem, Chétifs)* (Paris: Champion, 2013), p. 9. There is significant crossover between the generic elements of this cycle and the lexical sets used in crusade chronicles, such that Stefan Vander Elst has suggested that these were intended to serve propaganda purposes for later crusades, in *The Knight, the Cross, and the Song: Crusade Propaganda and Chivalric Literature, 1100-1400* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

⁸ Janet, p. 9.

French or in English—that captures the dark delight of seeing uncommon heroics play out alongside uncommon savagery, even if this is the common conceit of any well-made war movie, or horror film. If abjection is, in part, the bringing close of that which has been rejected, or the discomfiting mirage of a traumatic event, then the relative proximity of these texts to the close generational memory of the descendants of crusaders that would have formed their primary audiences demands reading. Further to this, the fact that extreme racial and religious violence is the focal point of much of the action, and the fact that this may have been pleasing to early audiences (but abject to modern ones) also bears consideration. In this way, there is a specific kind of horror that lives in the closeness of text, event, and audience that is perhaps less potent in *gestes* whose action is sited in a more distant epic past, but which acquires similar layers as it reverberates outward through the centuries to the present moment.

It is impossible to assert that these texts were received in any concrete way in the medieval period, except to say that a relatively large number of manuscripts produced in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are extant (compared to the other *gestes* in this thesis). This indicates that they enjoyed a degree of popularity in the centuries that followed their composition. Further to this, the central trilogy is most often bound together, and many of the examples are richly decorated.⁹ In the French scholarly tradition, these manuscript examples are referred to as ‘témoins’, a technical term whose meaning is heightened by reading for abjection in events for which the Crusade Cycle acts as a narrative ‘witness’. Because witnessing implies both seeing and telling, the texts and manuscripts effectively make their audiences complicit in reliving the events they repeat; that which was once present is made present again. In this way, witnessing in the Crusade Cycle allows difficult events to be confronted and named. Similarly, the capacity of the abject moment to reveal that which cannot be eliminated bears deep relations to the catastrophe that *punctum* lays bare. In each case, poet, text, manuscript ‘témoins’, and audiences work in concert to make thinkable the catastrophic ‘layers of meaning that must be uncovered even as they are already known’.¹⁰ As such, the narratives themselves are witnesses, but they similarly create witnesses in the form of audiences that are both internal to the

⁹ There are eleven examples of the *Antioche*, twelve of the *Jérusalem*, and six of the *Chétifs*, most of which are relatively complete. See: *Base Jonas: Répertoire des textes et des manuscrits médiévaux d'oc et d'oïl* < <https://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr> > [accessed 3 November 2021]. It is not within the scope of this chapter to analyze the implications fine manuscripts have on understandings of how the texts were received, except to say that they were clearly seen as valuable enough to merit preservation in prestige manuscripts.

¹⁰ Cherbuliez, p. 196.

narratives, and external to the texts as they move through time. The way these audiences are constructed is most obvious in the often highly emotional reactions the texts depict to moments of extreme, or abject violence. Although I am not interested explicitly in emotions as such, the framing that Ahmed offers for the impact of emotions on a text is useful: ‘Emotions are intentional in the sense that they are “about” something: they involve a direction or orientation towards an object. The “aboutness” of emotions mean they involve a stance on the world, or a way of apprehending the world.’¹¹ Although an affective reading of the Crusade Cycle along these lines could tell us much, I am more interested in abjection as a moment through which poets and audiences apprehend the world these *chansons de geste* present.

That said, emotional responses are useful in pinpointing places where Kristevan abjection can be used to read the unfolding of events and character arcs in crusade narratives. This is particularly true insofar as they can help to reveal unexpected, or unusual relationships between events and their witnesses within the texts as mythic *lieux*. Because they are part of a wider system of mythmaking and memorialization surrounding the full breadth of the Crusades—which unfolded over nearly two hundred years between the initial call, and the eventual fall of Acre (in 1291)—the *Chansons d’Antioche* and *Jérusalem* are, even more than other *gestes*, available to this type of reading. The mythmaking at play in these texts is, perhaps even more than other *chansons de geste*, firmly rooted in conceptions of race and difference, and as such the abjection that takes place throughout the Crusade Cycle is inextricably linked to the fictionalization of very real violence against very real bodies that is motivated by very real historical racism. Although this chapter will not be overly informed by psychoanalytic theory, it bears noting that abjection as a theoretical approach is particularly open to readings of race, as Victoria Turner frames it, as ‘in part, a psychological process’ in which race is ‘not simply a physical state of being or embodiment but a multifaceted process of becoming, of acting, and being acted upon’.¹² In the texts I will discuss, the constructions of the Muslim or Pseudo-Muslim enemy is made to act, more than act as such, and it is the pointed, embodied, violence that is acted upon them that renders this violence, and the position of those who enact it abject. Following Shookofeh Rajabzadeh’s seminal article on the subject, I will not use the term

¹¹ Ahmed, p. 7.

¹² Victoria Turner, *Theorizing Medieval Race: Saracen Representations in Old French Literature* (London: Legenda, 2019), pp. 9-10.

‘Saracen’ except where it appears in the Old French text itself.¹³ Rather, I will tend to use ‘Pseudo-Muslim’, which refuses to obfuscate the racialized project of the *chansons de geste* broadly, but specifically that of the Crusade Cycle. ‘Pseudo-Muslim’ accounts for the Islamophobia present in these texts, but also allows for the imaginative lens through which characters are viewed, and reflects Haidu’s assertions that, ‘through the parodistic reproduction of the Christian trinity’ the construction of the ‘Saracen’ became a ‘projection of the self on the screen of the Other’ and that it was ‘this false and prejudicial image of the Muslims, that European knights brought with them on the First Crusade. Without realizing it, the historical Crusaders would have been battling an image of themselves’.¹⁴ As such, these texts are especially open to the ‘poids repoussant et repoussé, fond de mémoire inaccessible et intime’ that Kristeva calls abject where Crusaders battling an images of themselves is, in part, as I will show, at once a rejection of and a pulling close of the violence that is their very purpose.

Indeed, according to Bernard of Clairvaux’s *De Laude Novae Militiae*, ‘a killer of Muslims was not really a destroyer of human beings. In elevating war into a world contest against evil, human bodies had become epiphenomenal. A killer of Muslims was only a destroyer of evil itself.’¹⁵ This did not, however, preclude the possibility for cohesion between religious and racial groups. This is the product of a racist ideology that was the motivation for crusade, and for which abjection provides a useful and nuanced frame. Although, as Geraldine Heng has shown, race is not the necessary byproduct of enmity, or indeed, of the contact zones out of which the Crusades arose, these conflicts were nonetheless crucial to the formation of racialized and racist ideologies in the period:

Holy war—especially extraterritorial mass military incursions we know today as the Crusades—is a matrix conducive to the politics of race [...] Race is a product of instrumentalizations that occur in war, and is also produced by political theology’s instrumentalizations in support of war.¹⁶

¹³ Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh, ‘The depoliticized Saracen and Muslim erasure’, *Literature Compass*, 16 (2019), 1-8 <<https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12548>> [accessed 28 October 2022]. I owe my use of the term ‘Pseudo-Muslim’ to a series of conversations with my colleague at Cambridge, Rebecca Courtier.

¹⁴ Haidu, *Violence*, pp. 36-37.

¹⁵ Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 115.

¹⁶ Heng, *Invention*, p. 113.

Rajabzadeh has demonstrated, to compelling and chilling effect, the degree to which medieval representations of Muslims are aligned with contemporary Islamophobia, and I ask the reader to bear this in mind as this chapter progresses.

Abjection and Finitude

In *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, Kristeva presents a reading of Louis-Ferdinand Céline's 1932 novel *Voyage au bout de la nuit*. The choice of Céline as a means of framing the literary forms that abjections can take is useful in the context of the Crusade Cycle insofar as Kristeva describes him as an author of the in-between, of discomfort, of malaise, of that which is neither in-nor-out.¹⁷ Céline creates a world which is familiar to his reader all while introducing transgressive elements that unsettle and disturb the comfort of the spaces the reader inhabits: 'Lieux que nous avons déjà parcourus—avec la *souillure*, l'*abomination*, le *péché*—sous d'autres cieux, sous d'autres protections.'¹⁸ This is not so different from the world the Crusade Cycle presents; one of Christian heroism peppered with sinful desires and abject acts undertaken, as Kristeva says, under other skies (both geographically, and in another time). In describing the literary uses of abjection through Céline, Kristeva says:

En d'autres termes, le thème de la douleur-de l'horreur est l'ultime témoignage de ces états d'abjection à l'intérieur d'une représentation narrative. Voudrait-on aller plus loin aux abords de l'abjection, on ne trouverait ni récit ni thème, mais le remaniement de la syntaxe et du lexique—violence de la poésie, et silence [...] Tout est déjà dans le *Voyage*: la douleur, l'horreur, la mort, le sarcasme complice, l'abjection, la peur... Et ce gouffre, où parle une étrange déchirure entre un moi et un autre—entre *rien* et *tout*. Deux extrêmes qui changent d'ailleurs de place [...] et donnent un corps douloureux à cette synthèse interminable, ce voyage sans fin: un récit entre apocalypse et carnaval.¹⁹

Much of what Kristeva perceives as thematic elements of abjection in Céline's work can be readily applied to the work of the anonymous *Antioche* and *Jérusalem* poets. For all their grandeur, the *chansons de geste* broadly are a poetry of violence in some of its most extreme

¹⁷ Kristeva, pp. 158-59.

¹⁸ Kristeva, p. 159.

¹⁹ Kristeva, p. 166.

forms; of multi-generational, inter-faith conflicts and of the broken bodies that are the foregone conclusions of such violence. And yet, where one might expect to see a more marked rift between enemy camps, the poets of the Crusade Cycle introduce an audience behind the walls of Antioch and Jerusalem that gives voice to this strange tear between the Franks and their adversaries revealing ‘deux extrêmes qui changent de place’. The *Jérusalem* poet finishes his book saying, ‘Ci finerai mon livre ou dit en ay assés’ (line 9889) so, although he does not present a historical ‘voyage sans fin’ as such, it is worth noting the open-endedness of the outward reverberations that the poem presents in its manuscript iterations and its ongoing cultural presence. The ‘voyage sans fin’ trending towards apocalypse and carnival is representative of what the Crusade Cycle preserves as two extremes: the sacred and the profane, both bound up in the inversion of order and the troubling of identities. This is the crux of the myth of the First Crusade; one in which its heroes are complicit in carnivalesque violence in a world teetering on the edge of a possible apocalypse. This apocalyptic potential is only underlined by the fact that, by the time these texts were committed to parchment, a second crusade had ended and a third was in the making—the first attempt at holy war, which the texts at hand recount, did not prevent a cycle of violence whose eventual outcomes were unknown to the poets who first memorialized it.

In his introduction to the first of the crusade narratives, Guidot evokes a poem that pushes at the bounds of violence normally expected of the genre, saying that:

l’atmosphère générale de la *Chanson d’Antioche* est celle d’une violence déchaînée et exacerbée [...] Cette terrible violence, omniprésente, est acceptée par le narrateur comme naturelle dans ces circonstances d’exception. Les crimes sont perpétrés des deux côtés et ils ne sont pas toujours châtiés. Les exemples ne manquent pas.²⁰

Of these many examples, most occur on the battlefield; beheadings are a constant feature of the fighting and epic strokes abound. Dead pagans and Christians alike are hacked to pieces, and their horses are not spared. Where this cycle differs from others is in what Guidot describes as a total lack of respect for the dead on the part of Christian troops and their leaders who are, ostensibly, emblematic of epic heroism. It is in the ‘violence déchaînée’ that Guidot exposes that the abject emerges as a confrontation with finitude in which human potential collapses in a

²⁰ Guidot, p. 111.

punctal, or catastrophic moment. The positionality of such violence and the bodies it leaves in its wake is reflected in Kristevan abjection insofar as:

l'*abject*, objet chu, est radicalement un exclu et me tire vers là où le sens s'effondre [...] Il est dehors, hors de l'ensemble dont il semble ne pas reconnaître les règles du jeu. [...] Ce n'est donc pas l'absence de propreté ou de santé qui rend abject, mais ce qui perturbe une identité, un système, un ordre. Ce qui ne respecte pas les limites, les places, les règles.²¹

The fallen object, representing a defiant outsidership, pulls witnesses to a limit where the horror of the abject as temporal is tied to catastrophe and collapse. This limit is the point 'où le sens s'effondre' where, like the *punctum*, time and meaning collapse and where witnesses confront 'that which is not survivable'.²² Furthermore, the position of witnesses in relation to the fallen object renders events menacingly *brumeux* as systems, rules, and limits are exceeded.

Insofar as, 'C'est pourtant le cadavre humain qui donne lieu à la concentration maximale d'abjection et fascination,' part of the dark desire described before is a confrontation with not only death, but with the capacity of the cadaver to be both an end, and the denial of finitude.²³ The corpse left on the battlefield is the physical echo of a violent horror; a being that is gone, and yet present. Christopher Fynsk describes finitude as a space in which 'death exposes a radical meaninglessness that cannot be subsumed' that seems akin to the sense of meaning collapsing that Kristevan abjection engenders within the temporal collapse of *punctum*.²⁴ All of this is tied up in how the epics of the Crusade Cycle portray the suffering, and by extension the horror that, through unbridled violence, forms its overarching theme:

Le récit célinien est un récit de la douleur et de l'horreur non seulement parce que les "thèmes" y sont, tels quels, mais parce que tout la position narrative semble commandée par la nécessité de traverser l'abjection dont la douleur est le côté intime, et l'horreur le visage public.²⁵

²¹ Kristeva, pp. 9, 12.

²² Cherbuliez, p. 185. The spectator is essential to Barthes's experience of *punctum* and the same holds true here, though the relationship between spectator and image is different than the relationship between witness and event. As far as the act of 'seeing' is concerned within the narratives of the Crusade Cycle, 'witnessing' is more appropriate.

²³ Kristeva, p. 175

²⁴ Christopher Fynsk, 'Forward: Experiences of Finitude', in *The Inoperative Community*, ed. by Peter Connor, trans. by Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp. vii-xxxv (p. xvi).

²⁵ Kristeva, p. 165.

The following passages provide an example of these two sides of abjection—private suffering and public horror—that are the hallmarks of what Kristeva calls ‘le récit célinien’, and which are also central to experiences of the abject in the Crusade Cycle. The first two examples show what is perhaps most aptly described as a public performance of violence, with the second set centering on the witnessing of that violence and the suffering it engenders. Throughout the enacting of, and reaction to these violent events, questions are raised as to what Kristeva might mean by ‘la nécessité de traverser l’abjection’, in which *traverser* implies at once to penetrate, experience, survive, or transcend:

El clos, devant le porte de le ferté garnie,
La troverent sarcus de marbre et de porfie;
Si jeterent les cors de cele jent haïe,
Et les dars et les wivres, mainte espee forbie,
Et elmes et clavains u li ors reflambie
Et totes celes armes que Turs porte en s’aïe.

[...]

Par les murs d’Anthïoce qui de pierre est polie,
A perrieres turcoises, dont la pierre est masie,
Ont jetees les testes et cascune galie. (*Antioche*, lines 3308-13, 3332-34)

Li dus Godefrois l’ot, si est avant passés:
As ribals les livra, cil les on decolés
Et tos nus despoilliés quant il les ont tûés.
Devant Jerusalem ont les cors traïnés,
As mangonels turçois les ont laiens jetés.
Les cars ont escorciés et overs et salés,
Puis les pendent en halt si sont al vent hallés.
Et les testes ficierent dedens les agus pels,
Puis les ont esteciés par desus les fossés. (*Jérusalem*, lines 2578-86)²⁶

²⁶ *La Chanson de Jérusalem*, ed. by Nigel R. Thorp (1992), VI: *The Old French Crusade Cycle*, ed. by Jan A. Nelson and Emanuel J. Mickel, 10 vols (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1977-)

Both passages reflect similar types of violence: the bodies of the pseudo-Muslim enemy are stripped and exposed to the elements, their heads then either displayed on pikes or thrown over the city walls. Each head thus becomes an ‘objet chu’ that is not only fallen in that it reveals an abject fascination with the meaninglessness of death, but in that it is quite literally falling from the sky. As the heads of fallen enemies penetrate the air above the city walls, questions arise as to which limits are being transgressed; the dead body enters an inbetween wherein it experiences abjection, radically exposing that which is neither survived nor transcended. Similarly, as the abject object falls, it pulls both witnesses and audiences towards the place ‘où le sense s’effondre’, the collapse of meaning that such violence engenders. The cadaver also, in this way, becomes a means to an end where fear is the desired outcome. If the violence here seems a matter of course on the ground (even in ‘ces circonstances d’exception’) it causes great distress to those witnessing from within Antioch and Jerusalem. It also bears noting in the passages above, and those below the presence of echo and repetition, which, when attached to death are also a feature of *punctum*. This is then paired with abject violence, in which I note the hallmarks of both time and meaning collapsing.

Quant païen l’ont veü, molt fu grans l’estormie,
 Les peres et les meres, lor femes, lor amie
 Reconurent les testes, cascune en brait et crië,
 Et maldient la terre u tels gens fu norie,
 Et dist li uns a l’autre: ‘Nos n’i garirons mie,
 Quant il les mors desterrent, ce est grans derverie,
 Et les vis nos ocïent par lor grant estoutie.
 Mahomés nos en venge, que cascuns de nos pïe!
 Perdue avons l’isque devers cele partie,
 Se nos de l’amiral n’en avonmes aïe,
 Tot seronmes destruit et mort a grant hascie.’
 Estes vos le cité de grant dol raplenie. (*Antioche*, lines 3335-46)

En la grant Tor David est Corbadas montés.
 A une des fenestres est li rois acoutés,
 De çou qu’il a veü est forment aïrés,

Et cil de Jursalem ont lor tinbres sonés
Por les Turs c'on lor ot balenciés et rüés.
Et li rois Corbadas s'en est jus devalés,
De le grant Tor Davi descendi les degrés.
Forment est estormie tot par tot la cités. (*Jérusalem*, lines 2587-94)

Dedens Jérusalem fo molt grans l'estormie.
Des Turs qui sont jeté cascuns en brait et crie.
Quant li rois Corbadas a la novele oïe,
Isnelement devale de la grant tor antie. (*Jérusalem*, lines 2595-98)

Although these passages highlight a potential excess of violence, Janet notes that the poets of the two *gestes* can be seen to legitimate the abuses perpetrated against corpses insofar as the wealth stripped from these bodies is redistributed to the poorest Franks and their camp followers.²⁷ Janet further explains that the impact of such acts goes beyond the immediacy of the shock and grief seen above:

Exposer le cadavre, c'est offrir au regard l'abject de la finitude humaine, c'est priver les proches de l'enterrement purificateur, c'est ôter au défunt le respect d'une cérémonie qui seule permet de reconnaître par-delà la mort comme un être humain, intégré à un groupe civilisé. C'est aussi pour le chrétien médiéval refuser au Sarrasin le moyen d'assurer une quelconque possibilité de ressusciter corps et âme à la fin des temps.²⁸

In Janet's analysis, it is the act of displaying the cadaver and the confrontation with finitude it provokes that renders these moments abject. It is the combined horrors of the acts themselves and the witnessing written into these two passages that demonstrates what Kristeva describes as a narrative driven to penetrate the abject, whose two faces are private suffering and public horror. Furthermore, the moments preserved above create a passage between the textual present and possible future outcomes that highlight the temporal tensions inherent to abjection in the Crusade Cycle. In exposing their cadavers, the crusaders deny the enemy dead salvation. The ultimate punishment is therefore the confrontation with finitude that Janet highlights—an end to both corporeal and spiritual life. The impact of this is reflected in the reactions of family members

²⁷ Janet, p. 436.

²⁸ Janet, p. 431.

watching from the city walls who claim that they will never heal from the disinterment of their dead: ‘Nos n’i garirons mie.’ A grammatical move towards the future tense here looks outwards, presenting an aspect that is doomed, yet without end. For Janet, the violence enacted on the bodies of enemy combatants as witnessed by civilians is motivated by a desire to dehumanize and dominate; to turn the defeated body into a trophy through which the triumphs of crusade can be made tolerable and commemorated.²⁹ It is in such moments that the tensions of a ‘temps affectif’ are most fraught, caught between the humanizing reactions of the pagan witnesses and the triumphal, punishing tones presented by the Christian poet.

Although both are part of a textual culture of commemoration and memorialization, the *gestes* are markedly different from contemporary chronicle material. If we accept that these poems were composed and transmitted, as Janet asserts, to inform and to entertain, the fact that the balance of Suard’s ‘temps affectif’ is given over to enemy bodies and civilian witnesses requires reading. This especially true insofar as these texts position themselves as historical and continue to be framed as such in the centuries immediately following their composition. Witnessing is therefore not only necessary to abjection, but to the qualities of performance and entertainment inherent to the genre of the *chansons de geste* more broadly. The turning of the two faces Kristeva describes—private suffering, public horror—towards the suffering of the individual body as witnessed or presented, and potentially enjoyed, is integral to what makes it abject in the context of these crusading narratives. Even if this might seem abhorrent to twenty-first century audiences, it is the dark delight of audiences witnessing the distress of pagans that underpins abjection in the cycle as a whole. According to crusader attitudes, their enemies have denied the true God and therefore suffer the consequence of a justified horror; the abject thus occupies the space that lies in between what is catastrophe for one and catharsis for the other. As such, the characterization of crusader violence as ‘grans derverie’ (*Antioche*, line 3340) is compelling. Even though spoken by their victims, calling the behavior of the purported heroes of the piece ‘devilish’ lingers; painting their actions as not entirely justified, even for an ostensibly Christian audience. This is complicated by Janet’s assertion that the fear of death exhibited by the pseudo-Muslims of the piece is framed as a moral and spiritual weakness. Alternately, if the Christian protagonists experience fear, it is their ability

²⁹ Janet, pp. 432-33.

to traverse it—to transcend it—that underlines their superiority over their enemies.³⁰ And yet, the attention given over to negative characterizations of crusader behavior is, as I will show, perhaps also tied to a need to pass through, or beyond abjection that is motivated by the fear of death on the part of the *chansons*' Christians; a confrontation with finitude in which bad deaths, or the denial of the eternal are the products of a desire for catharsis and purgation.

One of the most striking things present in scholarly descriptions of the abject is its shared qualities of *inbetweenness* and *becoming*. Given the types of violence that prevail in the Crusade Cycle, Rina Arya makes a particularly poignant observation in this regard, in saying:

Abject things cross boundaries, making their states indeterminate and it is this in-between state that renders the object abject [...] the corpse is not abject because it stinks or starts to putrefy, but because it is in-between categories, which makes the putrefaction abject.³¹

Human remains are present in the *chansons de geste* as a whole, but the ways in which these remains are treated, even weaponized, in the *Antioche* and *Jérusalem* material is both unusual and extreme. As a theoretical point, it is worth unpacking how the abject and the mechanisms by which people and remains are made abject bears on how the central core of the Crusade Cycle has been and should be read. The most abject acts by modern and medieval standards alike (rape, postmortem dismemberment, cannibalism) are carried out by or on behalf of a crusading Frankish army composed of known historical figures. This inverts the conventions of Suard's 'temps affectif', as discussed in my first chapter, wherein the suffering is that of the hero with whom the audience ostensibly identifies, as part of the community that the epics build. Roland and Vivien's deaths troubled their target audiences because they were 'theirs', and yet, in the Crusade Cycle, far from being pure propaganda, death appears to trouble Christian community values as much as it shapes them.

The inbetweenness that Arya ascribes to the corpse that is no longer alive but nonetheless present and putrefying and therefore abject by virtue of this combination is well suited to reading abjection in the *Antioche* and *Jérusalem* material. Whereas the violence that takes place in the context of the battlefield in both poems is similar in scale between the two warring factions, decapitations and dismemberments are largely one-sided and occur at an

³⁰ Janet, pp. 410-12.

³¹ Rina Arya, *Abjection and Representation: An Exploration of Abjection in the Visual Arts, Film and Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 27.

alarming rate. For Janet, these tropes belong to a long history, known to medieval audiences, that may have served to render them more tolerable:

Cette phase d'exposition est toujours accompagnée d'un morcellement du corps: les têtes sont inéluctablement tranchées pour suivre ensuite des voies plus variées. Cet usage historiquement avéré et exploité par les textes littéraires est révélateur de la volonté d'afficher son triomphe en réduisant l'ennemi à un trophée [...] selon un usage qui remonte aux Gaulois [...] Ces scènes déshonorantes nécessitent une écriture spécifique à même de les rendre tolérables à l'auditeur/lecteur.³²

Janet's reference to the Gauls in the above citation is notable, given the context; as putative ancestors of the Franks, they are themselves somewhat defiant of categories as a native people who both resisted and were ultimately consumed by Rome. Although it is unclear whether the earliest audiences of the Crusade Cycle would have made any immediate connection between the decapitations preserved in those narratives to those carried out by Gallic warriors, the historical linkages between past and present decapitations are nonetheless compelling. The head of the enemy in the *Antioche* is similarly transformed into a triumphal symbol that is then hurled back over the walls and into the faces of its living family members, which is met with an outpouring of grief:

Quant païen l'on veü, molt fu grans l'estormie,
les peres e les meres, lor femes, lor amie
reconurent les testes, cascune en brait et crië' (lines 3335-37).

Janet acknowledges that these scenes of decapitation and dismemberment (and, later, of cannibalism) are meant to be humiliating, but that they require a specific treatment to render them tolerable to the *chanson's* intended audience. The imbalance, or inversion, in the number of lines given over to suffering (as 'temps affectif') complicates Janet's assertions that they are meant to be 'tolerable'. The fact that these decapitated heads and dismembered corpses are presented to be seen is crucial insofar as the abject must be witnessed in order to function; again, private suffering and public horror are joined in the performance of dark delights. Curiously, the horror-stricken reactions of the Antiochenes parallel some of the poem's earliest *laissez* wherein the grief and suffering of Christ and Christian converts underpins the necessity of crusade.³³

³² Janet, pp. 432-33.

³³ *Antioche*, lines 157-265. The suffering of women is highlighted in *laisse* 37.

If the unstated goals of the Crusade Cycle are not just indoctrination and entertainment but parsing out the necessities of the more difficult historical acts and their consequences, then relationships to what is rejected and what is brought close (exposed by abject acts) is its own sort of mythmaking. In order for such acts to be tolerable, a different positionality was needed and explicitly constructed. As Heng explains, this positionality was communicated via ‘a war of words’, of a sort:

For Peter the Venerable, as for others before him in the Near East and Iberia who had written polemical tracts on Islam and its Prophet, *the sword of the Spirit* was wielded via the manipulation of words. A war of words—ideological combat for hearts, minds, and souls across the world—this interlocked with military politico-territorial war.³⁴

The role of the epics, as both written and performed, reflect this effort in creating and proliferating a certain worldview. They are, in a manner of speaking, both participants in a war of words, and a poetics of war in their own right. In this case, a view of the crusade enterprise requires a positionality that looks back just as it looks inward. In constructing systems of witnessing, these texts also ask important questions about what makes a community bound by the violence of Holy War.

Princes des Sots: Tafurs in Time

The ways of apprehending the world these texts reflect and the expectations they support or disrupt are illuminated by Andrew Cowell’s work on Western European epic traditions, including the *chansons de geste*. For Cowell, the purpose of epic extends past indoctrination and entertainment (as for Janet) and provides a means to negotiate ‘issues of identity, social order, violence, and alterity’ and to test ‘the limits and weaknesses of their own cultural models and ideals’.³⁵ Much of *The Medieval Warrior Aristocracy* centers on the simultaneous perfection and outsideness of epic heroes, and his assertions that they can be ‘used as a touchstone for examining the complex boundaries and interconnections between the self and the group, the performative and the sacred, and the group and the Other’ lends itself to reading abjection in the

³⁴ Heng, *Invention*, p. 116. The ‘sword of the spirit’ refers to Ephesians 6.17: ‘et galeam salutis assumite, et gladium spiritus (quod est verbum Dei)’.

³⁵ Andrew Cowell, *The Medieval Warrior Aristocracy: Gifts, Violence, Performance, and the Sacred* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), pp. 12-13.

Crusade Cycle.³⁶ The unsettling *inbetweenness* of the purported heroes of the cycle, the layered witnessing it preserves, as well as the boundaries violent acts transgress throughout reveal a different kind of community mythology, based less on the flower of nobility than on its darkness. If a large part of apprehending the world is parsing out one's place in it, then the ways in which these types of texts help to establish to which categories one belongs are important. Although literary texts like the *chansons de geste* establish community identities by asking audiences to place themselves within the narrative world, these processes can very easily extend to other genres of writing, like chronicles, or sermons. Any of these might ask their audiences to examine their place in the historical expanse of linked events (like the series of crusades these texts and their audiences touched), or their relationship to the moral boundaries, or smaller-scale political or religious allegiances that each text valorizes or negates.

Throughout the Crusade Cycle, abjection serves to trouble the categories of *chrestiens* and *paiens* as regards suffering, just as the boundaries between living and dead, and appropriate versus inappropriate violence are transgressed. This transgression of boundaries is typical of how abjection operates insofar as Arya explains that, if identity is established via rejection and negation, then the acts of making and being made abject necessarily, as Kristeva says, trouble identities.³⁷ This is particularly true if we accept that these texts were used as both entertainment and propaganda as they moved through time. The closeness of the Crusade Cycle's earliest audiences to the event and its many ghosts causes shifts in the degrees of abjection they experience. What troubles or transgresses identities is dependent in part on how witnesses are constructed; on how they perceive the events put before them. Whilst assuming an audience that will later read or hear the poems, the passages that follow also explicitly construct two sets of immediate witnesses: pseudo-Muslims and Crusaders. Each has different reactions, setting up an immediate politics of identification based on assumed sympathies and animosities within a shared set of cultural values that has likely shifted quite considerably as the texts have moved through time. We should keep in mind that the audiences nearest to the Crusade Cycle poems very likely had close ties to those who had been on crusade, and very different ideas about excess violence than twenty-first century audiences might. That said, there is a clear reckoning with the unsavory sides of crusade within these texts—it is not all glory. Of all the moments in the

³⁶ Cowell, pp. 13-14.

³⁷ Arya, p. 40; Kristeva, p. 12.

Crusade Cycle that transgress the bounds of expected violence, there is one incident that serves to challenge both crusader identities and ethics. In a moment of extreme deprivation, the leader of an enigmatic group within the Frankish forces approaches Peter the Hermit:

Dans Pieres li hermites fu ens enmi son tré,
Li rois Tafurs i vint, avoec lui son barné,
Plus en i ot de .M., tot sont de fain enflé:
‘Sire, conselliés nos, por sainte carité!
Por voir morons de fain et de caitiveté.’
Et respondi dans Pieres: ‘C’est par vo lasqueté!
Alés, prandés ces Turs qui la sont par cel pré,
Bon ierent a mangier s’il sont quit et salé.’
Et dist li rois Tafurs: ‘Vos dites verité.’
Del tré Pieron s’en torne, ses ribals a mandé,
Plus furent de .X.M., quant furent assamblé.
Les Turs ont escorciet, s’en ont le quir osté,
En l’eve et el rostier ont le car quisiné;
Assez en ont mangiet, mais de pain n’ont gosté. (*Antioche*, lines 4041-54)

Or est li rois Tafurs auques esvertüés,
Et il et sa compaigne dont il i ot assés;
A lor coutels qu’il ont trançans et afilés
Escorçoient les Turs, aval par mi les prés.
Voiant paiens les ont par pieces decolpés,
En l’eve et es carbons les ont bien quisinés.
Volentiers les manjüent, sans pain, tos dessalés;
Et dist li uns a l’autre: ‘Molt est cis savourés,
Mius vaut que cars de porc ne que bacons ullés.
Dehés ait qui morra tant com en ait assés.’
Ricement s’en conroie li rois et ses barnés. (*Antioche*, lines 4066-76)

The cannibalism that took place during the First Crusade is well-attested. The act is described with varying degrees of reticence in the chronicles of Peter Tudebode, Robert the Monk, Baudry

of Bougueil, Raymond of Aguilers, Albert of Aachen, Anna Comnena, William of Tyre, Ralph of Caen, as well as the *Gesta Francorum* and the *Historia belli sacra*.³⁸ Of all of these, Guibert of Nogent is the only one to include the Tafurs specifically, though he suggests in his *Gesta Dei per Francos* [c. 1106-1109] that they only played at cannibalism in order to strike fear into the Antiochenes.³⁹ In Guibert's eyes, the performance of cannibalism is only marginally better than the actual eating of human flesh, though, as in the epic material, it is the horror engendered by witnessing that renders the act 'useful', as such. From the chronicles onward, the tendency has been to treat this anthropophagy as an unfortunate outcome of the most desperate moments of siege warfare going badly; a perspective that certainly appears in the above passages.⁴⁰ The Tafurs, who are miserable and dying of hunger make an appeal to mercy and then accept a solution provided by a high-ranking cleric. This is a moment that modern audiences find quite shocking, but for reasons tied up in questions colonialism and race that would not have occurred to medieval audiences in France in quite the same way. It is, nonetheless, a difficult moment in the narrative and one that transgresses medieval expectations of 'normal' violence and consumption. In this sense, scenes of Tafur cannibalism act as a punctal moment in which the meaning of crusade collapses, especially knowing (as external audiences do) that Peter the Hermit has sanctioned it. The repetition present in the above passages creates a sort of punctal echo with the heroic deaths witnessed previously, though in this case inverted as the moral high ground of crusade is challenged. Audiences thus become witness to a moment of crisis, repeated for effect. By rendering the social and moral position of the Tafurs indeterminate, they embody the inbetweenness of the abject and thus a confrontation with the crusade enterprise's darkest desires. The crumbling of meaning inherent to the Tafur's act of consuming the enemy dead is

³⁸ Jay Rubenstein, 'Cannibals and Crusaders', *French Historical Studies*, 31.4 (2008), 525-52 (pp. 530-39).

³⁹ Guibert of Nogent, *The Deeds of God Through the Franks*, trans. by Peter Levine (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997), p. 146. Heng describes Guibert's description of the Tafur king as 'a rogue personage who has fallen in status' providing a mirror of Baldwin I of Jerusalem in *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), pp. 33. Curiously, Jay Rubenstein notes that Muslim chroniclers do not include the Tafurs, or cannibalism, in their histories, 'Cannibals', pp. 550-51.

⁴⁰ Scholars do not agree on the distinction between 'anthropophagy' and 'cannibalism', and many use the terms interchangeably. For Rachel B. Herrmann and Jared Staller, 'cannibalism' requires that flesh-eating have elements of 'savagery', and ritual, or taboo. Both are historians of the early modern period and it bears noting that their work touches on different understandings of race (and thus 'savage') than are present in the medieval period. In this case, both terms seem ontologically appropriate, though still fraught. See: Rachel B. Herrmann, 'Introduction: "Cannibalism and..."', in *To Feast on Us as Their Prey: Cannibalism and the Early Modern Atlantic*, ed. by Rachel B. Herrmann (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2019), pp. 3-17; Jared Staller, *Converging on Cannibals: Terrors of Slaving in Atlantic Africa, 1509-1670* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2019).

reflected in chronicle material which often views it as harmful to crusader morality even if driven by extreme deprivation. According to Merrall Llewelyn Price:

Raymond d'Aguilers wrote that the anthropophagy of the Frankish army, whether strategic or starvation cannibalism, not only appalled the enemy, but also impacted public opinion at home, even forcing some to rethink the ethics and the wisdom of the eastern campaign.⁴¹

The distaste for cannibalism is also present in other contemporary chronicles, including Fulcher of Chartres's *Historia Hierosolymitana*:

Human beings who had been turned into things by death and dismemberment were thus also turned into edibles to fortify the living. The eyewitness chroniclers report the events with constrained horror. [...] Fulcher is tormented by the implications of cannibalizing the Muslim enemy—acts committed, he says, by *very many* crusaders—and shudders at the thought that the cannibals ate *raw* rather than adequately cooked flesh, as if a distinction between the raw and the cooked, nine centuries before Levi-Strauss, signaled an important difference.⁴²

For Heng, this type of anthropophagy is colonial in nature and representative of the political act of consuming in which 'the very act of eating your enemy is also a potent demonstration of political power'.⁴³ Heng goes on to describe the ways in which later romances (like the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*) show cannibalism as an indulgence, carried out with elaborate recipes involving exotic spices. This conspicuous, lordly consumption is typically practiced by monsters or giants and is not the same 'spectacle of famished Christians desperately eating Muslim flesh half-raw at Ma'arra an-Numan, before the human meat was adequately roasted'.⁴⁴ The Tafur cannibalism of the *Chanson d'Antioche* is somewhere in between; the meat is 'bien quisiné', cooked with care, but eaten plain, unseasoned and without bread. The Tafurs themselves are often depicted as bestial, but human; perhaps this is the mitigating point between the historical anthropophagy of Ma'arra and the cannibalistic fantasy of the later romances Heng highlights. Certainly, the Tafurs episodes and the reactions of the witnesses to these episodes

⁴¹ Merrall Llewelyn Price, *Consuming Passions: The Uses of Cannibalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 8.

⁴² Heng, *Invention*, p. 120.

⁴³ Heng, *Empire*, p. 31.

⁴⁴ Heng, *Empire*, p. 122. Heng revisits this episode and cannibalism as colonial consumption in more detail in, *Invention*, pp. 118-26.

reflect the horror of seeing the ‘desecration of the already dead and buried argues the reduction of human bodies to mere thinghood’.⁴⁵

There are, however, some elements of indulgence associated with the scenes of cannibalism above. There also moments of catastrophe when this indulgence is witnessed by the Antiochenes. One of the most striking examples of such indulgence begins with the intervention of Godfrey of Bouillon and his companions in the Tafur cannibalism, marking a shift in the depiction of the act:

Li quens Robers i vient, Buiemons et Tangrés,
Et li dus de Buillon qui molt fu honorés,
Li quens Hues li Maines est avoec els alés,
Et li vesques del Pui, qui praus fu et senés,
Et trestot li baron; n’en i a nul remés,
Mais cascuns d’els fu bien fervertis et armés.
Devant le roi Tafur s’est cascuns arestés,
En riant li demandent: ‘Comment vos contenés?
—Par foi, ce dist li rois, giers sui bien asasés,
Se jou avoie a boire, a mangier ai assés.’
Dist li dus de Buillon: ‘Certes, vos en arés.’
De son bon vin li fu uns botels presentés,
Li rois Tafurs en but, as autres fu livrés. (*Antioche*, lines 4094-4106)

The most jarring aspect of the above passage for a modern audience is perhaps the treatment of the Tafur cannibalism as what appears to be an abject joke. This is compounded by the appearance of a list reminiscent of the epic trope of naming the noblest barons present on the battlefield, or those coming before kings on embassies, thus inverting the epic order in which tropes that typically serve to underpin heroic actions instead highlight a moment where Christian morality breaks down. This is one of many such inversions present in the Crusade Cycle where the highly recognizable formulae of the epic tradition are used to trouble or subvert expectations thus hurling audiences (as witnesses) from the comfort of the familiar into the discomfort of being in between categories; a confrontation with the barbaric and the heroic. Guidot renders these events of the *chanson* in his *analyse* as:

⁴⁵ Heng, *Invention*, p. 120.

Se sachant observés, le roi des Tafurs et ses ribauds vont se livrer à un spectacle ignoble: ils prennent la direction des tranchées qui avaient servi de cimetières, déterrent les morts et procèdent à un tri. Les hauts dignitaires chrétiens échangent des plaisanteries avec le roi des Tafurs.⁴⁶

Opening with the knowledge of being observed lends an aspect of performativity to the scene, explicitly constructing audiences within the immediate text. There is, in these passages, also a confrontation with a difficult historical reality, such as Raymond of Aguilers describes, that renders it tolerable by making it *brumeux* through performance. If the Tafur cannibalism is ‘funny’, it becomes less abject in its own time but consequently more abject to modern audiences; proximity to the act therefore informs degrees of transgression, part of the ‘fond de mémoire inaccessible et intime’ Kristeva calls abject.⁴⁷

Eating an enemy quietly and in secret would have very different implications for the phenomenon that Heng describes as inherent to colonial cannibalism. Witnessing is therefore necessary to both the performance of power and its abject consequences insofar as the abject must be witnessed to function properly. To do this, the *Antioche* poet creates audiences within the text who see and react to the events playing out before them. These audiences, primarily composed of either crusaders, or Antiochenes, work in concert to transmit signals guiding external audiences toward a way of apprehending the narrative world. Similarly, these poems were not composed to sit unheard and unread in the dusty corner of an archive—they are performances in their own right, through which strings of audience-witnesses are constructed in the narrative, and through time.

There is a brief disavowal of the Tafurs on behalf of the Crusaders, when the Antiochene leader Garsion shouts down from the battlements to shame Bohemond for not intervening in the cannibalistic frenzy. Bohemond seems impervious to shame, shouting back that he neither gave the order, nor did he approve—the blame lies squarely with the Tafurs, who cannot be controlled.⁴⁸ This abdication of responsibility clearly places the Tafurs outside of the crusader community, even though they are part of the Frankish force. Considering the reticence of the chronicle material regarding similar events, this abdication is also, in a way, ‘performed’ for both internal and external audiences. This allows historical audiences to participate in the

⁴⁶ Guidot, p. 146.

⁴⁷ Kristeva, p. 14.

⁴⁸ ‘Par nului ne peut estre li rois Tafurs dontés’, *Antioche*, line 4118.

carnavalesque inversion of norms and the bending of taboo whilst also displacing or avoiding the generational shame of the event.

The Tafur cannibalism is not viewed uniquely with humor, however, as the other internal audience is shown to experience the event very differently. It is also worth noting that this witnessing takes place before that of the Franks in the narrative order:

De cel furent paien durement esfrée;
Por le flair de la car sont al mur acouté,
De .XX.M. paiens sont li ribaut regardé
K'il n'i a seul .I. Turc qui n'ait des iex ploré;
De lor gent qu'il mangüent ont grant dol demené. (*Antioche*, lines 4055-59)

The marked contrast between the Frankish and Antiochene reactions to the event asks questions about who audiences should identify with—whereas the Franks provide an opportunity for levity and jokes, the Antiochenes, in their extreme grief might be the focal point for either catharsis, sympathy, or the type of derision reserved for enemy suffering. Although it is difficult for modern audiences to imagine the potential for enjoyment that this suffering presents, it is nonetheless important to consider the small distance between fear and delight as integral to their abjection. Indeed, there are elements of the carnivalesque even in the suffering of the besieged Antiochenes who, drawn to the city's ramparts by the smell of roasting meat, soon discover a scene of feasting in which norms are turned completely upside down.

The Tafurs might then be seen as an example of how enacting deviant desires through abject acts pushes what Kristeva might call the 'animality' of the Franks to the fore, and thereby calls the reception of texts built around the crusade enterprise more broadly into question. These poems that, as Janet claims, are meant to inform, persuade, indoctrinate, and please, fulfill that mission even if by throwing their audiences into abject realms:

Une humanité saisie au ras de son animalité, se vautrant dans ce qu'elle vomit, comme pour se rapprocher de ce qui, pour Céline, est essentiel, au-delà de toutes 'fantaisies': la violence, le sang, la mort. Jamais peut-être, même chez Bosch ou chez le Goya le plus noir, la 'nature' humaine, l'autre côté du 'sensé' de l' 'humain civilisé', du 'divin' n'ont été ouverts avec autant de cruauté, avec si peu de complaisance, d'illusion ou d'espoir.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Kristeva, p. 172.

The biblical proverb of the dog returning to vomit was well known to medieval audiences and it seems appropriate to understanding Kristeva's description of the inescapable pull of the abject.⁵⁰ The inability to resist prohibitions and the capacity to delight in that which should be repulsive is an apt metaphor, as is the helplessness of animal natures—a dog cannot conquer its desire. It is not, in the case of the Tafurs (or their later audiences) a question of being comparable in any physical way to animals (as some have argued), but rather of a primal pull towards the dark fantasies of blood and violence; a bringing close of that which has been or should be rejected. For the Frankish leaders within the text and its earliest historical audiences alike, witnessing the suffering of Antiochenes is perhaps also a means to indulge in the cruelty of a fantasy of punishment. No matter how 'civilized' a community perceives itself to be, for Kristeva, there exists a potential to delight in all manner of horror. Within a broader narrative of violence, the Tafur cannibalism constitutes a cruel fantasy in which death—removed from the divine possibility of salvation—becomes a moment in which hope collapses for the Antiochene witnesses. This collapse similarly implicates the relatives (even distant) of crusaders who are forced to confront both cannibalism and suffering as an abject historical reality upon which their world is built.

From the earliest *laissez* of the *Chanson d'Antioche*, the First Crusade is framed as a campaign of divine retribution and this no doubt informs, in part, the deployment of a 'temps affectif' within the abjection of the cycle writ large.⁵¹ One of the primary discomforts of the abject is that it is threatening, dependent on a fear provoked by a 'poids repoussant et repoussé.'⁵² Ahmed describes this threat as being 'bound up with the insecurity of the not', wherein the slippage between what is or is not 'us' challenges the very ontology of identity, the 'ontology of "being apart" from others'.⁵³ As such, the abject moment in the Crusade Cycle is one in which audiences are invited to delight in suffering by identifying with the Tafurs as a punishing force all while simultaneously rejecting the actual act of cannibalism. Much like

⁵⁰ Proverbs 26.11 reads: 'Sicut canis qui revertitur ad vomitum suum, sic imprudens qui iterat stultitiam suam' [As a dog that returneth to his vomit, so is the fool that repeateth his folly] and II Peter 2.22 reads: 'Contigit enim eis illud veri proverbii: Canis reversus ad suum vomitum: et, Sus lota in volutabro luti' [For, that of the true proverb has happened to them: The dog is returned to his vomit: and, The sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire] in *Biblia Sacra: Douay-Rheims & Clementina Vulgata*, ed. by Michael Tweedale (London: Baronius Press, 2008).

⁵¹ To give one example, early in preamble to the *Antioche* Jesus says from the cross: 'Amis' dist il 'Encore n'est pas li pules nés | Ki Me venra vengier des espiaus acérés, | Si Me venra ocire les paiens desfaés', lines 171-73.

⁵² Kristeva, p. 14.

⁵³ Ahmed, pp. 86-87.

Bohemond's admission that the actual perpetrators of the act are beyond his control after he has, ostensibly, encouraged them with his offer of wine. On a macro level, following the logic of crusade propaganda, this incident might also give permission, in a way, for future armies to pursue wars free of taboo—if the worst has already been done, the darkness delighted in full, then what violence could possibly surpass it. Indeed, what violence could ever be too excessive to fulfill the mission of divine vengeance that crusade promises?

Between Inside and Outside

Much of the scholarship surrounding the Crusade Cycle, and the *Chanson d'Antioche* in particular, has stumbled over the issue of the Tafurs; who they are and *why* they are. The difficulty hinges on the fact that Tafurs are largely absent from the historical record, a disruptive element of a cycle seen to be more 'factual' than the wider corpus of the *gestes*.

A good part of the ambiguity surrounding the Tafurs—whom Guibert of Nogent calls Trudennes—is seated in their name. The Tobler-Lommatzsch *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch*, identifies them as 'tout d'abord un peuple sarrazin' and also supplies *Landstreicher* [vagrant, tramp], *Lump* [scoundrel, rogue] and related terms. 'Tafur' also has forms attested in Armenian, Old Occitan, and in Arabic that denote a wide variety of possible meanings, both positive and negative. Some have gone so far as to suggest that these mysterious Tafurs are of Romani origin, some have said Flemish, others have suggested that they cannot be human, but rather an imaginary race of monsters.⁵⁴ A similar fate has befallen the *ribaut* who accompany the Tafur king, even to the degree that passages containing the *ribaut* are often indexed to the Tafur, as if they were one and the same. Contemporary translators have tended to use the modern French cognate *ribaud*, which implies scoundrel or debaucherer, and while the Old French can indeed be this, it can also denote an armiger—a common foot soldier. Strikingly, the *Dictionnaire Godefroy* as well as the *Encyclopédie Diderot* note that Philippe II Auguste assigned this term to the hardiest of his men.⁵⁵ It seems likeliest, given their behavior, that the pejorative terms are

⁵⁴ *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch*, ed. by Adolf Tobler and Erhard Lommatzsch, 10 vols (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag GmbH, 1976), X, pp. 31-32. A detailed note on the various interpretations of 'Tafur' can also be found in Heng, *Empire*, pp. 320-21.

⁵⁵ *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.*, ed. by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert in, *ARTFL Encyclopédie Project*, ed. by Robert Morrissey and Glenn Roe (University of Chicago/ATILF-CNRS, 2017)

most appropriate, and yet, that there is some variability to the Tafurs and to the *ribaut* is nonetheless important insofar as they resist categorization. As I will show in the next chapter, the *ribaut* also appear in the *Canso de la cruzada*, where they also participate in violence and destruction that is markedly outside of community norms. As such, they become a sort of eternal ‘bad guy’, undefinable, resistant to categorization, and outside of time.

For Susan B. Edgington and Carol Sweetenham, the Tafurs serve a ‘displacement function’ that allows guilt for the worst acts to be transferred from the Frankish army to a group of wild men of unclear origin.⁵⁶ This is no doubt true of both the Tafurs in the Crusade Cycle and the *ribauds* in the *Canso*, but to treat them only as scapegoats ignores the ways in which their radical alterity is balanced against their military utility, and indeed, the dark delights they perform. It is their position *inside* of the Christian army that complicates their actions; the horror they engender is thus also inside, even as it pushes at the bounds of the outsides of community values—*repoussant, et repoussé*. If so much of Kristeva’s abjection relies on that which is close, and yet inaccessible, then the intertwining of generational memories of fear and taboo are all necessary to understanding how, and why, the Tafurs are so fundamentally troubling. The abject is also that which renders fragile through radical outsideness and, in this case, the fragilities that tolerance of the Tafurs exposes are as related to the potential frailties of crusading morality and ethics as they are to any one event.

The conclusion that the Tafurs serve only to displace or deny the guilt of the First Crusade’s worst atrocities is somewhat troubled by the events of the *Chanson de Jérusalem*. In the final poem of the Crusade Cycle’s central trilogy the Tafurs prove themselves to be both loyal and ardent supporters of the new king in Jerusalem, thus blurring the delicate boundaries of identity and community the texts are seen to establish. This is evident in the respect paid to the Tafur King when Godfrey of Bouillon is offered the kingship of the newly conquered city, and the barons ask who should crown him:

‘Qui li metra el chief?’ dist Driues de Monçon.

‘Segnor’, ço dist li vesques, de vos li plus hals hom.’

<<https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/encyclopedie1117/navigate/14/1628/?byte=3181259>> [accessed 24 September 2022]; *Dictionnaire de l’ancienne langue française et de tous ses dialectes du IX au XV siècle*, ed. by Frédéric Godefroy, 10 vols (Paris: Émile Bouillon, 1892), VII, pp. 183-84.

⁵⁶ Susan B. Edgington and Carol Sweetenham, ‘The *Chanson d’Antioche* as a Historical Source’, in *The Chanson d’Antioche: An Old French Account of the First Crusade*, ed. and trans. by Susan B. Edgington and Carol Sweetenham (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 49-61 (pp. 50-51).

‘C’est li rois des Tafurs’, ce dist Raimbals Creton.

‘Car n’avons ci plus roi, de verté le savon.

Cil le doit coroner par droite esgardison’.

Li prince respondirent, ‘Bonement l’otrien.’

Li rois prist le corone qui fu de grant renon

Si le mist ens el cief Godefroi de Buillon.

[...]

Li baron font homage le roi par devisaon.

Dist li dus Godefrois, ‘Car entendés, baron.

Vés ci le roi tafur qui’st devenus mes hom.

Jursalem woel recevoir de lui et de son don,

Car il i entra primes, por ço le vos mostron.

Ja ne tenrai d’autrui valisant .I. boton,

Fors solement de Diu qui service faisons.’

Li prince respondirent, ‘Ainc n’amastes felon.’

Li rois tafurs a pris en sa main .I. baston,

Le roi Godefroi tent l’onor et le roion,

Aprés li a baisié en plorant l’auqueton.

Li uns rois contre l’autre sont mis a genellon.

Li baron descendirent qui’stoient environ

Et vont a lor osteus: ainc n’i ot traïson. (*Jérusalem*, lines 5322-47)

There are several elements in the above passage that complicate views of the Tafurs and *ribaut* as a mechanism for pure displacement, and which call into question their place in broader conceptions of community identity. Although other sections of the Crusade Cycle do portray them as adjacent to the monstrous or the animal, the Tafur King’s rank here is universally agreed to be high enough to accord him the privilege of crowning Godfrey as King of Jerusalem. Godfrey validates this position by giving the Tafurs leave to enter the city first, and by conferring honors upon them. Furthermore, during the coronation service, Godfrey kisses the Tafur King and kneels next to him. In this poignant moment, both men lean on each other in a moment of relative equality in front of a number of high-ranking barons and clerics. Witnessing is important here, too. John H. Arnold, describing an encounter that took place in 924, between

Raoul, King of the West Franks and William of Auvergne, gives some insight into the complex ‘language of gestures’ also at play in the *Chanson de Jérusalem*.

William, on horseback, crossed the river, and then dismounted, to approach Raoul on foot. Raoul embraced William, and kissed him. [...] What’s in a kiss? [...] At least part of the answer rests on the entire sequence of gestures: William crossed the river to Raoul (indicating submission); he did it on horseback (indicating status); he dismounted and approached on foot (indicating submission); Raoul embraced William (indicating status—but for both sides, as William did not adopt a more submissive pose, by kneeling for example); and Raoul bestowed a kiss (indicating status—and again, for both sides, treating William fraternally rather than demanding fealty). William had recognized Raoul’s kingship—but Raoul was in fact prevented, then and thereafter, from crossing the Loire into the area of William’s ducal authority.⁵⁷

For Godfrey and the Tafur King, the language of gestures indicates that they are embarking on a shared moral and political enterprise in which they are (relatively speaking) equal participants. Despite the atrocities the Tafurs and *ribaut* have committed (and, indeed, will continue to commit) the Franks seem to here accept them even as they embody that which is ‘dehors, hors de l’ensemble dont il semble ne pas reconnaître les règles du jeu’.⁵⁸ In this moment, in any case, the Tafur King does seem to know and respect the rules, and is able to participate fully in—and indeed benefit from—a system of community codes which serve to underline his place as being very much inside of the social order.

It is true that the worst of the violence enacted on pseudo-Muslim bodies is ascribed to the Tafurs, who, to use Kristeva’s terms, exist often (though not exclusively) radically outside of the rules generally obeyed by the Frankish army and its leaders. And yet, their position as pure scapegoat is not clear:

Au niveau de l’intrigue, aucun protagoniste représentant l’autorité laïque n’intervient pour s’indigner des outrages et en condamner les auteurs. L’éthique chevaleresque et son idéal de mesure ne sont pas invoqués. Aucun dignitaire religieux ne leur adresse de remontrance au nom de la morale chrétienne. Le Christ qui ailleurs exhorte les croisés à expier leurs péchés ne se prononce pas, ni l’évêque du Puy qui le représente, de sorte que

⁵⁷ John H. Arnold, *What is Medieval History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), pp. 88-89.

⁵⁸ Kristeva, p. 12.

les mutilateurs de cadavres, les cannibales et autres profanateurs de sépulture ne sont pas contraints à faire pénitence ni n'encourent de châtement.⁵⁹

As such, the Tafurs neither obey the rules, nor are they explicitly expected to exist within them; that which is defiantly outside is permitted without resistance from those who should by all rights intervene. There is perhaps less 'deferment' here than a confrontation with the dual potential for the Crusade Cycle, as poetic art, to delight even as it horrifies. Furthermore, if part of the ontological process of abjection is bringing close that which has been rejected, the scene of kneeling and kissing could be seen to reimagine the boundaries around the morality that constructs the crusading community. The Tafur King, in being integrated into an intimate, yet politically potent moment calls the ever-shifting limits of community (and abjection) inward, just as his past acts have pushed them outward. The nature of Tafur identity and the relationship it bears to Frankish, and crusading identities, is therefore perpetually inbetween and punctal; collapsing just as it creates meaning. It is perhaps here that Janet's assertions about the historical utility of the Crusade Cycle within the broader context of the *chansons de geste* ring the truest, within what Kristeva describes as literature's capacity to bear witness:

Car sa crudité, sortie de la catastrophe mondiale de la Deuxième Guerre, n'épargne, dans l'orbe de l'abjection, aucun univers: ni le moral, ni le politique, ni le religieux, ni l'esthétique, ni à la plus forte raison le subjectif ou le verbal. S'il nous montre, par là, un des points ultimes jusqu'où peut s'avancer ce qui, pour le moraliste, sera du nihilisme, il témoigne également du pouvoir de fascination qu'exerce sur tous, ouvertement ou en cachette, cette région d'horreur [...] Car l'abjection est en somme l'autre côté des codes religieux, moraux, idéologiques, sur lesquels reposent le sommeil des individus et les accalmies des sociétés. Ces codes en sont la purification et le refoulement.⁶⁰

If, as Kristeva suggests, the abject is the other side of the codes that serve to regulate and regiment—and indeed comfort—communities, then it stands to reason that the Tafurs represent the most uninhibited aspects of crusader violence. Abjection is therefore not just the domain of acts, or objects that throw communities outside of norms and comfort, but indeed *people* whose being inbetween or outside has the same effect. Insofar as cannibalism is an abject act,

⁵⁹ Janet, p. 441. Janet further notes that there is often a mitigating presence for abject or unjust violence in the *gestes* and puts forth the example of Bernier in *Raoul de Cambrai* as a model of *sapientia*. This renders the absence of punishment for acts considered reprehensible to medieval Christians even more anomalous in the Crusade Cycle.

⁶⁰ Kristeva, pp. 245-47. 'Sa crudité' here refers to the rawness of Céline's writing.

performing or witnessing cannibalism is also in a way abject. To write the abject is to parse out the boundaries of the places ‘où le sens s’effondre’.⁶¹

Abjection and the Limits of Epic

Just as they grappled with the heroic deaths of Roland and Vivien, it is logical that the poets who composed songs about the First Crusade would be compelled to address its horrors alongside its glories. Like the earlier *chansons de geste*, the Crusade Cycle is a way of apprehending the world, and of confronting history even if that meant, as Janet asserts, encouraging future violence. If Roland’s death calls into question the natural consequences of heroism, a similar paradox exists in the Crusade Cycle. According to Jay Rubenstein, even if distasteful, the cannibalism the *Chanson d’Antioche* describes is well within the rules of the game, and according to Janet, the poem does a significant amount of work to render this otherwise reprehensible behavior (and the Tafurs who it carry out) tolerable. Such a paradox indicates a collapse in the expected logic of such texts, and in finding the place where meaning collapses meaning can also be created. As Rubenstein explains:

To describe an event is to ascribe meaning to it—a truism that medieval authors would have well understood, trained as they were in biblical exegesis and in its overlapping levels of literal and allegorical meaning. For them the cannibalism at Ma’arra would have been heavily loaded with symbolic implication, even if it were merely an act of necessity. And to determine these meanings was not wholly a textual exercise. the cannibalism was real enough, and part of what complicated the writers’ task was that the cannibals themselves had found their own meanings. Perhaps as a way of coping with what they had done, perhaps in earnest aggression, some crusaders—and then chroniclers, reluctantly—understood the cannibalism as an act of holy war [...] as an aspect of the crusade enterprise.⁶²

Through all of this, it strikes me that the abject lives at the extremities of affect and should force us to reconsider what the ‘temps affectif’ of the *gestes* does in the context of a poetics of violence. It is perhaps less, however, a question of the affects written into the Crusade Cycle’s

⁶¹ Kristeva, p. 9.

⁶² Rubenstein, ‘Cannibals’, p. 539.

internal audiences; the suffering and delight of the Frankish soldiers, or the grief of the besieged Antiochenes upon whose bodies such horrors are visited both in life and in death. The affects that seem most pressing here are those that are entwined with an ephemeral politics of reception, arising and transforming as the texts move through time. If, according to Gregg and Seigworth, affects are synonymous with forces of encounter—the ordinary and its extra—then the force of our own encounter with these texts is no less important than those forces that brought the texts into being.⁶³ In *La Chambre claire*, Barthes describes his relationship (as critic) with photographs as such:

Comme *Spectator*, je ne m'intéressais à la Photographie que par "sentiment": je voulais l'approfondir, non comme une question (un thème), mais comme une blessure [...] et pour ces photos je puis, certes, éprouver une sorte d'intérêt général, parfois ému, mais dont l'émotion passe par le relais raisonnable d'une culture morale et politique.⁶⁴

His *Spectator* is not so far in this from the witnessing done within the narrative world of the texts, or by external audiences as they are received through time. Just as in a photograph, the events depicted in the *Chansons d'Antioche* and *Jérusalem* are constructions; mirages of real events that are encountered at varying degrees of distance, for a variety of purposes, transmitting memories that are at once intimate and difficult to grasp. Encountering the image (or the poetic retelling) of the event is a potent reminder of generational traumas, even if witnessed at great removes; the abject is thus temporal, tied to moments as much as to objects. Experiencing the abject through time therefore creates an affective tension which is at once personal and cultural, one which accumulates across the relatedness of the narrative world to the non-narrative world. An affective tension thus arises that is born of outsidership, between the worlds the text touches; between the thirteenth century and the twenty-first, between the historical and the imagined, the real and the surreal.

In *Tabloid Terror*, François Debrix uses theories of the abject to frame the discourses surrounding American security culture pre- and post-9/11. In his introduction, he describes scenes that were shown widely in the American news media—the burning and display of deceased American soldiers alongside images of a surviving hostage in Somalia in 1993, and planes crashing into the World Trade Center in 2001—as 'primal scenes'. These scenes, for

⁶³ Gregg and Seigworth, p. 2.

⁶⁴ Barthes, *Chambre*, pp. 42, 48.

Debrix, have a dual valence; although they resist speakability in their initial moments, they are later mobilized to justify large-scale military interventions:

The power of the primal scene is precisely to reveal how ‘a repressed reality creaks through’ even when all seems to be going well for those in the political establishment, for the social elites, for those who are part of the media universe, in a nutshell, for all those for whom the control over the meaning of the image and its message appear to have been settled. In this context of cultural and social normalcy, when a certain set of political and economic relations are discursively and, by extension, materially taken to be the way things are, primal scenes can be brutally ironic and destabilizing. They may reveal meaninglessness behind the excesses and flourishes of dominant media representations at a moment when the public is least prepared for such a lack of meaning.⁶⁵

Scenes of excess violence and horror in the Crusade Cycle constitute just such ‘primal scenes’ and the purpose they serve reflects the phenomenon that Debrix describes. Even as it entertains, the Tafur cannibalism nonetheless destabilizes to some degree the divine calling of crusade, and the integration of the Tafur King into elite society similarly calls into question the boundaries around crusading morality as it relates to identity. Although the overarching goal of the Crusade Cycle may indeed be, as Janet asserts, to encourage participation in later crusades, Debrix is more overtly cognizant of the transactional nature of the abject within potentially propagandist projects. For Debrix, the abject is not only an experiential phenomenon tied up in subject/object relationships, but something that permeates being in much more subtle ways.

Unlike the traditional dichotomy between subject and object that has long been privileged by intellectuals of statecraft [...] the abject is a condition or disposition of being that does not allow one to fall on either side of the subjectivity/objectivity, us/them, hero/villain, nation/enemy, or good/evil divide. The abject is both beyond us and within us. Abjection is both a rejection and a fascination. It is a condemnation through which the body nonetheless expresses itself.⁶⁶

The abject is therefore a locus—whether in time or in space—where meaning is made, even if it ultimately reveals the underlying meaninglessness of violence. The impossibility of falling on either ‘side’ that Debrix describes is perhaps the crux of the difficulty that abjection presents in

⁶⁵ François Debrix, *Tabloid Terror: War, Culture, and Geopolitics* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 4.

⁶⁶ Debrix, p. 72.

the *chansons de geste*. And yet, reading for the abject reveals precisely the fraught nature of fascination and rejection, delight and condemnation that its most violent moments engender. In a similar, but divergent move, Imogen Tyler has suggested that Kristeva's abjection can be carried more explicitly into the social sphere by embracing its rejection as a theory of power—rather than blurring the lines between us/them, hero/villain, 'social abjection' serves to harden them.⁶⁷ For Tyler, social abjection is most apparent in the mechanisms by which xenophobia seeks to drive out migrants and insofar as it creates a 'memory hole' that provides 'a psychological alibi for "hygienic" forms of nationalism'.⁶⁸

In the case of the Crusade Cycle, the concept of a 'memory hole' is more complex than it might seem on the surface, especially when considering a nationalist politics of forgetting. Rather than omitting the most abject acts and characters, these texts preserve them, even if transformed into something that is ostensibly more tolerable. This may be part of a wider cultural moment wherein the inheritors of crusade ideologies (immediate, or several centuries on) are confronting the origins of national mythologies as they are being made. Sweetenham has suggested that anxieties about the more extreme examples of violence, particularly against civilians, are apparent in other narratives associated with the Crusades, notably in Robert the Monk's *Historia Hierosolymitana* (c. 1107-1120). Throughout his chronicle, Robert describes the 'indiscriminate slaughter of non-combatants', and compares the Crusaders, 'to a wild beast, a lioness. All these—savagery, treachery, atrocities, and comparisons to beasts—are common features of the *chanson de geste* Saracen.'⁶⁹ Much as Sweetenham highlights the ways in which the inverted tropes that appear throughout Crusade-era chronicles help to pinpoint anxieties about extreme forms of violence, Cowell has argued that, 'the epic itself is a form of speculation on the extremes and limits of its world.'⁷⁰ It then stands to reason that through its presentation of 'primal scenes' and by establishing an internal audience of witnesses in the citizens of Antioch

⁶⁷ Imogen Tyler, *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain* (London: Zed Books, 2013), p. 4.

⁶⁸ Tyler, pp. 29-33. Tyler's introduction centers Gypsy and Traveler communities, but here refers specifically to the treatment of migrants in the post-colonial French context.

⁶⁹ Carol Sweetenham, 'Crusaders in a Hall of Mirrors: The Portrayal of Saracens in Robert the Monk's *Historia Hierosolymitana*', in *Languages of Love and Hate: Conflict, Communication, and Identity in the Medieval Mediterranean*, ed. by Sarah Lambert and Helen Nicholson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), pp. 49-63 (p. 58).

⁷⁰ Cowell, p. 108. Cowell borrows 'going beyond' from Alfred Adler in *Epische Spekulanten: Versuch einer synchronen Geschichte des altfranzösischen Epos* (Munich: Wilhem Fink, 1975), pp. 21-22.

and Jerusalem, that the *chansons de geste* are doing a different kind of work than previously supposed; work that affirms just as it breaks down:

[...] the gratuitous act as seen in medieval epic culture is not an act of resistance, but an act which is simultaneously a perfecting and a ‘going beyond’; the acts must be understood not as resistance, but as the extreme affirmation of a system which they nevertheless also potentially destroy [...] In the context of the medieval preference for taking hostages and ransoming them, purposeful killing itself could be seen as a gratuitous act—it makes no sense within a logic of reciprocity.⁷¹

According to this logic, the Crusade Cycle is a means to test the limits of a system based on violence. As such, the abject, through Cowell, becomes a way of reading what he calls ‘gratuity’ and dangerous excess against the heroics that have traditionally been assigned to the *chansons de geste* broadly. As such, Sweetenham’s comparison of the *Historia*’s inversion of tropes—attributing atrocities to the Crusaders in language typically reserved for ‘Saracens’—is important, and by no means limited to Robert the Monk. There is a deviation there and in the *Antioche* and *Jérusalem* material from an ideological space where assertions that ‘Païen unt tort e chrestïens unt dreit’ can exist uncritically.⁷² In much the same vein, the *Tafurs* are most troubling not because they are outside, but because they are inside. The behavior of the Frankish leaders is troubling because it calls into question what it means to be ‘us’, even as ‘us’ takes on many names, shifting through time. This is the abject pulling in, just as it repels; reinforcing the limits of community and identity even as it calls them further outward. Although Debrix’s frame of reference is rather different from the First Crusade, his suggestion that abjection ‘can better help us to make sense of how and why constructing a narrative of American identity and global supremacy as a way of overcoming despair also requires embracing terror, making the war on terror one’s own, and in fact becoming one with terror’ is perhaps not far from how these medieval texts work in practice.⁷³ This helps to explain the uneasy position they sometimes occupy between entertainment, propaganda, and history—becoming one with terror is perhaps what allows a poet to make light of cannibalism, or an audience to enjoy suffering. Debrix goes on to say that, ‘It is indeed often with abjection that one’s culture, any culture, ends and starts; it

⁷¹ Cowell, pp. 108-09.

⁷² *Roland*, MS O, line 1015.

⁷³ Debrix, p. 72.

is along the tenuous borderline of the abject that one's culture is protected and threatened, safeguarded and annihilated at the same time, in the same motion.⁷⁴

It is in the moment that we recognize, as Kristeva says, the 'deux extrêmes qui changent de place' when crusader ethics are 'safeguarded and annihilated' in a single motion.⁷⁵ Just as Kristeva puts forward Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit* as an example of how literature can cause an uncomfortable fascination with uncanny figures and places, so too does reading abjection in the Crusade Cycle; this poetry of violence that attracts and repels is one of deep discomfort and dark delights. Debrix suggests that, in order to construct a narrative of national and religious supremacy, these texts require that their audiences embrace the notion of horror. Instead of unquestioned heroism, they present a vision of an ethical system breaking down just as it meets its apex—no bad deed goes properly punished, and, in this way, that which is abject, defiantly outside of rules and moral codes also threatens the mythologies it has helped to create. If 'le masque' is what makes a face the product of a society and its history, then perhaps the Tafurs and the Crusaders are two sides of a mask the texts create in order to make horror tolerable, even as part of a cycle of unresolved violence.⁷⁶

By the time the *Antioche* and *Jérusalem* poems were composed and production completed on their many manuscript examples, the Second and Third Crusades were either looming, or well underway; in the case of the latest examples, the realities of the Fourth and Fifth Crusades may have been all too evident. As Rajabzadeh notes, 'Violence never dies, and cannot be bound by time, space, or genre. It is also never fictional. When violence is spoken, imagined, or written, its immaterial force eternally haunts and eternally operates as a violent threat, a violent parallel life.'⁷⁷ In a very material way, the poems of the Crusade Cycle and the bodies they depict (alive and dead) are held in limbo; a parallel life where violence is ongoing, victory over the enemy is at once complete and menaced, a sort of dream vision of the real state of things. It is therefore important to consider holistically the impact of the earliest purported versions of these poems, the intervention of a quasi-mythical poet, Graindor of Douai, and the historical personages his poems rub up against. The long-standing process of mythmaking in which they participate over hundreds, if not thousands, of years are part and parcel of the work

⁷⁴ Debrix, p. 75.

⁷⁵ Kristeva, p. 166; Debrix, p. 75.

⁷⁶ Barthes, *Chambre*, p. 61.

⁷⁷ Rajabzadeh, p. 6.

these poems do, and were perhaps intended to do from the very beginning. There is a future element in all propaganda; the desire to make a world, even imbricated with ideas of the past. As they are among the most explicitly historical of their genre, the Crusade Cycle poems are themselves an example of an abject inbetween—straddling past and future in which generational memories are both too close for comfort, and too far away to be properly recognizable; a world that was never truly real, onto which very real hopes are fixed.

Mythic Thinking: Jean-Luc Nancy's Communities and the *Canso de la Crozada*

In the 2017 television series *Knightfall*, a Templar knight of mysterious ancestry named Landry du Lauzon searches for the Holy Grail. He is aided in his quest by the equally mysterious Brotherhood of Light (an unlikely consortium of Christians and ‘Saracens’) whose mission it is to keep the Grail from the hands of earthly rulers (in this case, Phillip IV *le bel* of France), and from the Church (headed by the zealous Pope Boniface VIII). One of the series’ most enigmatic characters is the at times slippery, at times sympathetic William de Nogaret—whose irreligious pragmatism informs much of the narrative intrigue, as does his scheming to bring down the Church and procure the Grail for Phillip. Far from being purely political machinations, it is revealed as the story progresses that a young Boniface had burned William’s Cathar parents at the stake when he was still a child. Guillaume de Nogaret’s conflict with Boniface VIII is historical, but it seems very unlikely that it was motivated by a Catharist grudge; the suggestion is, nonetheless, dramatic and thrilling. The writers responsible for *Knightfall* have, in this small way, captured the persistence of the Albigensian Crusade in the collective memory of Western Europeans, and of France and its surrounding regions since the events first took place, even if that memory has been distorted and manipulated through time.

This will not be a chapter that concerns itself with the Cathars, in history or in myth. Any reader wishing to know more about this particular religious phenomenon will find plenty to delight them elsewhere. Although I acknowledge the mystic power of Catharism that ties its demise to the wider myth of the Albigensian Crusade, the term ‘Cathar’ does not appear in the epic *Canso de la crozada* that will be the focus of this chapter. The heresy [*eretgia*] or mad beliefs [*fola crezenza*] (real or imagined) of the southern barons are called just that, and this chapter will find itself in no need of embellishment with regard to the vivid characters, the violence, or the intrigue that the *Canso* presents. That said, although Mark Gregory Pegg has called Catharism an ‘utter fantasy’, I would like to stress that fantasy in the form of community mythmaking is incredibly powerful.¹ This is particularly true where, following the schism between the Roman Church and the English Crown, and in the Anglo-American imagination in

¹ Mark Gregory Pegg, *A Most Holy War: The Albigensian Crusade and the Battle for Christendom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. x. This is a somewhat controversial opinion on Pegg’s part; there is a significant body of scholarship that treats Catharism and the role it played in the Albigensian Crusade very seriously.

particular, the image of a ruthless Catholic Church that restricts religious practice and stamps out true believers might be particularly compelling. The same is true of the secular French Republic, which has also had an oppositional relationship with the Church, if for somewhat different reasons. This chapter will therefore concern itself with how one text helped to establish the myth of the Albigensian Crusade, leaving aside the Cathar myth that has been its most persistent legacy in popular culture.

Although he takes serious issue with the prominence of the Cathar myth in scholarship, Pegg is quite clear about the historical importance of the Albigensian Crusade, with some attention paid to its mythic power:

The Albigensian Crusade is one of the great pivotal moments in world history, if for no other reason than the fact that a very distinct Christian culture in the lands of the count of Toulouse was accused of being heretical by the Catholic Church, accused of being an apocalyptic plague threatening to destroy Christianity, and that these accusations led to an irrevocable moral obligation for mass murder. [...] it is the epic story of the battle for Christendom.²

Pegg strikes a rather forceful tone here, but not an unusual one. Popular culture and academic scholarship alike have taken sides on the Albigensian Crusade. The history of relations between what was France, and what is now 'southern France' has long been fraught, and for a variety of reasons that go even further back than the conflict at the center of this chapter. In her chapter, 'Uncivil Wars: Imagining Community in *La Chanson de la Croisade Albigeoise*', Sharon Kinoshita highlights the difficulty of writing about the impact of this conflict and the nationalistic overtones present in much of the scholarship related to it. This, she says, is most evident in the names used for people and places, with 'southern France' versus Occitania or Provence, providing the starkest example.³ The precise nature of the conflict and the myths that arose around it will be a topic for more detailed discussion later on, but I will try throughout the chapter that follows to use the language and names that seem most appropriate. This will mean Occitan forms for Occitan material, which may need to be anglicized in translation.

² Pegg, p. xiv.

³ Sharon Kinoshita, 'Uncivil Wars: Imagining Community in *La Chanson de la Croisade Albigeoise*', in *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), pp. 200-35 (p. 202).

The history of the conflict we now know as the Albigensian Crusade is preserved in three primary sources; the Latin chronicles of Pierre des Vaux-de-Cernay (*Historia albigensis*) and Guilhem de Puylaurens (*Chronica magistri Guillelmi de Podio Laurentii*), and a *chanson de geste* in Old Occitan.⁴ The *Canso de la cruzada*, or *Song of the Albigensian Crusade*, is, more than many other epic poems of its genre, explicitly historical. Its composers were no doubt witness to the events they recount, and they do so with a high degree of accuracy even if they make no effort whatsoever to hide or mitigate their political leanings. As a result, the earliest audiences of the poem, unlike other *chansons de geste*, would also have lived through the events it relates. The general tenor of the *Canso* is therefore different, special, and opens up space for theorizing community and conflict that is perhaps less possible for other *gestes*, like the *Roland*, or the *Guillaume*, whose characters are vivid but at a more significant historical remove. The *Canso* is known in a single extant manuscript, under shelf mark Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS français 25425.⁵ It is a fine, though unfinished manuscript decorated throughout in red and blue initials and containing thirteen sketches—primarily of battle scenes—that were never illuminated. It was most likely copied in the region of Toulouse circa 1275, though there is no indication for whom.⁶ The *Canso* takes the general shape of a *chanson de geste*, and indeed, its second *laisse* positions it within the genre of the *gestes*, and specifically within the already existing framework of those inspired by the First Crusade of 1095-1099:⁷

esta canso es feita d'aital guia
 Com sela d'Antiocha et ayssi·s versifia
 E s'a tot aital so, qui diire lo sabia' (2.1-3)

⁴ Marjolaine Raguin, *Lorsque la poésie fait le souverain: Étude sur la Chanson de la Croisade albigeoise* (Paris: Champion, 2015), p. 28.

⁵ The manuscripts are as follows: The complete Bibliothèque nationale de France, français MS 25425 (MS A), another complete manuscript, now lost, known only as MS R (though Martin-Chabot uses the prologue preserved in Raynouard's *Lexique roman* for his edition). A fragment, Grenoble, Bibliothèque municipale MS 1158 (MS G), was later preserved by Guyon, seigneur de Maleville in *Esbats sur le pays de Quercy*, published between 1600 and 1614, Raguin, *Lorsque*, pp. 43-46

⁶ Raguin, *Lorsque*, pp. 25, 44; Michel, Zink, 'Introduction', in *La Chanson de la Croisade albigeoise*, ed. by Eugène Martin-Chabot, trans. by Henri Gougaud (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1989), pp. 11-31 (pp. 16-17).

⁷ This is likely a reference to Grégoire Béchada's *Canso d'Antiocha* (c. 1126-1138), though Guilhem de Tudela was no doubt also familiar with the Old French *Chanson d'Antioche* c. 1180, Zink, p. 29. Citations of the *Canso* are taken from *La Chanson de la croisade albigeoise*, ed. and trans. by Eugène Martin-Chabot, 3 vols (Paris: Champion/Société des Belles Lettres, 1931-1961); the *laisse* is given first, followed by the line.

The poem was composed in two parts, by two distinct poets, although Marjolaine Raguin asserts that the second poet very likely altered the prologue.⁸

It is by no means unusual within the genre of the *chansons de geste* for a second poet to take up and continue the work of a previous poet, the *Canso*, however, is unusual in this regard as its poets represent different factions in the conflict and thus hold opposing views as to the legitimacy of the crusade being undertaken. As Michel Zink explains in his introduction to Henri Gougaud's translation of Eugène Martin-Chabot's edition:

La *Chanson de la Croisade albigeoise* est une œuvre de combat dans les deux sens du terme. Elle chante les armes, puisqu'elle se présente comme un poème épique: c'est une chanson de geste historique ou une chronique sous la forme de l'épopée. Mais c'est en même temps une œuvre polémique et engagée. Une œuvre double aussi, et c'est là que réside son ambiguïté. Commencée par un poète, elle a été poursuivie par un autre, du camp opposé: le premier est favorable aux croisés, son successeur aux Méridionaux.⁹

The first poet to whom Zink refers is Guilhem de Tudela, who is responsible for the first one hundred and thirty stanzas (roughly 2700 lines), written in *laissez capcaudadas*. Raguin describes Guilhem as a cleric, well-studied in literature and favorable to crusade, who was attached to the court of Raymond VI of Toulouse's younger brother Baldwin, who had been raised at the French court.¹⁰ The second poet is responsible for the following eighty-three stanzas (roughly 6800 lines), this time in the form of *laissez capfinidas*. The identity of the Anonymous has been subject to conjecture, but he was likely also a cleric with significant theological and juridical knowledge.¹¹ He was likely from the region of Toulouse, a city for which his love manifests strongly throughout the latter portion.¹² The Anonymous probably composed his work over the course of 1228 and 1229, though he ends his narrative in 1219.

Kinoshita describes this 'Anonymous Continuator' as having sympathies with:

what he depicts as an emerging Occitanian resistance [...] Structured around a respect for traditional values of honor, vassalage, and *lignage*, this society is represented as

⁸ Raguin, *Lorsque*, pp. 24-25.

⁹ Zink, p. 11.

¹⁰ Raguin, *Lorsque*, p. 26.

¹¹ Saverio Guida proposed that the troubadour Gui de Cavaillon might be the Anonymous in 'L'autore della seconda parte della *Canso de la crozada*.', *Cultura Neolatina*, 63 (2003), 255-82.

¹² Raguin, *Lorsque*, p. 26; Zink, pp. 17-18, 20.

harmoniously integrating people up and down the feudal hierarchy, replacing the battle between Christians and heretics with a new kind of imagined community.¹³

Along with the characteristics that Kinoshita highlights, the argument that Sweetenham makes for the subgenre of *chanson de geste historiographique*, and the particular place that Occitan material might occupy within this subgenre is compelling. She begins by noting that although the subjects of the *chansons de geste* are varied (ranging from quasi-historical Carolingian material to complete fantasy) the events should take place in either a distant place, or be historically distant, or both.¹⁴ Neither of these conditions is fulfilled by the *Canso de la crozada*, however, which takes place in both historic and geographic proximity to its composers and its initial audiences. This, for Sweetenham, necessitates a different view on the function of the Occitan *gestes*:

L’historiographie occitane est rare, et en latin et en langue vernaculaire. La littérature occitane a alors une approche tout à fait opposée à cet égard à celle des littératures anglo-normandes et françaises: dans celles-ci, la chanson de geste est probablement le seul genre à ne pas se retrouver utilisé comme véhicule de l’histoire contemporaine; alors que dans la littérature occitane elle et le sirventès sont à peu près les seuls genres à se trouver ainsi utilisés.¹⁵

There is therefore a difference, generally, between the way that the Occitan *chansons de geste* are mobilized versus their French counterparts. Insofar as I consider the *gestes* to be a mythmaking exercise, this rather significant difference between linguistic communities is relevant to the work at hand; there is, perhaps, in the *Canso de la crozada*, a parallel but separate type of mythmaking being undertaken, one that straddles more explicitly the real and the ideal in service of more pressing political-historical events; one that reverberates differently through transhistorical audiences.

Although Sweetenham does mention the *Chansons d’Antioche* and *Jérusalem* as an example of those in the French tradition having closer historical proximity to their audiences than other *gestes*, Finn E. Sinclair asserts that the *Canso* proves ‘une datation qui place les deux

¹³ Kinoshita, pp. 201-02.

¹⁴ Carol Sweetenham, ‘*Eu ne cug encar far bona canson novela*. Les origines et le développement de la chanson de geste historiographique occitane’, *Revue des langues romanes*, 121. 1 (2017), 14-42 (p. 22-23).

¹⁵ Sweetenham, p. 26.

auteurs au cœur des événements qu'ils décrivent'.¹⁶ This proximity is important within a wider genre otherwise dedicated to epic heroes and myth at a much farther remove. Even if contemporary audiences viewed Roland as belonging to a true but distant historical reality, he lacks the immediacy of Raymond-Roger Trencavel, Simon de Montfort, Raymond VI, Raymond VII, or Louis VIII; previous and *current* generations that the *Canso* depicts. The *Antioche* and *Jérusalem* material falls more explicitly into the generic expectations of the Old French *chansons de geste*, whereas the Occitan material takes on forms that reflect the lyric styles prevalent in the southern courts. This is, as much as anything, testament to the malleability of the *chansons de geste* as a genre, and the willingness to adapt it to local cultures. (The same is true, I think, for the Italianate material being produced later in the period). According to Raguin, the use of both epic and lyric forms is a means by which the Anonymous poet anchors his work more explicitly in Occitan culture.¹⁷ For Raguin this is part of a broader project of propaganda for the Anonymous poet, but Sylvia Huot has shown that Guilhem de Tudela is also very adept in his use of lyric forms throughout his portion of the *Canso*, and that the text combines the systems of values of both the *chansons de geste* and of Provençal lyric throughout. For example, as Huot notes, 'Unlike the figures of earlier French *chansons de geste*, who are portrayed almost exclusively as warriors, Guilhem's heroes maintain as well their identity as members of a refined courtly society.'¹⁸ For Huot, this may have been done, in part, to stress the communal nature of the conflict; she stresses that 'this is not a war fought on a distant battlefield by select, superhuman heroes', but rather one that requires an expression of 'Occitanian cultural solidarity', which resulted in the *Canso de la crozada* alongside a number of *sirventes*, because the 'collective emotion produced by these shared rituals—the "fighting spirit" of Occitania—is lyric *joi*'.¹⁹

As such, more than a sometimes oversimplified North-South divide, the *Canso de la crozada* reflects the complexities of community in the Midi. It also reflects community mythologies; some of which are longstanding and some of which are being made in real time,

¹⁶ Sweetenham, p. 25; Finn E. Sinclair, 'La *Chanson de la croisade albigeoise* comme forge d'une histoire mythique', *Revue des langues romanes*, 121. 1 (2017), 159-78 (p. 159).

¹⁷ Marjolaine Raguin, 'Dames et jardins. De l'épique à la lyrique dans la partie anonyme de la *Chanson de la Croisade albigeoise*', *Archives Ariégeoises*, 6 (2014), 77-99 (p. 80).

¹⁸ Sylvia Huot, 'The Political Implications of Poetic Discourse in the *Song of the Albigensian Crusade*', *French Forum*, 9.2 (1984), 133-44 (pp. 136-37).

¹⁹ Huot, p. 141.

and which continue to be made throughout the poem's textual life. It will therefore be important for the work ahead to bear in mind that neither poet's work presents a simplistic view of communities that can be reduced entirely to one 'side' or the 'other', but that they are instead representative of multiple interlocking and competing interests. This is a conflict that played out between people with very close family ties; Raymond VI, to whom the Anonymous shows immense loyalty, and Baldwin, Guilhem's patron and one of his great heroes were brothers; Philippe II Auguste and Raymond VI were first cousins. Far from being a simple question of France marching into Occitania, the conflict engulfed many southern counties and pitted neighbor against neighbor. The crusade and its resistance also drew in foreign powers; the crowns of Aragon and England provided money, men, or both, and religious orders and their representatives from across Europe were implicated in a variety of ways.²⁰ Furthermore, this was a conflict between Christians; for the Anonymous, the Roman Church and its clerics are as much to blame for the devastation as the Crown, and for Guilhem, protecting heretics does not prevent the young Raymond-Roger Trencavel, viscount of Béziers and Carcassonne from being a perfect Christian fallen in with a bad crowd (15.1-7). Perhaps most importantly, this is a conflict that took place between powerful men from different traditions of governance. As Kinoshita explains:

In this period, a great lord holding a multiplicity of lordships typically governed each according to its own local traditions. Thus the blanket imposition of the *us et costume* of Paris represented a radical reordering of Occitanian society—an outrage that helped turn the crusade into a war of Occitanian resistance.²¹

This was exacerbated by 'the emergence of an Italian-style urban council' that had taken place across the Occitan-speaking counties, and particularly in Toulouse where, by '1190, twenty-four elected officials, called *capitouls*, were largely in control of the city'.²² Again, I must stress that this was not a simple question of North-South divides, but a conflict that was taken up through inter- and intra- family tensions, differences of opinion over Christian religious practice, and desires for regional versus centralized governance.

Throughout this chapter, I will rely on Nancy and his two collections of essays *La Communauté désœuvrée* and *Être singulier pluriel*, both of which grapple with how communities

²⁰ Mark Gregory Pegg, 'Dramatis Personae', in *A Most Holy War*, pp. xvii-xxii.

²¹ Kinoshita, p. 206.

²² Kinoshita, p. 209.

are made and unmade; how they operate and how they remain inoperative. Nancy is, of course, writing from a position that is both historically and ontologically far removed from the medieval period; he is an *adepte* of the Greeks and Romans, but references to the intervening period up until the Enlightenment are scant at best. This is odd, given that Georges Bataille, himself a trained medievalist, is an anchoring philosopher for *La Communauté désœuvrée*, nevertheless, this chapter will use Nancy's work as an instrument to peel back the layers of a text that embodies in so many ways the fraught nature of history passing into myth, and the ways communities conceive of themselves through that process. In the forward to the English translation of *The Inoperative Community*, Fynsk distills Nancy's overall expression into what he calls 'a thought of history' through which the experience of history is questioned and foundational philosophical discourses collapse, resulting in a liberating 'thought of finitude'.²³ It is what Fynsk describes as an 'experience' of history that I believe is central to the work that the *Canso de la crozada* has done through time. When we think about the poetic endeavor of the text, it is about the sense of being in history that the poets preserve, their perceptions of history, and the transmission of those perceptions through the textual life of the piece from its earliest audience through to the present day. This is a way of reading for which Nancy is particularly well-suited, and to which the *chanson de geste historiographique* as a subgenre is especially open. This is also true of Nancy's *finitude*, as Fynsk describes it, within a narrative whose poets and whose events make proof of fragmentation; within a narrative of violence and loss that calls into question the very value of the eternal that finitude challenges. This is not to deny the challenges that a theorist like Nancy poses to readings of the medieval period, or, vice-versa. Indeed, one of the potential barriers to a Nancian reading of a text like the *Canso* is that 'communism' as a political system is foundational to Nancy's work, and yet deeply anachronistic to the study of political and social systems in the Middle Ages. However, Nancy's conception of 'communism' does not always comply with the standard definitions, nor does it present a pure analog of 'Marxism'. The word 'communism' seems fraught for Nancy, insofar as:

Even if history is not enough to explain what we would call the "destiny" of this word, something seems to be positive. *Community*—*koinônia*, *communitas*—emerges at times

²³ Fynsk, p. viii.

of profound social transformation or of great turmoil including the destructions of a social order.²⁴

In this way, communism becomes its own sort of myth; one that emerges from being in historical proximity to turmoil and resulting in the transmission of a sort of Nancian being-in-history. If recording and making sense of turmoil and social destruction is one of the primary motivators of the *Canso de la cruzada*, then this view of ‘communism’ as contiguous with ‘community’, or ‘*communitas*’ is productive. This is only compounded by Nancy’s assertion that ‘communism’, the word itself, is not only a political system, but a means of making sense of singularities and commonalities:

Communism, therefore, means the common condition of all the singularities of subjects, that is, of all the exceptions, all the uncommon points whose network makes a world (a possibility of sense). It does not belong to the political. It comes before any politics. It is what gives to politics an absolute prerequisite to open the common space to the common itself—neither to the *private* nor to the *collective*, neither to separation nor to totality—without permitting the political achievement of the common itself or an attempt to turn it into a substance. *Communism* is a principle of activation *and* limitation of politics.²⁵

Nancy’s definition of ‘communism’ resists the conversion of the common into substance, insofar as this ‘common’ does not belong to the private or to the collective in its capacity to make sense. One could just as easily substitute ‘history’ for ‘politics’ in the context of a text like the *Canso de la cruzada*, whose poets were no doubt working out of political immediacy, though their work, and that of the Anonymous in particular, has been taken to stand for collectives they never could have fathomed.²⁶ Naturally, what is deemed *private* versus *common* is likely to shift over time, and Patricia Harris Stäblein Gillies’s use of Lacanian ‘extimacy’ is one way of explaining the relationship between the two:

Identities in the eleventh century were complex and interlocking [...] This was a world in which cultural identities were relatively fluid in that new—ie. foreign—hegemonies

²⁴ Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘Communism, the Word (Notes for the Conference)’, in *The Idea of Communism*, ed. by Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2010), pp. 145-53 (pp. 146-47)

²⁵ Nancy, ‘Communism’, p. 149.

²⁶ Anecdotally, it has become common in certain circles to draw a clear line between nineteenth- and twentieth-century linguistic suppression (specifically of Occitan), other regional cultural suppressions, and the Albigensian Crusade. Although the reasons for this are certainly understandable, this practice glosses over key moments and movements in both French and regional nationalisms over the intervening centuries.

produced new expressions or concepts of spiritual and corporeal power. Such a world reflects the paradox of what Lacanian theorists define as ‘extimacy’: the problematical relationship between exterior and interior elements in the construction of the subject.²⁷

This seems particularly relevant to the *Canso* in that the private versus the collective, and the interior versus the exterior, are helpful in explaining the categories that are butting up against one another and overlapping throughout the conflict.

Mythic thinking and ‘le mythe interrompu’

The second part of Nancy’s *La Communauté désœuvrée*, ‘Le Mythe interrompu’, opens with a description of early man’s first storytelling; the inception point, as Nancy imagines it, and the earliest intersection of ‘public’ storytelling, myth, and collective history. This rather beautiful passage reveals some of the fundamental conceits that Nancy’s piece will work through with regard to myth and mythmaking:

Il leur raconte leur histoire, ou la sienne, une histoire qu’ils savent tous, mais qu’il a seul le don, le droit ou le devoir de réciter. [...] Il parle, il récite, il chante parfois, ou il mime. Il est son propre héros, et eux sont tour à tour les héros du récit et ceux qui ont le droit de l’entendre et le devoir de l’apprendre. Pour la première fois, dans cette parole du récitant, leur langue ne sert à rien d’autre qu’à l’agencement et à la présentation du récit. Elle n’est plus la langue de leurs échanges, mais celle de leur réunion—la langue sacrée d’une fondation et d’un serment. Le récitant la leur partage.²⁸

Nancy highlights the storyteller as a category of person within this primitive group who, whether by status or by gift, has the authority to make and transmit myth. In this invention scene of a founding myth, the stories are rooted in the use of language for a specific, ‘non-pragmatic’ use, which Nancy calls the *agencement*, or putting into order, of the story. It is clear throughout ‘Le Mythe interrompu’ that Nancy sees myth as malleable; the function of these stories-cum-myths changes through time as a result of sharing, or *partage*, following what Nancy calls the desire, or *volonté*, of myth.²⁹ Further to this, Nancy identifies two distinct meanings for ‘myth’,

²⁷ Patricia Harris Ståblein Gillies, ‘Staging Francophone Identities: Latin First Crusade Narratives and the Epic Conflict of French and Occitan’, in *Medieval Francophone Literary Culture Outside France: Studies in the Moving Word*, ed. by Nicola Morato and Dirk Schoenaers (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019), pp. 453-72 (p. 453)

²⁸ Jean-Luc Nancy, *La Communauté désœuvrée* (Paris: Christian Bourgeois, 1986), p. 110

²⁹ Nancy, *Communauté*, p. 115

as both foundation and as fiction. Within that tentative framework, he asserts that ‘le mythe est un mythe’—mythologies are in and of themselves, immanently, myths:

Car il s’agit bien [...] de deux sens hétérogènes pour un même vocable, d’une même réalité mythique, ou d’une même idée du mythe, dont une espèce de désunion interne engendre les deux sens et leur infini rapport ironique. C’est le même mythe que la tradition du mythe a pensé comme fondation et comme fiction. La sentence qui joue de la désunion met en œuvre les ressources d’une réunion antérieure, secrète et profonde au cœur du mythe lui-même.³⁰

All myth is therefore as much about the *volontés* or desires that drive its creation; the ways in which the making of myth as myth serves the creation and maintenance of shared desires, of shared ways of thinking. For Nancy, the theorization (and by extension the importance) of myth is found not in the content of the myths as such, but in the way they are thought about through time. He goes on to say that:

La pensée mythique, en effet—opérant d’une certaine manière par la relève dialectique des deux sens du mythe—n’est pas autre chose que *la pensée d’une fiction fondatrice, ou d’une fondation par la fiction*. Bien loin de s’opposer, les deux concepts s’épousent dans la pensée mythique du mythe.³¹

This reorientation towards mythic thinking is particularly productive for analysis of *La Canso de la crozada* insofar as it participates actively in its own mythmaking, both in its relative closeness to the events it depicts and in its composite nature. Whether Guilhem and the Anonymous intended it or not, the *Canso* has achieved a foundational status through its literary life, as twentieth and twenty-first century nationalist movements have mobilized it as proof of historic and ongoing linguistic and cultural suppressions of a nature the two *Canso* poets neither discussed nor foresaw. As such, and in terms of Nancy’s theorization of myth, making myth is the opening up of a space in which possibility reigns supreme; a space where new or expanded meanings can emerge. In the context of the *Canso* specifically, writing the myth of the Albigensian war is, for both poets, a way of apprehending the world as it might have been, as it

³⁰ Nancy, *Communauté*, p. 133.

³¹ Nancy, *Communauté*, pp. 133-34. Boutet similarly identifies two types of myth whose relationship to literature is ‘pour l’un, un véhicule déformant et déqualifiant, pour l’autre, la condition même de son existence’, pp. 10-11. This sits nicely alongside Nancy’s reading of myth as both foundational and fictional in that, for Boutet, literature acts as a sort of agent; either the amplifier of an existing myth, or its creator.

is, as it may yet be. A Nancian reading of the *Canso* reveals a text where history, myth, and prophecy occupy the same space within the narrative itself. As such, the text allows for dissenting meanings among audiences contemporary to the events, and through historical time; what might therefore seem disjunctive is in fact entirely unproblematic.

Despite Nancy's opening gambit (which heavily implies the most ancient mythologies), Ian James notes that the word 'myth', 'does not refer simply to fabulous tales transmitted by tradition or to what we usually understand by "mythology" (in, for instance, its Greek, Roman or Nordic forms)' but can instead be defined more broadly as a passage between or intermediary between orders of meaning.³² Myth is therefore:

that to which a political community appeals in order to found its existence as such and to perpetuate that existence as the intimate sharing of an identity or essence. The passage from the political to the sphere of politics occurs, then, in myth, insofar as it is in myth that the existence of lived community is founded and perpetuated.³³

In this sense, myth is foundational when a political community, by process of mythic thinking (*pensée mythique*), desires or wills it to be, though the nature of that foundation is wont to shift as the will and desire of communities changes through time. As such, the *Canso* represents a space for mythic sense, in the Nancian sense of the term 'space' wherein sense or multiplicities of sense are opened inside and outside of linear time. This is made particularly clear by Nancy's assertion above of the existence of 'la relève dialectique des deux sens du mythe' which implies that the two meanings he ascribes to myth are necessarily in conversation with each other and that this back and forth (or, echo, as the case may be) forces the boundaries that might otherwise be established around individual stories and meanings to shift.³⁴ Indeed, to take the semantic unit *relève* as a series or continuation and *dialectique* as a sort of investigation or calling into question of contradictions would seem particularly well suited to the way that the *Canso* operates within its own mythic space and within the broader universe of the epic tradition, whether in French or in Occitan.

The space, or spaces, of myth might then be rather more like a series of concentric circles whose boundaries move outward as the stories reverberate through time. Mythic space is

³² Ian James, *The Fragmentary Demand: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 196.

³³ James, p. 196.

³⁴ Nancy, *Communauté*, p. 133.

not fixed historically in the cultural, or community consciousness, but instead amplifies ontologically with each degree of separation from the event; it gains and sheds meanings throughout the *relève*, as it were. This squares with James's summary of how 'sense' and 'space' interact with bodies, all of which seem relevant to a poem, like the *Canso*, which is concerned with physical and temporal space and with bodies (of the human sort that endure violence, but also of competing bodies politic):

Sense, as that which the world *is*, is only insofar as it never constitutes a ground, locus, or site that has any identity or propriety, but rather exists as passage, as movement-to or as a creation or a birth [...] there is the passage of sense as a bodily event, as an opening up of meaningful spaces and a meaningful world in which such distinctions as mind/body, ideality/materiality can be made or be thinkable as such.³⁵

In very real terms, the *Canso*, as *chanson de geste historiographique* represents just such a passage from the shared bodily experience of a conflict to shared story (via poet, jongleur, or manuscript) in such a way as it allows it to become thinkable far beyond the boundaries posed by individual methods of delivery. In being written (or sung, as the case may be) it becomes culturally (communally) intelligible, and therefore thinkable across eras. This is, in a manner of speaking, mythic thinking at work; a phenomenon which only gains traction when one considers (as I will in the following section) the insertion of well-known epic heroes into the narrative by both poets, thereby using a shared set of cultural beacons to not only make thinkable the events they describe, but to enter them into a mythic order of meaning, in turn adding a circle (not to beleaguer the metaphor) to an established, preexisting epic *relève*. In the Nancian sense, this *relève* as it relates to the degrees of separation from a historical event viewed through a world- and therefore sense-making literary lens (although, for medievalists, this divide is perhaps less rigid than Nancy's own writing might suggest) is also linked to notions of immanence and transcendence. That is, the 'essence' of the *Canso* in and of itself, but also of the mythic space and thinking in which it takes part; simultaneously immanent and transcendent in the way that it constructs meaning, and in the way that its meanings have been amended and mobilized as they have reverberated through time.

As such, I propose that the space of myth is one that is simultaneously always past, present, and future; one that sits comfortably in each temporality, and yet cannot be

³⁵ James, pp. 102, 107.

restricted to a single one. The capacity of *La Canso de la cruzada* to be both immanent—obeying its own internal logic—and transcendent—gaining multiple meanings through time—is the key to unlocking its particularities as a mythmaking object occupying a series of expanding and collapsing spaces, but also as the subject of mythic thinking more broadly. This is most evident in the way the *Canso*'s two poets incorporate the characters and tropes of the epic tradition into their narrative record of contemporary events.

I am not the first person to remark on the inclusion of the best-known heroes of the Old French epic in the *Canso de la cruzada*, although previous scholarship of the poem has tended to take these inclusions at face value; references to other *gestes*, and to the *Chanson de Roland* in particular, are, after all, plentiful across the genre. Kinoshita notes that the list of crusader combatants in *laisse* 49 recalls those of Charlemagne's troops in the *Roland* (and by extension, those in the *Chanson d'Antioche*), and highlights the use of adjectives associated with Roland—like *preux*—to describe Baldwin of Toulouse in Guilhem's portion. Kinoshita also suggests that Guilhem's somewhat menacing landscapes—the *montanhas* and *passatges*—that loom over the dwindling crusader army in *laisse* 36 are intended evoke comparisons between Simon de Montfort and Charlemagne.³⁶ For Sinclair, the *Canso*'s recourse to motifs of light versus obscurity, of spring and winter, 'rappellent la *Chanson de Roland* et la justification morale et religieuse de l'empereur Charlemagne et de l'armée française, opposés aux païens à qui manque la lumière divine' alongside the motifs of springtime and rebirth that are hallmarks of the 'discours poétique des troubadours'.³⁷ Eliza Miruna Ghil has also noted Guilhem's more traditional approach to the tropes of the *chansons de geste*, which she characterizes as a sort of revival for a new crusade:

Le poète navarrais s'ingéniait à raviver ainsi le monde mythique, brillant et glorieux de la lutte anti-païenne, lutte dans laquelle le chevalier Roland et l'archevêque Turpin combattaient côte à côte, et dans laquelle les chevaliers chrétiens de différentes nations réunis devant Antioche recevait l'aide efficace de leurs anciens camarades, maintenant au paradis.³⁸

³⁶ Kinoshita, pp. 204-06.

³⁷ Sinclair, 'Chanson', p. 170.

³⁸ Eliza Miruna Ghil, *L'Age de Parage: Essai sur le poétique et la politique en Occitanie au XIII-e siècle* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), p. 203.

Of Guilhem's five references to Old French epics, three are pulled directly from the Roland/Charlemagne tradition and largely reflect the righteous battle against the pagans Ghil mentions, and the one against heresy that prompted the crusade being undertaken by his patrons. The two other references are somewhat different in their approach, although they too would seem to adhere to Nancy's vision of how mythological thinking works as it enters into writing, and as it highlights commonalities within community groups. In the note that follows the first part of *La Communauté désœuvrée* (which bears the same name) Nancy asserts that:

Rien n'est plus *commun* aux membres d'une communauté, en principe, qu'un mythe, ou un ensemble de mythes. [...] ...textes intercalés, alternés, partagés, comme tous les textes, offrant ce qui n'appartient à personne et qui revient à tous: la communauté de l'écriture, l'écriture de la communauté.³⁹

The *chansons de geste* are a collection of myths as Nancy describes, which through sharing (be it performance or manuscript transmission) shows just the kind of intertextuality that I believe Nancy means by 'textes intercalés'. That said, although it is objectively true that myth as a category 'revient à tous' and yet belongs to no one, it is perhaps also the work of the *Canso*'s poets to make within it a space of either belonging to or of rejection of the communities the *chansons de geste* construct. It is impossible to speak of authorial intent, but it seems entirely possible that the *Canso* as it is preserved (and certainly as it has been mobilized throughout the centuries) is the unfolding of a specific mythic space in order to make it belong to specific sets of individuals. This relies on what Nancy terms creation of myth 'en abîme'—the myth of myth, the myth of the absence of myth, the inevitability or inherence of myth—where myth is constantly building on itself and reverberating outwards, and where recuperating the 'original' intent may be far less interesting than considering its assembled interpretations.⁴⁰

One of the guiding questions for reading the *Canso* might then be how such intertextuality is a feature of mythic thinking as part of a structural system built around a foundational epic past. Then, what part depictions of the epic heroes play in establishing what Nancy calls 'le rang mythic', or mythic order, in which myth is a foundational and revelatory element of the most intimate being of a community.⁴¹ Furthermore, it is a question of whether the epic heroes are, as for myth more broadly, immanent, or transcendent in their mobilization in the

³⁹ Nancy, *Communauté*, p. 104.

⁴⁰ Nancy, *Communauté*, p. 121.

⁴¹ Nancy, *Communauté*, p. 122.

Canso, and in their reception through time. In this regard, the two non-Roland/Charlemagne references in Guilhem's portion are quite telling. The first occurs early in the text, and describes the crusader army outside of Béziers:

C'anc la ost Menalau, cui Paris tolc Elena,
No fiqueron tant trap els portz desotz Miscena
Ni tant ric pavalho, de nuits, a la serena,
Com cela dels Frances [...] (18. 5-8)

According to Martin-Chabot, this is an allusion to Benoît de Saint Maure's *Roman de Troie*, an Old French romance based on classical material which dates to the second half of the twelfth century. This short reference invokes the *Roman de Troie*'s rather long description (of roughly three-hundred and twenty lines) of the Greek navy before its departure for Troy; a colossal force that audiences then (as now) will largely have associated with military success.⁴² It is no great leap to assume that the mention of Menelaus would have elicited a fairly widespread reaction; Benoît's *Troie* counts fifty-eight extant manuscripts, of which thirty are complete, thereby suggesting that it was very well known in its day (even as compared to other material referenced in the *Canso*).⁴³ Just as this implicitly roots Arnaud Amaury, the Abbot of Citeaux's 'granda ost' (18.2) in an ancient and successful military tradition, the inclusion of Paris here is also telling. In the *Roman de Troie*, Paris is very handsome and of great worth, whereas Menelaus is very noble, courageous, wise, very courtly, brave, and bold.⁴⁴ This lends something of the wronged party on a voyage of reclamation to the army at Béziers; the stalwart, hardened, and righteous warrior before a handsome and worthy, if doomed opponent. This dual reference to Menelaus and to Paris thus positions the French army as being both morally and militarily worthy, while avoiding painting those besieged inside of Béziers as inherently bad. This is fairly typical of Guilhem's style:

il n'y a pas de bons et de méchants parmi les chevaliers qui s'affrontent et [...] on n'accuse d'habitude de méfaits que les routiers recrutés par les seigneurs du Midi et la valetaille de l'armée croisée, la réputation de tous les autres restant bien sauve.⁴⁵

⁴² Martin-Chabot, I, p. 53, footnote 3.

⁴³ Glyn S. Burgess and Douglas Kelly, 'Introduction', in *The Roman de Troie by Benoît De Sainte-Maure: A Translation*, ed. and trans. by Glyn S. Burgess and Douglas Kelly (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2017), pp. 1-32 (p. 2)

⁴⁴ Burgess and Kelly, pp. 79, 93, 104.

⁴⁵ Ghil, p. 101.

Ghil posits that this is in part related to the ways that the *Chanson d'Antioche* inspires the *Canso*, but also to the fact that Guilhem might be trying to mitigate possible negative sentiment among his contemporaries who 'le poète pouvait tenter d'éclairer ou de conseiller, mais non pas d'offenser ou d'agacer'.⁴⁶

Guilhem's second reference to the Old French *chansons de geste* is perhaps less straightforwardly engineered to blur the lines between the 'bons et méchants' that Ghil mentions, though it does tie the misdeeds of the 'routiers' to a significant moment in the Old French epic tradition. During the attack on Béziers a group of men attached to the French army, who Guilhem names 'Le reis e li arlot' (22.1), thinking they have been deprived of their share of the riches during the sack of the city, set fire to everything they can find including 'totz lo mostiers, que fetz maestre Gervais' (22.17). For audiences familiar with the *chansons de geste*, this conjures quite vividly one of the more shocking moments in the tradition and Guilhem quickly draws a clear comparison between the two:

Aisi ars e ruinet Raolf, cels del Cambrais,
Una rica ciutat que es depres Doais;
Poichas l'en blasmet fort sa maire n'Alazais,
Per o el la'n cuget ferir sus en son cais. (22.8-11)

At first glance, it would seem very odd for Guilhem to compare 'li arlot' (or 'li fols ribautz')—both rogue elements of the French army, similar to those in the *Antioche* and *Jérusalem* poems—to Raoul de Cambrai, the eponymous hero of one of the best-known poems of the Rebel Barons Cycle. This episode draws explicitly from the famous incident at Origny where Raoul's *démésure* reaches its pinnacle and he burns down the city, including a convent of nuns.⁴⁷ In the previous *laisse* (21) the French barons punish the 'ribautz' for their misbehavior; Raoul's cruelty and blasphemy are transferred here to the bad elements of the French army, whereas the crusader barons remain the personification of reason and justice in the face of unbridled (though familiar) violence. Ultimately Ghil's assertion about the inherent nobility of the 'chevaliers' involved in the conflict holds, with bad behavior acknowledged but deferred, as in the material dealing with the First Crusade, upon which Guilhem explicitly bases his poem. The inclusion of Raoul's mother, Alaïs, is intriguing. As one of the most diplomatically adept characters in *Raoul de*

⁴⁶ Ghil, p. 102.

⁴⁷ *Raoul de Cambrai*, lines 1299-1317.

Cambrai, and one whose temperament is the polar opposite of her son's notorious *démeseure*, Guilhem's reminder to his audiences that she not only complained of his bad behavior, but that she suffered violence as a result is note-worthy. It is somewhat unclear whether this inclusion is meant as a further rebuke to the 'ribautz/arlot', whose behavior is an affront to the wider crusader army, or whether this constitutes a foreshadowing for the mistreatment of Dame Giraude in *laisse* 68. In a particularly violent episode, four hundred inhabitants of Lavaur (assumed to be heretics) are burned in a field, after which the crusaders throw Dame Giraude into a well which is then covered over with stones. There are few women in Guilhem's portion, and this incident which he calls 'dols e pecatz' (68.21), stands out as a second example that calls into question the treatment of women by ill-tempered men.⁴⁸ It is important to mention, however, that Guilhem does not take issue with the killing of heretics in this episode, but rather with the specific cruelty to which Dame Giraude is subjected. This is followed up later when the scene is repeated in *laisse* 71. This time, however, Guilhem makes sure to say that the other ladies of Lavaur did not meet the same fate: 'E de las autres donas us Frances cortes gai | Las fe estorcer trastotas, com om pros e verai' (71. 14-15). Even in moments of *démeseure*, it would seem that there are some good guys left, after all.

The Anonymous poet also presents a series of references to some of the best-known heroes of the *chansons de geste*, Roland and Olivier among them. The way this is done in the anonymous portion, however, deviates somewhat from Guilhem's approach, providing an example of what Nancy calls, 'un mythe en train de s'interrompre.'⁴⁹ For Nancy, the very nature of myth is innovative, even if founded on ancient mythologies; in this sense, myth and *mythation* are as capable of constructing themselves through negation as they are through affirmation.⁵⁰ James explains that, for Nancy, the 'interruption' of myth is a process of 'exposure to the plurality of finite sense for which it cannot account, and thus its exposure to new forms of sense or meaning. These might then be organized into new mythic narratives which would displace the old'.⁵¹ This process is, according to James, not dialectical or teleological but, 'a constant birth or

⁴⁸ Ghil suggests that Guilhem uses this episode as a sort of 'message double' to show the occasional incompatibilities between clerical and secular interests, pp. 122-23.

⁴⁹ Nancy, *Communauté*, p. 119.

⁵⁰ Nancy, *Communauté*, pp. 130-32.

⁵¹ James, p. 199.

becoming of singular-plural sense that interrupts established foundational narratives and opens the way for future narratives to emerge.⁵²

In the anonymous portion, the emergence of a new or altered narrative is most notable in the treatment of the epic hero Roland and his companion Olivier. Where Guilhem uses comparisons to Roland and Charlemagne to complement the reputations of his heroes, Baldwin and Simon de Montfort, the Anonymous has a more symbolically complex approach. This is particularly true if Roland and Olivier are, as Raguin suggests, not uncomplicated representatives of a unified epic past, but rather converted into ‘ethnotypes’— ‘respectivement Français et Méridional’⁵³—from whom different meanings are drawn depending on the allegiances of the poet. Where Guilhem focuses on Roland’s more positive characteristics, for the Anonymous it is pride and shame that take center stage; the epic pair becomes a fighting brotherhood for whom the unchecked arrogance of one betrays the other to ruin even unto death. Contrary to Guilhem’s portion, there are most certainly ‘méchants’ here. Where Guilhem compares Baldwin to Roland, the Anonymous uses Olivier to underpin the value of his own great hero, Raymond VI. As he arrives to retake Toulouse late in the second portion, the Anonymous describes a man who occupies a special place in the hearts of his people:

Lo coms receubt Toloza, car n’a gran desirier,
Mas no i a tor ni sala ni amban ni soler
Ni aut mur ni bertresca ni dentelh batalhier
Ni portal ni clauzura, ni gaita ni portier,
Ausberc ni armadura ni garniment entier.
Pero ilh lo receubro ab tant gran alegrier
Que cascus ins e·l cor cuja aver Olivier. (183.1-7)

Rather than being a friend or sidekick here, Olivier, personified in the elder brother Raymond, becomes synonymous not with French heroism, but with Occitan resistance. Raguin explains:

Si l’on postule que le *Paratge* des Méridionaux tient lieu de noblesse de sang comme de cœur, et que celui-ci s’est placé dans un système de correspondance avec l’Orgueil des Français, cela signifierait que la noblesse des Français est Orgueil. Or, selon le système de valeur méridional cet orgueil déraisonnable est une anti-noblesse. Cela correspond à

⁵² James, p. 199.

⁵³ Raguin, *Lorsque*, p. 580.

l'usage des figures de Roland et Olivier dans la *Chanson* et à la problématique sous-jacente de l'orgueil de France et de la noblesse de cœur méridionale.⁵⁴

Raguin goes on to explain that, in the Anonymous portion in particular, the characters in the *Canso* itself identify with the characters from the wider tradition that they feel are most in line with their own values. This means that, for the Anonymous, the crusaders seem unable to learn from the sacrifices of the *Chanson de Roland*, a theme which reoccurs in two more of the *laissez* that follow.⁵⁵ What I find most notable about these two further references to the *Roland*, is that both center on the death of Roland and that the Anonymous gives the speeches concerned to those allied with Simon de Montfort and the crusaders. The first of these belongs to Foucaud of Berzy, who relates the expulsion of the crusader army from Toulouse to the death of Roland at Roncevaux:

Cascus de nos deu esser planhens e sospirans
Car nos avem perdudas las honors e·ls bobans;
E tota Fransa aunida e·ls parens e·ls efans,
Que no pres major onta pois que moric Rotlans; [...] (185.19-22)

Then, again, when Robert of Picquigny, 'us valens soldadiers [...] vengutz de Fransa' (192. 59, 61) is asked for his opinion during the battle for Toulouse:

E per l'orgolh de Fransa e pels faitz menudiers
Foron mort en Espanha Rotlans e Oliviers.
E lo coms pert la terra car no es bos terriers [...] (192. 74-76)

Robert goes on to say that although Simon is an able soldier (having easily conquered southern lands with sword and cross) his real motivation is the money in the form of 'las rendas e los marcs e·ls diners' that the 'aversers' he leaves in charge can wring from the inhabitants (192. 80-81). In this comparison, 'Roland est à la fois victime et incarnation de cet orgueil. Par un phénomène d'identification, l'orgueil de *Fransa*, aux temps ancestraux de Roland et Olivier, se trouve être celui de Simon et de ses croisés.'⁵⁶ For Huot, this constitutes an inversion of the value system of the *chansons de geste* 'used to distinguish the power-hungry aggressors from the

⁵⁴ Raguin, *Lorsque*, p. 577.

⁵⁵ Raguin, *Lorsque*, p. 580.

⁵⁶ Raguin, *Lorsque*, p. 579.

rightful holders of the land' which displays a relationship to 'the common legends' which is markedly different.⁵⁷

Roland's conversion into an anti-hero presents a somewhat jarring take on one of France's best-loved legends, but it is the brief reference to William (and to a poem, now lost, that was likely used in the composition of *La Prise d'Orange*) that indicates a more tangible shift in the Anonymous's attitude towards the heroes of the Old French epic more broadly.⁵⁸ In this passage, the crusader army awaits the belated arrival of Simon de Montfort outside the city of Beaucaire. They have trapped 'e·ls coms joves', Raymond VII, inside the city and worries grow that if they should fall prisoner to him, all will be lost:

Rainers del Caldaïro a parlat estremiers:
'Senhors, remembre vos Guilhelmet al cort nes,
Co al seti d'Aurenca suffri tans disturbiers:
O de mort o de vida siam tug cavalers,
Que ja Montfort ni Fransa no n'aion reproers;
Que si·l coms nos pot pendre, datz es nostre loguers,
Car sel er plus astruc que sera mortz primers.' (159.48-54)

The first thing that strikes me about this passage is that William is invoked by the French army and not by Raymond VII and his allies. This is particularly odd given that William is, rather famously, a southern baron. This might indicate that, for the Anonymous poet, he is ideologically more closely tied to the French and the king than to the Occitan barons; rather like Raymond VI's brother Baldwin, who was seen as an outsider by his brother's allies although his lands were in the South. In fact, references to the *chansons de gestes* throughout both portions of the *Canso de la crozada* are almost all either about or offered by characters associated with the crusader army. It might therefore be right to extrapolate that the Anonymous associates the epic with 'French' culture and therefore, although maintaining epic form throughout, does not particularly care to place his own heroes within that mythological space (with the notable exception of Olivier, who speaks truth to power, as it were, and whose death is symbolic of Roland's failings). This would therefore mean that the Anonymous portion of the *Canso* is operating in a somewhat different order of meaning than the Old French epic, versus Guilhem's portion which operates

⁵⁷ Huot, p. 140.

⁵⁸ Martin-Chabot, p. 126, footnote 2.

entirely within it even while incorporating lyric forms. This would then constitute precisely the sort of interruption that Nancy highlights. Whereas Guilhem's portion is designed to place the conflict and its heroes squarely within the Old French tradition, the Anonymous continues to use this form as a means to reject the old heroes in favor of new ones that better reflect his own culture and values. As such, the Anonymous portion constitutes a tangible interruption to the crusader myth that Guilhem constructs, whilst also inverting several important textual elements that provide a sort of undermining echo.

For Nancy, interrupted myth need not be a wholesale rejection, however, as communities touch upon each other, expose each other; the interruption of myth is also a demarcation of boundaries, even the very porous boundaries of family lines and land disputes that form the central core of the *Canso*:

L'interruption est au bord, ou plutôt elle fait le bord où les êtres se touchent, s'exposent, se séparent, communiquent ainsi et propagent leur communauté. Sur ce bord, vouée à ce bord et suscitée par lui, née de l'interruption, il y a une passion—qui est, si on veut, ce qui reste du mythe, ou qui est plutôt *elle-même l'interruption* du mythe.⁵⁹

In this way, literature as *héritage* constitutes its own sort of being in common, one in which myth echoes history and history echoes myth.⁶⁰ Myth, and the interruption—be it rebirth, retelling, refusal—of myth is, according to Nancy, essential to communities insofar as it provides both a closure and a destiny. Returning to Nancy's 'rang mythique', it seems to me that it is not a question of a single mythic order, but rather of Nancian *relève*, or a series of interrelated orders which tie past to present, and which reverberate outwards, and which can never be fully recuperated. Mythic thinking in the case of the *Canso de la crozada* and its two poets is plural thinking; an appeal to myth and an appeal to community through the *agencement* of epic heroes, of combined epic and lyric forms. I asked before whether myth and the heroes of the *chansons de geste* were immanent or transcendent; in many ways this was an impossible question, a 'both-and' as much as an 'either-or'. And yet, by way of a conclusion, I posit that the epic heroes seem immanent for Guilhem (i.e. having an inherent value in and of themselves that is mobilized but that does not fundamentally change from text to text) whereas the Anonymous seems to view them as transcendent (i.e. having a value in their source texts and 'culture' but by belonging to a

⁵⁹ Nancy, *Communauté*, p. 154.

⁶⁰ Nancy, *Communauté*, pp. 157-60.

certain kind of Catholic Frenchness that does not fully transcend the Occitan epic in the same way). What is absolutely key to this reading is that it is possible for the poem's two poets to be working simultaneously to parallel, and cross purposes; that the text might be taken up as foundational and mobilized in different and concurrent ways. Furthermore, that this is neither wrong, nor problematic, but instead a feature of how mythic thinking is taken up and progresses through time. In this way, cultural remains like the *Canso de la cruzada*, the older *chansons de geste* that it references, and the texts and movements it goes on to inspire are rather like rings on a pond; we can see the expanding circles as they grow and move outward, and we can trace them backwards, but we can never truly recuperate the pebble that made them in the first place.

The Future Perfect Community

As discussed before, the close proximity of the *Canso de la cruzada*'s composition to the events it depicts is a key feature of the mythos it helps to construct. That said, the temporalities of the *chansons de geste* as a whole are complex, and perhaps never more so than in the subset of poems that Sweetenham calls *historiographique*. For the *Canso*, it is precisely this closeness that drives much of its community mythmaking. There is something of the Barthesian future perfection about the way that this plays out, and in ways that must have felt much more tangible than in the *Chanson de Roland* (whose specter is, as I have shown, palpable in the Albigensian narrative). The previous section has shown how the text of the *Canso* is an example of 'le mythe interrompu', as Nancy conceives of it, and this section will continue along those lines but with a view to following its narrative reverberations outward by examining the future and prophetic spaces that reading myth for interruption opens up. Raguin has said, and I agree, that to study the *Canso* is not a matter of recuperating a lost paradise of Occitan culture: 'L'auteur enseigne au contraire que, si paradis il y a, il est idéal, futur hypothétique et menacé—mais surtout déjà perdu avec les ancêtres mythiques Roland et Olivier.'⁶¹ Following this logic, Nancy's assertion (through Bataille) that myth is necessarily linked to—if not a product of—absence renders this ideal, future hypothetical, and threatened paradise all the more telling. Indeed, as Nancy says, 'S'il n'y a pas de nouvelle mythologie, il n'y a pas et il n'y aura pas de nouvelle communauté. Si le mythe est un mythe, la communauté se résorbe avec lui dans cet abîme, ou se dissout dans

⁶¹ Raguin, *Lorsque*, pp. 36-37.

cette ironie.’⁶² As such, this is a continuation of the *Canso* as both a myth in and of itself and of the cycles of undoing and rebuilding in which both poets are active participants; this is an example of Nancian community mythmaking insofar as the worlds worth making are at once lost and yet still possible.

For Nancy, myth is essential to communities insofar as it provides both closure and destiny.⁶³ I posit that the very writing of the *Canso* implicates both Guilhem de Tudela and the Anonymous in the attempt to both make sense of (find closure) and imagine a future (find hope) following the sacking of the southern strongholds, with Toulouse at their center. In this way, Toulouse is a mythic space, and as such, the temporalities at play in the *Canso* have much in common with the Barthesian *intersum* discussed in Chapter One. In the context of a piece whose authors no doubt lived through the events they recount, as did its earliest audiences, it is crucial to unpack how the *Canso* is mobilized to create and interrupt myth, and to fix memory; this exercise on the part of Guilhem de Tudela and the Anonymous is at once retrospective and projectional, working both forwards and backwards. For Sinclair, the text is a means by which the Anonymous in particular (although I find this equally true for Guilhem) creates an image of the present, whose goal it is to perpetuate itself as memory; writing allows the Anonymous to bring his own history and ideology to life and to transmit it in perpetuity.⁶⁴ I add to this that the memory being fixed transfers over time from personal, poetic memory to generational, cultural memory.

There is an intersection to be found in the backward- and forward-looking nature of the text between Nancy, for whom ‘Non seulement la littérature est l’héritière (ou l’écho) du mythe, mais la littérature a été pensée et doit sans doute être pensée en un sens elle-même comme mythe...’ and Barthes’s *eidolon*, or specter.⁶⁵ The ontological links between literary-historical echo and specter to the *futur antérieur* are complementary; just as Roland and Vivien are both dead and about to die, the communities the *Canso*’s two poets construct have been, and will be [*cela sera et cela a été*].⁶⁶ As such, through its bipartite structure and its narrative mechanisms the *Canso* is both a poetic echo—one in which Guilhem calls out and the

⁶² Nancy, *Communauté*, pp. 145-46.

⁶³ Nancy, *Communauté*, p. 155.

⁶⁴ Sinclair, ‘*Chanson*’, p. 162.

⁶⁵ Nancy, *Communauté*, p. 157.

⁶⁶ Barthes, *Chambre*, p. 150.

Anonymous answers back—and the spectral echo of the experience of history. In the context of what Sinclair describes as a presentist creation of history, there is also significant overlap between a Barthesian *intersum* or *interfuit* and a Nancian *coming*, or *becoming* insofar as they make it possible to experience the space between the text, the spectator, and what will, or what could be. The way that these two theoretical frameworks interact in this particular piece is, however, different from the repeated deaths of Roland and Vivien discussed earlier in this thesis. In the *Canso*, it is perhaps less the demise of the hero than the lingering attempt to contend with or to understand the limits and boundaries of absence that drives a Nancian reading:

La communauté sans communauté est un *à venir* en ce sens qu'elle *vient* toujours, sans cause, au sein de toute collectivité (c'est parce qu'elle ne cesse d'y venir qu'elle y résiste sans fin à la collectivité elle-même tout autant qu'à l'individu). Elle n'est que cela: venir à la limite de la comparution, à cette limite où nous sommes en effet convoqués, appelés et envoyés—et d'où nous sommes convoqués, appelés et envoyés. L'appel qui nous convoque, aussi bien que celui que nous nous adressons, sur la limite, les uns aux autres (c'est sans doute, de l'un à l'autre le même appel, et ce n'est pas le même) peut se nommer, faute de mieux, l'écriture, ou la littérature.⁶⁷

For the *Canso de la crozada*, this *à venir*, a homophone of *avenir* is crucial to Nancian coming or becoming as progressive and constant, without fixed end. The acknowledgement that we are collectively called or sent to a limit implies something which is bounded in both space and time, and yet also impermanent in the sense that this limit is always *à venir*. The space literature creates and occupies is therefore always past, though perpetually present to each audience, and yet always projecting forward. As I see it, this works most obviously in two ways in the *Canso*: through references to prophecies related to Raymondins and through Toulouse as a symbolic space. Raguin has also identified what she calls, 'entrecroisements de temporalité' in the text, reliant on theological time and chronological time versus what she terms 'le temps du sujet'.⁶⁸ For the purposes of this chapter, I am less interested in Raguin's theological-apocalyptic reasoning than I am in how she theorizes the substitution of chronological time for the history to which the poets themselves belong, and the

⁶⁷ Nancy, *Communauté*, pp. 177-78.

⁶⁸ Raguin, *Lorsque*, p. 418.

temps du sujet qui permet au récit de faire sens au cœur de la vie de ses propres personnages, comme de son public. Ce ‘temps du sujet’ consiste à interpréter les événements comme éléments ayant une signification qui s’inscrit au cœur ontologique des êtres concernés, une forme d’eschatologie de l’instant.⁶⁹

Raguin’s ‘eschatology’ applies here insofar as the structure of the *Canso* itself denies us an end. Part of how mythic thinking works in the *Canso* is that it presents each iteration of myth as a becoming for which multiple ‘ends’ are ultimately possible and for which the text itself is the *intersum*, or interstice between the rings on the pond that represent the reverberations of individually held meanings through time.

Some of this operates as James explains, as a form of ‘transcendence such as it is played out within the metaphysical tradition’, wherein a figure of divine authority (in this case, the epic heroes themselves), through this ‘transcendent principle could affirm itself in other figures, of course, for example in an essence of the human or in an end of history which is not present, but rather projected as that which is yet to come’.⁷⁰ There are two ways in which, I believe, the *Canso de la cruzada* engages, not in supplying an ‘end to history’, but in creating a projectional mythic space. Firstly, both poets end their portions of the narrative well before the conflict has come to its end. The second, is in its multiple references to prophecy, the first of which occurs in the first *laisse* of the *Canso*, which opens, as many *chansons de geste* do, with the promise of blood.⁷¹ The prologue is nonetheless unusual in two key ways; the first in that it describes a named author (Guilhem de Tudela) with considerable detail, and the second in that it claims his access to prophecy through the practice of geomancy:

Per la destructio que el conog e vic
En la geomancia, qu’el a lonc temps legit,
E conoc que·l país er ars e destruzit,
Per la fola crezensa qu’avian cosentit,
E que li ric borzes serian enpaubrezit
De lor grans manentias, don eran eriquit,
E que li cavalier s’en irian faizit,

⁶⁹ Raguin, *Lorsque*, pp. 418-19.

⁷⁰ James, pp. 163-64.

⁷¹ Additionally, there are two references to prophecies made by Merlin in *laissez* 150 and 194, one of which appears to foretell the demise of Simon de Montfort.

Caitiu, en autras terras, cossiros e marrit. (1.6-13)

Given that geomancy is ‘a visionary practice whereby the future is quite literally read in the earth’,⁷² it is no surprise that land and wealth will prove to be calques for dynastic successes within the *Canso*—with the city of Toulouse at its symbolic center—and for the reverberations outward as the story is transmitted through time. Just as the prologue refers to Guilhem’s geomancy, in which the earth itself is prophetic, both Raguin and Sinclair describe Toulouse as a place where the terrestrial and spiritual meet; an ideal space and ‘une évidence’.⁷³ Toulouse is therefore, a locus for the *intersum*; a prophetic-mythic space the text creates, most notably in the way the Anonymous ends—or rather, does not end—the narrative as the king’s armies march on the city. Indeed, Sinclair describes the effect of the Anonymous’s ending as such: ‘Le texte ne s’achève pas par une vraie conclusion. Ici, il n’y a ni défaite, ni victoire, mais l’image d’un peuple et de son seigneur unis sous une protection divine fortement renforcée, et à la fin, il reste l’espoir d’un avenir où la justice et le droit vont triompher.’⁷⁴

In March of 1993, Nancy wrote about another city whose fate seemed unclear. He described the word ‘Sarajevo’ as having become ‘l’énoncé d’un système complet de réduction à l’identité.’⁷⁵ The name of a city in the throes of a brutal war had acquired a meaning beyond itself, for its people and for the world. In some ways, it had become an *intersum*, an *interfuit*, a reminder of the intractable space beyond anyone’s control. As Barthes conceived of it, the space between the subject and the infinite; a space of time deferred. Nancy goes on to call ‘Sarajevo’ a name that signals the space of a conflict and a mixing, a crossing and a disconnect; a name that is neither a person proper, nor a nobody.⁷⁶ There are, of course, many names in the *Canso de la crozada*, but among them ‘Toulouse’ is most emblematic of the symbolic power that Nancy highlights as transcending its geographic designation. ‘Toulouse’ is, like ‘Sarajevo’ in the imagination of its contemporary audiences, the site of a *mêlée*, a space of crossing over and of arrestation. Without wishing to draw too hard a comparison between the conflicts as historical events, on a symbolic level, the name of the city denoting a mythic space holds true for both. This also applies to the *Canso*’s authors; Guilhem says of Toulouse, ‘Que de totas ciutatz es cela

⁷² Gillies, p. 60.

⁷³ Raguin, *Lorsque*, p. 79; Sinclair, ‘*Chanson*’, p. 174.

⁷⁴ Sinclair, ‘*Chanson*’, p. 175.

⁷⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Être singulier pluriel* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), p. 171.

⁷⁶ Nancy, *Être*, p. 171.

flors e roza' (79.7) but it is the Anonymous poet who imbues the city with the greatest mythological meaning. Ghil highlights a passage describing the demolition of the city by the crusader army (in 1216) in which Toulouse and *Paratge* are held up as parallel terms as an example of the Anonymous poet's use of 'Toulouse' as a collective term which is 'un être symbolique incarnant une civilisation urbaine liée de façon ineffable à la lignée raymondine et consubstantielle avec les valeurs dont celle-ci est le champion.'⁷⁷ Raguin echoes this, adding that 'Toulouse' is representative of a transcendent Christian ideal, and the values of a specific type of courtly and chivalric society.⁷⁸ Laurent Macé takes this a step further with the claim that the Anonymous portion is not just concerned with a 'Toulouse' that could be lost, but rather that it centers on the hope of youth; the southern dynasties kept alive through new blood untainted by the suspicions of heresy that marred the previous generation, the continuation of *paratge*.⁷⁹

Macé's assertions about the hope of youth—personified most vividly in the *coms joves*—recall clearly the Nancian *avenir / à venir* and the 'appel qui nous convoque' in the sense that myth, as written, calls out to, or summons its audience to a yet undetermined limit.⁸⁰ The *à venir* underpins the Anonymous poet's narrative choices, and is a feature of the form he adopts. Whereas Guihelm favors the *laisse capcaudada*, wherein the final half-line of the *laisse* establishes the rhyme for the one that follows, the Anonymous favors the *laisse capfinida*, wherein a word is introduced in the final line of the *laisse* which will then be taken up and repeated throughout the following *laisse*. Both the *capcaudada* and the *capfinida* are typical of the *trobar clus*, which, reduced to its most simple definition shows a lyric which is 'consciously and by deliberate choice rendered difficult of access, and demands more than ordinarily acute receptivity on the part of the reader'.⁸¹ While Guilhem adheres quite rigidly to the conventions of the *capcaudada*, the Anonymous deviates slightly by carrying the entire half-line into the first line of the following *capfinida*. For example, *laisse* 189 ends 'En aquesta maniera es pres l'acordamens | Com fassan los dos setis' (lines 124-25), directly followed in *laisse* 190 by 'Com fassan los dos setis es lo cosselhs donatz | Entre ls baros e l comte empress e autreiatz' (lines 1-

⁷⁷ Ghil, p. 187. The line reads: 'Car Toloza e Paratges so e ma de trachors | E parec ben a l'obra,' 178.59-60.

⁷⁸ Raguin, *Lorsque*, p. 445.

⁷⁹ Laurent Macé, 'Jeunesse et légitimité dynastique dans le chant de l'Anonyme: *La mortz o la terra*,' *Médiévales*, 74 (2018), 83-98 (pp. 83-84, 96-97).

⁸⁰ Nancy, *Communauté*, p. 178.

⁸¹ Frank M. Chambers, *An Introduction to Old Provençal Versification* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1985), p. 93.

2). Similarly, *laisse* 210 ends ‘Si nos volon atendre, o lor plassa o lor pes | Hoi auran la batalha’ (lines 99-100), where the half line is immediately taken up again ‘Hoi auran la batalha veramen, si Dieu platz | Ez a la departida, veirem cals tendra·ls datz!’ (211.1-2). The repetition of what becomes an anticipatory half-line in the *laissez capfinidas* of the anonymous portion creates a remarkable tension between passages. The effect is like that of a refrain, helping to mark the passage from one moment to the next. The repetition is also, however, rather like a stutter on the page, creating a feeling first of arrestation, then of forward motion. This is particularly true of the *Canso*’s final *laisse*, its last half-line, and the sense of pressing futurity that it engenders. It begins with the *coms joves*, Raymond VII, leading preparations to defend the city ‘Contra l’orgolh de Fransa’ (213.120; 214.1), and ends with a prayer:

Mas la Verges Maria lor en sira guirens,
 Que segon la dreitura repren los falhimens,
 Per que la sanc benigna no·s sia expandens.
 Car sent Cernis los guida, que non sian temens,
 Que Dieus e dreitz e forsa e·l coms joves e sens
 Lor defendra Tholoza! (214. 131-36)

The *laisse* as a whole paints a hopeful picture; the barons and knights within sleep in their armor and the Anonymous poet takes this last occasion to list the fighting men of rank present by name. Although the poet says, confidently, that the barons inside have guaranteed the city’s defense, he is not coy about the dangers they face. The ‘cardenal de Roma’ desires the destruction of the city and its inhabitants down to the last creature, ‘Que tuit prengan martiri en las flamas ardens’ (214.130). And yet, the prayer that ends the poem turns to future tense; looking outward in time even as the crusader army closes in. Perhaps most importantly, if the *Canso* were to continue according to the form the Anonymous poet has laid out, the half-line ‘Lor defendra Tholoza!’ would be the beginning of a theoretical next *laisse*. The exhortation to defend Toulouse therefore reverberates outward, even if silently, into a hypothetical future: Toulouse *quondam et futurus*.

Finitude and the Unfinished

Mais il est claire, dès lors, que ‘finitude’ signifie: infinie singularité du sens, de l’accès à la vérité. La finitude *est* l’origine, c’est-à-dire qu’elle est une infinitude d’origines. L’‘origine’

signifie, non pas cela d'où viendrait le monde, mais la venue, chaque fois une, de chaque présence du monde.⁸²

Before concluding this chapter, it is worth discussing who knew what, and when, in the production of both poem and manuscript. Guilhem began composing his portion in roughly 1210, and covers the events of 1208 through 1213, or from Innocent III's call to crusade through the Assemblée de Pamiers and the full entry of the Crown of Aragon into the conflict. The Anonymous poet picks up from 1213 and goes through the death of Simon de Montfort (in 1218) to the arrival of Louis de France (the future Louis VIII) before Toulouse in 1219. The Anonymous poet likely began composing his portion between 1228 and 1229, which means that, whereas much of Guilhem's work is properly contemporaneous to the events he describes, the Anonymous is looking entirely backwards. As such, it is fairly safe to assume that the Anonymous knew that Raymond VII, the *coms joves*, had lost his rights (in 1226) and had been excommunicated (in 1227), but he may or may not have known about the Treaty of Paris-Meaux (of 1229) in which Raymond VII regained his title, but submitted fully to the French Crown and the Roman Church. The scribe of the only extant manuscript (and presumably, his patron), on the other hand, definitely knew the full extent of the outcomes following the end of the Anonymous's narrative, and that an inquisition had been ongoing in Toulouse since 1233.⁸³ All of this to underline that the manuscript itself—the memory it preserves, the myth it makes—shows a keen desire (*volonté*) for the emergence of a prophetic, southern text. Indeed, Martin-Chabot describes BnF, MS fr. 25425 as a very local production:

œuvre d'un scribe d'environ l'an 1275 [...] On ne peut donc que conjecturer les modifications qu'il a pu apporter personnellement à l'orthographe et à la langue des auteurs des deux parties du poème. Mais comme il paraît avoir été originaire de la région formée par le Toulousain, le Quercy, l'Albigeois, le pays de Moissac, le Comminges et le comté de Foix, qui était aussi, [...] celle de l'auteur de la continuation de la *Chanson*, il est à craindre qu'il ait retouché la langue du poème de Guillaume de Tudèle, où figurent tant de formes françaises, bien plus qu'il ne l'a fait dans la suite.⁸⁴

⁸² Nancy, *Être*, p. 33.

⁸³ 'Chronologie' in *La Chanson de la Croisade albigeoise*, ed. by Eugène Martin-Chabot, trans. by Henri Gougaud (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1989), pp. 553-59.

⁸⁴ Martin-Chabot, 'Introduction', I, pp. xxi-xxii.

One of the most remarkable things that emerges from the pages of the *Canso de la crozada* is its constant and repeated confrontation with finitude. This is as true for the two poets as it is for the manuscript that preserves their work. Although the poem as a whole is bounded by a prayer: ‘El nom del Payre e del Filh e del Sant Esperit’ (1.1) [...] ‘Amen.’ (214. 137), there is a feeling that, for both poets and illuminators, it remains unfinished. This is reflected most obviously as I have shown in the open-ended projectionality of the Anonymous portion, but Sinclair has argued that the future is also a pressing concern for Guilhem:

Guilhem ne raconte pas tout simplement les évènements rapportés par ceux qui participaient à l’assemblée: il imprègne aussi son récit d’un message moral qui signale le manque de compassion chrétienne de la part de ceux qui dirigent la croisade. Le ton prophétique du récit annonce l’importance diachronique du texte, que l’auteur cherche à lier avec les évènements du passé, le temps présent de l’écriture et l’avenir dans lequel l’histoire va se projeter.⁸⁵

This prophetic tone, which both Guilhem and the Anonymous strike, is picked up in the manuscript insofar as it is also beautiful and though the text itself is complete, its images are unfinished. Those who work on the *chansons de geste* (and the earlier examples in particular) are used to small, utilitarian manuscripts—the *Canso de la crozada* is neither. The manuscript measures 245mm by 180mm, roughly 3.5 centimeters smaller in height and width than a sheet of A4 paper. Although a work of quality, it is also one of unfulfilled promise on account of its thirteen unfinished drawings, no doubt destined to be illuminated. Each drawing occupies roughly one third of the space given over to the poem on each page, and one can’t help but feel the absence of color and gold when looking at the figures arrested in time. Most of the illustrations are of battles, with the instructions remaining, like ‘La destrucio de Bezers’, ‘Cant Carcassona fon preza’, and the final illustration, ‘Le seti de Marmanda cant le filh del rey de Fransa la pres.’⁸⁶ There are two, however, that I find most captivating. The first—which is perhaps testament to the sympathies of the illustrator—depicts the return of Raymond VI to Toulouse. On folio 148, three armored men on horseback ride towards the open gate of the city; three figures greet the men outside of the city walls, kissing the hands and feet of the leading horseman. A building that appears to be a church rises above on the upper left-hand side of the

⁸⁵ Sinclair, ‘*Chanson*’, p. 167

⁸⁶ For a full list, see Martin-Chabot, ‘Introduction’, I, p. xix.

image, tacitly blessing the scene, while the last of the invaders is stabbed and thrown from the city walls.

The content of Anonymous portion and the manuscript itself both underpin the fact that this exemplum is a fundamentally local production. Following the Anonymous's poetic example, its patron, scribe, and illustrator are creating a mythic space for themselves and for posterity that is both foundational and left open to possibility, for which the unfinished illuminations provide a visual metaphor. In the incomplete battle scenes, I see a confrontation with an intractable finitude. Just as the repeated half-lines are a call to a limit whose final iteration is left open-ended and looking to the future, so the unfinished manuscript also effectively arrests time—in being unfinished, the illustrations metaphorically deny finitude in favor of possibility. Indeed, this brings me to the other image that pricks me—this time the manuscript's very first. Against the backdrop of the city walls and a tower are three figures; one, seated with a manuscript. Opposite him, to the very right of the image a portcullis gate hangs open, half-way between a welcome opening and a menacing closure. Above the image is the faded instruction: 'Ayci le maestre qui escrip', here is the master, who writes.⁸⁷

It is not at all unusual for manuscripts across a wide variety of medieval literary and historical genres to feature an illustration of a figure sitting at their desk composing the work to follow. In this case, however, the presence of a single figure raises questions as to how the illuminators understood the authorship of this piece: which of the two poets is given such pride of place in a poem that is so clearly divided both in its authorship, and in its politics? The practice of making present a poet undertaking the act of composition for the viewer, or reader, of the manuscript reflects, as much as the text itself, a process of mythic thinking. As such, manuscripts themselves are mythic spaces, like Toulouse, that reverberate from the past through and beyond the present—fixed in time and yet movable in their meaning. The *Canso de la crozada* is testament to how community histories and memories are shaped by human intellect and human hands and, in being unfinished, its illustrations are also emblematic of the constant change and interruption that mythic thinking as a process entails. Indeed, the act of beginning an illumination but not finishing it represents an opening for which a closure at once is possible and

⁸⁷ Guillaume de Tudèle et continuateur anonyme, *Chanson de la Croisade contre les Albigeois, en vers*, Paris, BnF MS fr. 25425, fol. 1, in *Gallica* < <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b60006868/f9.item> > [accessed 14 March 2023].

impossible. Similarly, the image of a gate that is perpetually neither fully open, nor fully closed—one which quite literally hangs in the balance—is itself a powerful visual metaphor for the possibility and the loss both poem and manuscript communicate, from then to now.

Created Children: Exegesis and the *Enfances*

In the Bibliothèque nationale de France there is a volume, assembled by the Département des Manuscrits in the late nineteenth century whose hand-written title page reads ‘Fragments de Manuscrits en Vers’. The unassuming little book contains the fragments of fifteen works dating from the early thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries, each accompanied by a short description. The typewritten note for the first group of fragments reads:

57. Fragments du Mainet, poème français du XIIe siècle, consacré à l’enfance et à la jeunesse de Charlemagne. Il n’en subsiste plus que ces fragments d’une copie du XIIIe siècle, qui avaient été employés à couvrir une boîte. Don de M. Gazier, maître de conférences à la Faculté des lettres de Paris. —(XI.)¹

The fragments of this once (and still mostly) lost poem were, as the note indicates, removed from the outside of the box to which they had been affixed sometime in the seventeenth century. Why the fragments were used this way is unknown; perhaps as an old-timey decoration, perhaps because the person who did it simply needed something more durable than paper to cover it and happened to have these pieces of parchment to hand. Whether they disposed of the rest of the poem, no longer needed, or whether they only ever had these few pieces is lost to time. We owe the only edition of these fragments—and thus of *Mainet*—to Gaston Paris, whose 1875 article opens with a short description of the manuscript’s discovery. He describes Monsieur Gazier as a ‘professeur au Lycée Saint-Louis’, who was hosting a friend (Monsieur A. Boucherie) that noticed ‘une ancienne boîte en carton recouverte de feuilles de parchemin’ which he identified as belonging to a *chanson de geste*. This M. Boucherie copied down several lines of the poem, which he then presented to Paul Meyer who determined that they belonged to the lost *enfance* of Charlemagne. The owner of the box was persuaded by M. Gazier (who was, presumably, renting rooms) to donate them to the Bibliothèque nationale, where Paris was able to consult them.²

¹ *Fragments du Mainet*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Nouvelles acquisitions françaises 5094, fol. 1^r, in *Gallica* <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6000371s?rk=64378;0>> [accessed 24 March 2022].

² Gaston Paris, ‘Mainet, fragments d’une chanson de geste du XIIe siècle’, *Romania*, 4.15-16 (1875), 305-37 (p. 305).

In all of this, I am struck by an incredible sense of M. Boucherie being in the right place at the right time. Paris doesn't indicate what his professional training was—perhaps he was an educator, like M. Gazier—but it is clear that he had the requisite knowledge to recognize a *chanson de geste* even in very abridged form. He also had the skill needed to read and transcribe its thirteenth-century hand, and the personal network through which to solicit Meyer's opinion. I am also struck by this potent reminder of how easily manuscripts can be lost, and yet how durable they are both in their material and in their cultural impact; how changing tastes and values alter—sometimes irreparably—how they move through the world. M. Gazier's box is, in its own small way, an example of how the past is repurposed, remade, or discarded wholesale, and how recuperation and preservation are part of cyclical movements throughout history. Once again, the *chansons de geste* are a metaphor for lack and abundance. *Mainet* is an apt demonstration of this, in which the lack of a further epic past is addressed by the expansion backwards of the Charlemagne narratives, creating an abundance of further readings. In the *analyse* of his edition, Paris was able to reconstitute the missing portions of the poem using examples from other linguistic traditions; the work of Girard of Amiens, the Venetian *Karleto*, *Karl Meinet*, the *Gran conquista de Ultramar* are echoes of the Charlemagne tradition—proof of an abundance of myth through which Paris was able to speculatively address the lack *Mainet* presented.³ And still, because it remains incomplete we linger between the reality of its loss and the possibility the rest could yet be found.

Mainet is one of a series of continuations added to the core group of *chansons de geste*, called *enfances* and *chevaleries*, that imagines the youths and early knighthoods of the most famous epic heroes. Although they delve further into the epic past, these texts, often likened to 'prequels', are among the last epic poems to be composed.⁴ The most obvious desire met by this expansion backwards is motivated by the search for origins—are the great heroes born, or made, and what do their youthful exploits have in common? In short, what makes a hero?⁵ Just as it reflects a movement towards completeness and cyclicity, the addition of these

³ Paris, p. 307.

⁴ Phyllis Gaffney and Luke Sunderland describe the *enfances* as a phenomenon of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, with some popularity attested through the fourteenth century; Sunderland, *Narrative Cycles*, pp. 5-6; Phyllis Gaffney, *Constructions of Childhood and Youth in Old French Narrative: Writing the Medieval Child* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 159-60. For a complete listing with dates, see François Suard, *Guide de la chanson de geste et de sa postérité littéraire (XI^e-XV^e siècle)* (Paris: Champion, 2011).

⁵ For more on these questions, see: Anna P. Carney, 'A Portrait of the Hero as a Young Child: Guillaume, Roland, Girard, and Gui', *Olifant*, 18. 3-4 (1993), 238-77.

youthful narratives is evidence of an expanding interest in biography and genealogy, sometimes (though not always) rooted in very real-world concerns tied to land and inheritance.⁶ The emerging interest in youth narratives may be due in part to rising literacy rates among women, changing attitudes to ‘childhood’ and childcare, as well as more emphasis being placed on ‘moral and intellectual upbringing’ as evidenced by the work of John of Salisbury and Gerald of Wales.⁷ The interest of these texts does not lie in expressions of medieval childhood as such, though Phyllis Gaffney’s work on the subject as it relates to the coming of age narratives of both the *chansons de geste* and romance is compelling. Rather, it is quite clear that the *enfant* of the *chansons de geste* is not meant to reflect the realities of medieval childhood any more than Roland is meant to reflect the typical realities of knighthood, and as such, the interest of these texts lies in reading outside of faithful representations of a ‘historical’ world.

The addition of an *enfance* or *chevalerie* to an established series of *gestes* is by no means accidental, and many examples seem to have been composed within the context of expanding the cycles into and through cyclical manuscripts.⁸ This process did not take place according to a uniform timeline. Rather, Sunderland posits that they should be considered as part of a rhizomatic process of compilation and expansion in which the text is ‘without a beginning or end but only a series of middles which sprawl and intermesh’:

Epic cycles (and the *Renart*) work slightly differently [than romance cyclicality] because the separate source texts are not absorbed into the whole but rather survive within it. The connections made at an early stage remain, with more connections added, forming complex entities. Individual poems have endings that are always potential new beginnings, and so the cycle grows not as a series of closed wholes, but as a set of middles that interact.⁹

Viewing these texts as parts of a plantlike rhizomatic structure shooting off in various directions allows the critic to examine at once how the *chansons de geste* ‘invited continuation and revision’ from their earliest stages, and to think through the ways in which their multi-authored, non-linear structures spoke to, and continue to speak to the needs and desires of audiences at

⁶ Gaffney, pp. 159-60; Sunderland, *Narrative Cycles*, p. 7.

⁷ Gaffney, pp. 186-87.

⁸ Sunderland, *Narrative Cycles*, p. 5.

⁹ Sunderland, *Narrative Cycles*, p. 9.

different stages in time.¹⁰ The rhizome provides a powerful metaphor for connections being established and expanded across uncertain, and often layered, historical and narrative timelines. This is especially true in the way that it conceives of and prioritizes the potentiality such a structure implies, wherein, as Sunderland says, each ending opens up possibilities for new beginnings. The rhizome is a good metaphor for when and how the *enfances* poems were added to the corpus as part of a cycle of growth, and as such, an excellent way to visualize the way the *chansons de geste* come together as a genre over time. That said, it is perhaps too neutral in its outlook to account for the narrative motivations that drove the composition of these texts—the somewhat unpredictable directional nature of a plant metaphor does not adequately capture the intentionality that I believe lies behind the creation of the *enfances* as a subgenre, nor the part they play in helping to orient the overall project of the *chansons de geste* as a whole. Even so, the *enfances* are in many ways centered around genealogies, and the rhizome nonetheless remains productive for reading them in the context of expanding family trees (which I will touch upon later in this chapter). I am particularly drawn to the question of what it means for a text to ‘survive within’ a larger body of texts rather than being absorbed into it; the way texts remain independent yet send signals between each other. If the *enfances* are, in part, about expanding genealogies, they are also about the sort of narrative recuperability that ‘survival within’ implies—they are built around, and constantly refer to the texts that preceded them and thus send signals both backwards and forwards in the narrative time of the epic world they help to create. ‘Survival within’ similarly implies contending with the potential for loss, and, as I will show, the *enfances* are also part of a project that expands upon the core myths of their genre in order to confront an epic world trending towards collapse.

None of this is to say that historical, or genealogical, readings of the youth narratives are not compelling—they are. Genealogies do not, however, account for the full scope of the work the *enfances* do within the narrative project of the *chansons de geste* as a genre within their time, nor indeed beyond it. Many of the *enfances* have an interstitial quality, existing at once within a historicizing timeline and yet also firmly outside of it. This is partly to do with the order in which they are composed (for which Sunderland’s rhizome accounts), and partly a question of where the organizing principle of the *gestes* as a whole is located. It is my contention that each heroic arc within the world of the *chansons de geste* seeks to resolve a single

¹⁰ Sunderland, *Narrative Cycles*, p. 26.

catastrophe: Roland's sacrifice at Roncevaux. This disaster becomes the central paradigm around which is built a world shaped by exegetical impulses towards allegory and anagogy.

Just as the Crucifixion is the organizing sacrifice of the New Testament that allows the resurrection of Christ and thus the promise of a better world, Roland's own sacrifice creates a tension between the death of epic's central hero and the promise of perfection yet to come.¹¹ As a figure functioning within the system of the *chansons de geste*, which relies heavily on religious meanings and references, Roland fulfills many exegetical desires—a similar sacrifice is the ultimate goal for any great hero. And yet, even if epic heroism is, in its way, transcendental, Roland's sacrifice represents a fundamental futility in the system: a promise that remains unfulfilled. Within this system, the *enfances* attempt to reconcile the loss of this promise and build upon its future potential, and simultaneously underline serious cracks in the very foundations of the *chansons de geste* as a tropological, or moralizing endeavor.

In the context of exegesis, the youthful exploits of the epic heroes cease to be merely historical, or explanatory, but are instead part of an allegorical and anagogical figuring of the epic world that takes place over generations (both within the narratives, and as they are experienced by audiences through time). This is not to draw a direct line between the *chansons de geste* and scripture in the medieval world, nor to say that they were experienced in the same ways. Scholarship has, however, suggested that clerical communities enjoyed the epic poems and very possibly participated actively in preserving them, if not in creating them.¹² It is also widely accepted that the *gestes* share many thematic and formal elements with vernacular hagiographies, which means that the overlap between religious readings and 'entertainment' is both reasonable and logical. In a similar vein, like hagiographies and biblical narratives, the corpus of the *gestes* accumulated over time; the addition of stories in stages over generations that were eventually understood—and indeed reworked in order—to form a more cohesive whole is not unlike the

¹¹ Adrian McClure has recently argued that the Oxford *Roland* might be read as a Trinitarian text with Roland occupying the place of the Son (alongside Charlemagne as Father and Archbishop Turpin as Holy Spirit). See: 'In the Name of Charlemagne, Roland, and Turpin: Reading the Oxford Roland as a Trinitarian Text', *Speculum*, 94.2 (2019) 420-66. It is beyond the scope of the present piece, but both Kay and Haidu draw on Ernst Kantorowicz's work in which the king has two bodies—sacred and physical—as part of their broader discussions of how kingship and hierarchy is represented in the *gestes*. It is perhaps not too much of a stretch to assume that Roland has a similarly bipartite body, see: Haidu, *Violence*, pp. 105-19; Kay, *Political Fictions*, pp. 117-18.

¹² For more on the genesis of the *chansons de geste*, see Jones, pp. 3-9 and Andrew Taylor, 'Was There a Song of Roland?', *Speculum*, 76.1 (2001), 28-65. For a detailed analysis of epic's audiences (including clerical audiences and the status of the *jongleurs de geste* with regard to the Church), see especially: Leverage, 'Reception of the Chansons de Geste: The Medieval Model', in *Reception and Memory*, pp. 23-67.

way the Bible's books were, through both collaboration and contest, assembled into a whole that suited its audience. In this context, biblical exegesis suits the *gestes*, insofar as characters are related across narratives 'historically', and insofar as characters and events act as figures for other characters and events. Using Nicholas of Lyra's famous formula, this chapter will use the senses of medieval exegesis to parse the layered temporalities and meanings present in the *enfances* as they relate to the broader corpus of the *chansons de geste*: 'Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia' [The letter teaches us what happened, the allegorical what you should believe, the moral what you should do, the anagogic where you are going].¹³ Exegesis, at its most fundamental level, follows a line of meaning that runs through from past to future, linking the Bible's central figure (in the form of Christ) to all that came before and all that has not yet been. It is a theory of how the world was made and how we might guarantee the best world yet to come (and indeed, our place in it). In order to do this, the world must be considered in its wholeness, in its completeness, and I propose that the same is true for the *chansons de geste* beginning with the *enfances*. Underpinning my theory of the case for the *enfances*, and their place in within the *gestes* is the work of Jesuit priest and pioneering twentieth-century theologian, Henri de Lubac, who says:

Peu importerait en effet tous ces 'gestes des anciens', toutes ces histoires du temps jadis, ou du moins peu importerait que nous en eussions connaissance, si nous ne savions comment les rapporter à un ordre de choses qui les arrache au passé mort. S'il est utile de les confier à notre mémoire, c'est en vue de leur intelligence ; car si l'Esprit a voulu que nous soit conservée dans les Livres saints l'histoire de ces deux antiques cités, Jérusalem et Babylone, c'était pour manifester à tous à travers elles deux autres cités, plus durables, qui nous concernent actuellement. Toutes ces choses historiques *mystifiant nobis aliquid* [*conveys a mystery to us*]. Encore une fois, au-delà du contenu immédiat de l'histoire ou du sens premier de la lettre, cherchons donc *quae sit in ea spiritalis ratio* [*the spiritual meaning that is in it*].¹⁴

¹³ Cited in R. P. Roberts and T.V.F. Brogan, 'Exegesis', in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Roland Greene, Stephen Cushman, Clare Cavanagh, Jahan Ramazani, and Paul Rouzer, 4th ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 467-70 (p. 467). I owe much of the wording in the translations to follow to Mark Sebanc in Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. by Mark Sebanc, 3 vols (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).

¹⁴ Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale: Les Quatre sens de l'écriture*, 3 vols (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1959), II, pp. 490-91.

The project of this chapter is one of finding the through lines of ‘spiritual meaning’ in the *gestes*. Alongside their narrative events, the order of their composition is also actively making meaning—not because being composed ‘out of order’, or ‘back to front’ is a purely genealogical endeavor, but because in order to understand the catastrophe of the end, a beginning had to first be made. Far from being purely historical, through this explicitly exegetical effort, the ‘mystery’ of the *chansons de geste* enters its full spiritual meaning. Even if the order of composition seems chaotic, the addition of the *enfances* is also an attempt to enter the world of epic into an intelligible order. This is also, as I will show, a means to convey the mystical importance of places, like cities or battlefields, as literal *loci* for the myths the *chansons de geste* propagate; a means to resurrect Roland and the other epic heroes from a ‘dead past’. Just as the exegetes looked for Christ in the Old Testament, I will read the *enfances* for how, as *littera*, they establish the relationships between the texts and characters to come, how their *allegoria* is revealed through prophecies that point both backwards and forwards through time, and how their *anagogia* contends with the epic world’s unfulfilled promises. The fourth sense, *moralis*, will be held over until my general conclusion which will consider the figurative meaning of the *chansons de geste* and their world as a whole.

Littera and the *studium* of the *enfances*

Although the four senses of exegesis work across the timelines established by the *chansons de geste*, and indeed challenge the linear narratives they present, the epic poems position themselves as historical (even if their relationship to actual history as we understand it is complex). The youth narratives in this chapter are quite explicitly part of the overall historical view that the *gestes* as a genre present, though, because they are added to the corpus during the later stages of the genre’s development, their participation in this historical project is motivated differently. Nonetheless, in the first instance, they fall quite nicely into the first sense of medieval exegesis:

Littera gesta docet. Tel est le premier des sens bibliques: dans le texte, la ‘prima significatio’; chez le commentateur, la ‘prima expositio’; chez le lecteur, le ‘primus intellectus.’ Ici, le mot *littera* est sans doute appelé par la mesure du vers; mais l’on peut

aussi penser qu'il est choisi pour rappeler la doctrine essentielle de la lettre et de l'esprit.

Il est en tout case synonyme d'*historia*, compris en un sens large.¹⁵

If *historia*, in the medieval sense, is understood as an 'account of past events' or the 'recorded knowledge of past events', then the narrative arcs of the *enfances* provide a good example of *littera* as *historia*.¹⁶ The role of the *enfances* as part of the overarching *littera* of the *chansons de geste* is therefore a question of making its history and its genealogies intelligible, of making the 'first understanding' that Lubac highlights possible. Insofar as the youth narratives provide the 'first signification' and 'first exposition' of the *gesta* (what was done) and of the complex webs of family ties (*gestes*) previously unknown, they occupy a unique position within the overall project of the *chansons de geste* as a genre. This is particularly true given that they are composed in the later stages of the genre's development. The *enfances* as *littera* insist upon or establish the fields of play that were previously murky, or unknown and, as such, they are closely related the work of the *studium* as a means to communicate and fulfill expectations within narrative arcs (even across layered temporalities). This is similarly true of the form ('la mesure du vers') that the *enfances* and *chevaleries* take, which does not deviate from what is expected of the *gestes*, and indeed, as I will later show, mirrors them in many ways. The *studium* in this case is also, as Lubac notes for *littera*, a 'first' path to understanding the narrative world the texts create. Although the signs of deeper meanings are there from the beginning, the *littera* as *studium* constructs (quite intentionally) the first encounters audiences will have with the epic heroes, once the texts are assembled 'in order'—the first signification, the first understanding of things as they were, and of things to come. As an expression of *studium*, the 'letter' is a way of imposing order on the *enfances* (and the *gestes* broadly) that might have otherwise seemed opaque; of reframing events whose meaning was obscured by the vast rhizomatic offshoots of the genre's asynchronous development. Viewing this as akin to *studium* similarly alters the outlook of events that seem inexplicable or outside of the norm, entering them into a sort of cosmic order in which the past (added retrospectively) has established the through-lines necessary to transform the unexpected into the destined. In this way, the *enfances* as *littera* work to expose the interrelatedness of characters, bloodlines, and events—they render visible the ties that bind the

¹⁵ Lubac, II, p. 425.

¹⁶ 'Historia', in *The Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources Online*, ed. by Richard Ashdowne, David Howlett, and R. E. Latham, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), <<http://clt.brepolis.net/dmlbs/>> [accessed 19 April 2022]

world together. As part of their wider genre, the *enfances* signal the ‘how we got here’ of events known to take place later in ‘historical time’, thus allowing for the meanings of these events to be read. This foggy temporality is also important, as Sunderland says of the *enfances*: ‘A retroactive creation of the past, it in fact makes the past a premature enactment of the future [...] Confirmation of meaning will come in the future, when we will learn what the present “will have been”.’¹⁷ In the exegetical sense this system of retroaction is incredibly important—even if its primary function is to create a narrative of the past, *littera* is always pointing towards the future (even, as for the Bible, beyond the end of historical time). This is a logical continuation of Barthes’s *cela sera/ça-a-été* as seen in Chapter One, but instead of a past event already being known and then repeated, the ‘letter’ of the *enfances* adds a new temporal quality insofar as it allows the event (or hero) to have already been foretold. An example of this appears in the closing *laisse* of Adenet le Roi’s *Berte as grans piés* (c. 1275), a poem dedicated to the meeting and marriage of Charlemagne’s parents:

Li premiers des enfans, de ce ne doutez mie,
 Que Pepins ot de Berte, la blonde, l’eschevie,
 Orent il une fille, sage et bien ensaignie,
 Femme Milon d’Aiglent, molt ot grand seignorie,
 E fu mere Rollant qui fu sans couardie,
 Ains fu preus et hardis, plains de chevalerie.
 Après ot Charlemaine a la chiere hardie,
 Qui puis fist seur paiens mainte grant envaie.
 Par lui fist la loys Dieu levee et essaucie,
 Par lui fu mainte terre de paiens essillie,
 Maint hiaume decoupé, mainte targe percie,
 Maint hauberc derrompu, mainte teste trenchie;
 Molt guerroia de cuer sor la gent paiennie,
 Si k’encore s’en duelent cil de cele lignie. (*Berte*, lines 3473-86)¹⁸

As this *laisse* shows, *Berte as grans piés* is at once ‘historical’ and forward-looking. Although in the narrative time of the poem, Charlemagne has yet to be born, his many deeds are recounted in

¹⁷ Sunderland, *Narrative Cycles*, p. 55.

¹⁸ Adenet le Roi, *Berte as grans piés*, ed. by Albert Henry (Geneva: Droz, 1982).

the past tense—each future moment already a *fait accompli*. This example also illustrates the place of the *enfances* in a complex generic system motivated by historical desires—they explain how we (or, in this case, Charlemagne) got here. This is done by expanding the narratives backwards and by making explicit the ties between characters—as for Roland and Charlemagne, above—in such a way as to make them knowable. After establishing the links between Pepin and Berthe, Roland, and Charlemagne, there is a notable shift forward. In the final two lines, Charlemagne’s famous campaigns against the pagans have a continuing effect—they still suffer and grieve even into the present moment. The proximity of Adenet le Roi to the Eighth Crusade (of 1270)—which saw the death of Louis IX before the effort was essentially abandoned—creates a sort of through-line from the past evoked by the *Berte* poem into a very present moment.¹⁹ Although the Eighth Crusade was hardly a success, these last lines are an example of epic’s *littera* being used to create an allegorical relationship between the epic past and a present that must have felt very real—the suffering of ‘*cele lignie*’ as the present, textual manifestation of a very real historical desire.

A similar genealogical impulse (leading to a sort of prediction or foretelling) takes place across the *enfances* as a subgenre, with the *Enfances Renier* providing an example of a poet attempting to make more explicit the links between epic *littera* and ‘real-life’ *historia* on a grand scale, across multiple generations with implications well into the future. Early in the narrative, after the customary summary of the adventures to come, the arrival of a baby boy is announced:

Ce fu en may, en la douce saison:
 Fuellent cil bois, chantent cil oiseillon.
 En Poupaillart, sus el mestre donjon,
 Fu nez li enfes qui tant ot de renon.
 Filz Maillefer, dont oroiz la chançon.
 Dame Guibors a la clere façon
 Desmaillola le petit valeton;
 Au feu le chafent sanz plus d’arestison.
 Après devisent au fons le porteront;

¹⁹ Anna Moore Morton, ‘Introduction’, in Adenet le Roi, *Bertha of the Big Foot*, trans. by Anna Moore Morton (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2013), pp. 1-13 (p. 1).

A Maillefer ançois demanderont
Conment vodra que ses filz ait non.

[...]

‘Dame, Reniers, car ce me semble bon
Pour son ancestre, qui Dieus face pardon,
Celui de Gennes qui tant fu voillans hon’. (*Renier*, lines 114-38)²⁰

In this *laisse* we learn that the baby is Maillefer’s son, and thus Rainouart’s grandson. This ties him to the lineage of the Narbonnais, through his great-aunt, Guibourc. We also learn that he is named for his ancestor, Renier de Gennes, middle son of Garin de Monglane. The elder Renier is, according to a later manuscript belonging to his own *geste*, also Aude and Olivier’s father.²¹ The Renier of the *enfances* is thus one of the final representatives of several significant epic lines. This is an apt example of the *enfances* pointing back and forth across narratives, and indeed across narrative time; the expanse of the epic world is condensed down into this one little boy whose own issue will also have ties to both epic, and to ‘real’ *historia* in the future. Sinclair has suggested that instead of reading such genealogies according to ‘vertical patrilinearity’, we might instead apply a ‘genealogical matrix’ which valorizes not only the presence of maternal lines, but ‘the existence of more than one strand of genealogical inheritance’ broadly.²² This type of reading also provides a fruitful explanation for the ‘diachronic and achronological’ movements that define the order of composition and the narrative progression of the *Enfances* as a subgenre. I will not insist on the ‘matrix-model’ that Sinclair develops, except to say that it provides a powerful means by which to trace the different versions of the epic heroes (as child and as knight) as they interact with and inform one another across texts and across time, and how these interactions form their own genealogy of sorts:

Instead of projecting a notion of reproduction and continuity which depends on linear progression, the openness of the matrix-model allows for interplay between the characters that comprise it. It can in fact be conceptualised as a framework, or network of signs, in

²⁰ *Enfances Renier: Chanson de geste du XIIIe siècle*, ed. by Delphine Dalens-Marekovic (Paris: Champion, 2009).

²¹ Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal MS 3551 reads ‘Puis fut un jour certain apres espousa notablement a Olive en laquelle il engendra Aude la belle, qui fut accordee a Rolant le neveu Charlemagne et sy engendra l’annee ensievant Olivier le preux et compaignon Rolant lesquels morurent depuis en Raincevaux quant Guennes les trahy et vendi a l’admiral Marcille’, in *La geste de Monglane: I. Hernaut de Beaulande. II. Renier de Gennes. III. Girart de Vienne*, ed. by David M. Dougherty, E. B. Barnes, and Catherine B. Cohen (Eugene: University of Oregon Books, 1966), p. 120. Similar references to Olivier being the son of Renier appear in the Oxford *Roland*.

²² Finn E. Sinclair, *Milk & Blood: Gender and Genealogy in the ‘Chanson de Geste’* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), p. 61.

which characters are inscribed, or plotted, as points of reference that carry a particular significance within themselves, but which also interact with, influence and produce the signs that surround them. This type of framing allows for diachronic and achronological movement, the writing of epic lineage in reverse, rather than confining its reading to one particular temporal direction or dimension.²³

Sinclair's reading of both character and genealogy as carrier of significance each in their own right is amply reflected in the *enfances* narratives, as is the valorization of female lines for which her genealogical matrix accounts. The *Enfances Renier* makes clear that the eponymous Renier is not the only child of a rather impressive congruence of bloodlines—shortly after his birth, his sister, Gracienne arrives. Late in the poem a wedding takes place that results in the further blending of the great epic bloodlines, and which will have a significant impact on the future of not just this group of noble families, but on whole nations:

Les gentis dames, dont il y ot assez,
Bien ont les lis et fez et ordenez;
Ydoine couchent, qui moult ot de biautez,
Et Graciëne, qui moult ot honnestez,
Gonssent la sage, son pere fu Esclersz,
La mere Ydoine o les gresles costez.
Robert Ricart, cil fu scs avoucz;
De celui fu Buyemont engenrez
Et de Renier fu Tancre li membrez,
De Bauduïn fu Jehan li senez,
Li plus biax enfes qui onques puis fust nez,
Mes a .III. anz fu mort et devïez.
[...]
La nuit que fu Buyemont engendrez
Et son neveu, le bon vassal Tancrez,
A Cambrai fu Godefroy engenrez
Qui de Buillon fu puiz sire clamez
Quar le sien pere, Huistace li membrez,

²³ Sinclair, *Milk*, p. 62.

Qui de Bouloigne fu quens et avouez (*Renier*, lines 17932-43, 17956-61)

One possible reading of the *chansons de geste* might see this as part of a search for origins within the genre, and notably within the *enfances* wherein the historical desire being fulfilled is one of genealogical expansion and linkage. In examples such as the *Enfances Renier*, the great gestes of the epic world (both real and imagined) are tied together more and more explicitly. The heroic *gestes* (in all the multiplicity of the term) are thus creating deepened meanings; like the Old Testament figures populating the Christian world and prefiguring later figures, the *enfances* add a layer in time, in which heroes beget heroes both literally and metaphorically. Instead of lines ending without issue as they so often do in the oldest examples (*Guillaume*, *Girart de Roussillon*, *Roland*, *Raoul de Cambrai*), we can instead trace different, but associated lines into the ‘present’ day. In this vein, the *Enfances Renier* draws a clear line from the epic heroes to the heroes of the First Crusade. As Sinclair notes:

in the epic the lineage or a particular hero is often produced achronologically, with the story of the hero’s ancestors being composed later than those tales that establish him as hero. The possibilities opened up by a genealogy written in retrospect allow for considerable play in the internarrative manipulation of family and lineage.²⁴

This is related to questions of recuperation that I will raise later; to the desire to keep ties to a world being lost. Tancred and Bohemond are related to the fearsome Rainouart, to the great Guillaume ‘shortnose’ and the Narbonnais (even if by marriage), and to Garin de Monglane. The next also suggests that Godfrey of Bouillon and Hugh of Maine, both heroes of the First Crusade narratives were born on the same night (if in other locales).²⁵ I will examine the other possible readings of this later on, but it is worth insisting on the degrees to which this is a historical, legitimating endeavor in which the facts of these lineages are laid out; even in this apparent chaos a family tree is being constructed in which the world of epic reaches out and wraps around known historical characters and events. The acts of the crusaders are therefore not similar to the epic heroes, they are, quite literally, in the blood; if Tancred, Godfrey, and Bohemond display epic qualities it is because they are of the ancient *gestes*.

It is important that I digress slightly to put the youth narratives I will be

²⁴ Sinclair, *Milk*, p. 68.

²⁵ The poem then goes on to make clear the relationships of many notable Crusaders that will appear in the *Antioche* and *Jérsusalem* poems, including Harpin of Bourges, Robert of Flanders, Baldwin of Beauvais, and others (*Renier*, lines 17958-90).

discussing on a timeline relative to the texts I have already discussed in this thesis. In each case, the *enfance* or *chevalerie* was composed after the core *geste* it refers to, though not all of the *enfances* are written at the same time in relation to each other. In narrative time, *Mainet*, which I have already briefly introduced, follows *Berte as grans pies*, but precedes *La Chanson d'Aspremont* (Roland's *enfance*), and the action of all three precedes the disaster at Roncevaux.²⁶ The action of both the *Enfances* and *Chevalerie Vivien* takes place after Roncevaux but precedes the action of *La Chanson de Guillaume* (and thus of *Aliscans*). The *Enfances Renier* follows the battles at Roncevaux and Larchamp by a full generation, but precedes the action of the *Enfances Godefroi*, whose narrative takes place before the First Crusade, and thus of the *Chansons d'Antioche* and *Jérusalem*. There is no *enfance* for the *Canso de la crozada*, though Toulouse is related anagogically to other battlefields signalled by the *enfances* (and, indeed, Raymond IV of Toulouse was among those who answered the first call to Crusade). The networks of relatedness that the *littera* of the *enfances* help to establish across characters and events will allow the *quae sit in ea spiritalis ratio* to emerge. The allegorical and anagogical meanings present in the *chansons de geste* cannot be read without first understanding how things are related 'historically' in their completeness—without arriving at the *primus intellectus* of the signs that point backwards and forwards across narratives and temporalities.

The *enfances* as *figura*

‘Per allegoriam sacramenta Ecclesiae, quomodo praecedentium rerum figuris praenuntiata sint intelligimus.’²⁷

If the 'historical' progression of the narratives within the full scope of the *chansons de geste* forms the *littera* of Nicholas of Lyra's formula, then the next sense is *allegoria, quid credas*. Erich Auerbach, who prefers the term *figura*, defines it as 'something real and historical which announces something else that is also real and historical. The relation between the two events is

²⁶ The order of composition for these poems is decidedly 'out of order'. The Roland's MS *O* dates to the very early twelfth century, *Mainet* to the second half of the twelfth century, *Aspremont* to c. 1190, and *Berte* to the end of the thirteenth century.

²⁷ Richard of Saint Victor (d. 1173) cited in Lubac, II, p. 501: 'Through allegory, we understand how the sacraments of the Church were foretold by the figures of previous things.'

revealed by an accord or similarity'.²⁸ Following this, the *enfances* participate in the *historia* of the *gestes* by, in a sense, announcing the events and characters yet to come. Even if they are composed to signal accords and similarities in the narrative future, this creates tension in the temporal fabric of a world in which the past is a prefiguration of events and characters. As such, the *enfances* occupy a floating temporality, where the narrative 'time of the telling' in which audiences find themselves is one in which present things point to both past and future things—all time is made 'present'. This is further complicated by the fact that many points of reference (which Heinemann might term internal, or external echo) within the *enfances* point forward to 'real' historical characters and events. The relatedness of these signals across the time their world establishes means that they can be read in ways that echo the structure (and indeed, the impulse towards parsing deeper meanings) of the figural, or allegorical, readings of biblical narratives common throughout the Middle Ages. Although the Old of the *chansons de geste* (the *enfances*) is added after the New, and the rhizomatic way in which texts were assembled into cycles is more fraught than for the Bible as medieval people (living in the same historical and geographical context) knew it, in both cases the assembled texts of the whole have a sort of cohesion. Both also show an incredible capacity to be made to speak to contemporary questions, even if situated in a past that must have seemed quite far away.

In terms of the *enfances* and *chevaleries*, the addition of a further past to an established, core group of narratives provides an analog for the relationship between Old and New Testaments—even if in reverse—that reveals an exegetical impulse behind their composition. Auerbach describes this phenomenon in saying that:

No student of the Middle Ages can fail to see how [exegesis] provides the medieval interpretation of history with its general foundation and often enters into the medieval view of everyday reality. The analogism that reaches into every sphere of medieval thought is closely bound up with the figural structure.²⁹

Indeed, in the work of nineteenth-century art historian, Émile Mâle, 'exegesis practically drives or determines Gothic art,' presenting a view in which 'it is impossible to understand medieval art simply in stylistic or cultural terms because this approach misses that original impulse behind

²⁸ Erich Auerbach, 'Figura', in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, trans. by Ralph Manheim (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) pp. 11-76 (p. 29).

²⁹ Auerbach, pp. 61-62.

those works.³⁰ As such, the desire to understand the impact of the past on the present in the scope of a Divine plan means that figuration and prophecy in which events and characters are foretold are both key drivers in the addition of the *enfances* narratives to the existing epic corpus. Characters and events are presented throughout the youth narratives in such a way as to provide analogs (or echoes) that manifest as more explicitly allegorical; each epic hero, each epic gesture (*gesta*) figures, or prefigures another within his own life cycle, or beyond. Once again, the temporality this presents is somewhat nebulous—although a past narrative essentially *prefigures* a future narrative, in the case of these ‘prequels’, the future precedes the past in order of composition (and in many cases, is well established in traditions of reception). The past is thus a *postfigural* allegory for a known future.

According to Lubac, biblical allegory is ‘essentiellement *allegoria facti*. Plus précisément, elle est *allegoria facti et dicti*. Elle est, au sens chrétien du mot, *mysterium*’.³¹ This requires some unpacking in the first instance. Lubac is, of course, placing biblical allegory within ‘the letter’ of those narratives, a move which transfers well onto the *chansons de geste*, in which ‘the facts’ are directly related to the historical progression of the narratives and to the words and deeds of the characters acting within them. In the case of the *gestes*, the relationship between *littera* and *figura* is much the same as in biblical exegesis. Unlike the Old and New Testaments, however, it would be difficult to understand the *enfances* narratives in isolation, so reliant are they on their futures to construct both their narratives and their meanings. In this sense, understood as part of a whole, allegorical readings of these youth narratives within their broader genre are a different (but parallel) expression of the interrelatedness that historical and genealogical readings expose, rendering the conversations taking place across space and time both legible and intelligible. Following Lubac above, the youth narratives also point to and expand upon the *mysterium* of the *gestes*, which is to say a deeper truth that is not literal but rather figurative—one which transcends the world of the *gestes* themselves and which sets up precisely the anagogical and tropological meanings that are, perhaps, their ultimate concern.

It bears noting that, for Auerbach, *figura* is not the only term that might be appropriate to reading and analyzing figural structures within narratives, specifically those which are more explicitly prefigural or prophetic: ‘*Figura* is not the only Latin word used for historic

³⁰ Christopher G. Hughes, ‘Art and Exegesis’, in *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*, ed. by Conrad Rudolph (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 173-92 (p. 179).

³¹ Lubac, II, p. 497.

prefiguration; often we find the Greek terms *allegoria* and still more frequently *typus*; *allegoria* generally refers to any deeper meaning and not only to phenomenal prophecy, but the boundary is fluid, for *figura* and *figuraliter* often extend beyond figural prophecy.³² What I am most drawn to here is the fluidity of the boundaries between the terms that Auerbach highlights. The distinctions between the times of the figuration, and what bounds a figure are porous, both insofar as what might be termed allegory, and what is more explicitly prefiguration. Auerbach also establishes a frame where both might be possible at once, for *figura* and *allegoria* to experience significant overlap, both as facts revealing a prophecy, and as figures echoing each other across time. In the *chansons de geste*, this potential for characters and events to both stand for and predict similar characters and events is perhaps due to a more fluid system overall. Auerbach's *figura*, and the epic heroes as allegorical both help to show the ways in which epic texts are composed to reflect changing values, rather than dictating them (which, in turn, helps to both further establish and heighten the *gestes'* *mysterium*).

As I have shown before, Heinemann's 'echo' is a mechanism by which events are made present across uncertain temporalities, allegory in the *chansons de geste* is also a gesture in the present towards things that have been and are yet to come. This is done most commonly in the *enfances* and *chevaleries* by the use of visions (often those of women) and by spoken prophecies, where the audience is left to follow the echo outward; to access shadows and memories of events that have already taken place. Meaning is therefore gained and shed as the epic cycles are expanded. This system of echoes creates movements across time that underline the *gestes'* capacity to create what Sunderland has called 'odd temporalities' wherein retroaction and anticipation blur the lines between past and future.³³ This framing is well suited to Auerbach's interpretation of the figural in biblical texts:

Figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons, the first of which signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second encompasses or fulfills the first. The two poles of the figure are separate in time, but both, being real events or figures, are within time, within the stream of historical life. Only the understanding of the two persons or events is a spiritual act, but this spiritual act deals with concrete events whether past, present, or future, and not with concepts or

³² Auerbach, p. 47.

³³ Sunderland, *Narrative Cycles*, p. 55.

abstractions; these are quite secondary, since promise and fulfillment are real historical events, which have either happened in the incarnation of the Word or, will happen in the second coming.³⁴

The notion of a second coming is perhaps less fraught than it might seem on the surface; questions of promise and fulfillment within the *chansons de geste* are present not just in the *enfances*, but across the corpus. As I demonstrated in Chapter One, the lines that are drawn between the promise of an act and its fulfillment (often through violence) are central to the motivating tensions of the genre—the *enfances* serve to expand and heighten these tensions, to further insist on destinies through a series of predictive postfigurations, even in ways that an audience unfamiliar with the whole might easily miss. Simply put, the *enfances* cannot work to their full extent in isolation; the past needs the future in order to make sense. Just as Heinemann notes that each echo needs its reflection to make sense, Philippe Haugeard asserts that the aesthetics of repetition produce an effect of symmetry that can serve to reinforce tensions between characters.³⁵ This section will use examples from the youth narratives of Charlemagne, Roland, Vivien, and Godfrey of Bouillon to consider the relatedness of mirroring, echo, and allegory—first in the context of verbalized prophecies, then by looking at mirrored characters and events as both pre- and post-figural.

Mainet escapes an ambush

The fragmentary *Mainet*, or *Enfances Charlemagne*, is perhaps one of the most artful examples of echo and prefiguration among the *enfances* texts. As is fairly common to the *enfances* poems broadly, the narrative of *Mainet* is one of dispossession; two brothers (Hainfroi and Heudri) commit treason by poisoning Pepin and Berthe, and then usurp the young Charles (yet to be *li magne*). The teenager, now called Mainet, ‘comme Rainouart dans la *Chanson de Guillaume*, a été rélégué aux cuisines,’ but, aided by loyal companions, manages to escape and flee to Spain.³⁶ Mainet and his companions find themselves at the court of the Spanish *amiraus*, Galafre—father

³⁴ Auerbach, p. 53.

³⁵ Heinemann, p. 229; Philippe Haugeard, ‘L’idéologie d’un combat des chefs: la mort d’Eaumont dans *Aspremont*’, *Op. cit. Revue des littératures et des arts*, 20 (Fall 2019), 1-11 (p. 7) <<https://revues.univ-pau.fr/opcit/507>> [accessed 18 February 2023].

³⁶ Suard, *Guide*, p. 201. This is, in itself, a beautiful example of Heinemann’s echo, and of the tying together of epic stories of different cycles—Mainet, like Rainouart, will employ a *broche* in his escape.

of Marsile and the beautiful Galiene. In one of its strongest prefigural moves, the text gives one explanation as to why the relationship between Charles and Marsile is so acrimonious in the *Roland* (beyond, of course, questions of conquest and religious strife)—early in *Mainet* Galafre enlists Charles’s help in defeating his enemy, Braiment l’Esclabon, and promises him rich rewards should he succeed:

Donrai vos de ma terre cent liues de tos lés
Et ma fille a moillier se prendre le volés:
De la terre d’Espagne serés rois couronés (3.116-18).³⁷

This reward would disinherit Marsile and give his beloved sister to an unknown Christian, so, naturally, he is annoyed—audiences familiar with the broader *Roland* tradition know that this grudge will last far into the future, with catastrophic consequences for Charles and his family. Marsile’s sister Galiene is a central character in *Mainet*, whose influence extends far beyond being beautiful, or marriageable—she is one of the many *sarrazines* of the *gestes* with access to forms of magic, manifesting in her case as the gift of sight.³⁸ *Mainet* gives an overview of this gift in the first instance by describing first her skills, then how they may yet be useful to our young protagonist:

Or vos dirai de Karle des ici en avant,
Du sens et des proeces et du bernage grant,
D’Orionde Galie od le cors avenant
Qui plus sot des estoiles, de la lune luisant,
Que Othes ne Sebile qui s’en penerent tant;
Puis gari ele Karle de mort et de tormant
Quant Marsiles le vaut ocire laidemant
En la cambre a Toulete en murdre sousprenant;
Marescaus de Melante n’i gaaigna noiant

³⁷ Gaston Paris, in his edition of the badly mutilated manuscript of *Mainet*, gives the number of the folio then the line number within that folio. As there are many lacunae between the folia preserved, I have maintained this system.

³⁸ Shirin A. Khanmohamadi demonstrates that Galiene is an example of a specific type of *translatio imperii* in, ‘Charles in al-Andalus’, *Digital Philology: A Journal of Medieval Cultures*, 8.1 (Spring 2019), 14-28. Although the focus on sexual sin occasionally makes her arguments difficult to incorporate in terms of this chapter, Stahuljak similarly shows that women in the *gestes* are agents of *translatio*, see: ‘Translations of Genealogy’, in *Bloodless Genealogies*, pp. 142-89. For Gaunt on prophetic women in the *Enfances*, see: *Gender and Genre*, p. 64. Sinclair notes that prophecy is often coded as feminine, see: *Milk*, p. 77.

Ne li viels Aalin ne le fiers Dragolant. (4.42-51)³⁹

The exact circumstances by which Mainet is ‘gari de mort et de tormant’ are unclear in the above passage but are later revealed in more detail. This short description of Galienne’s powers, however, serves to create the same paradigm of guarantee and fulfillment seen in the *Roland* tradition, though this time the outcome will be a happier one. An event promised (Charles will be saved by Galienne) becomes the first occurrence to which the second will point, and within the system of echoes that Heinemann has established, this brief description will serve to underline an even ‘later’ reoccurrence. Furthermore, each echo (as *figura*) introduces a mystery that through ‘figural interpretation’ or by tracing the allegory, asks each audience to solve it, to draw a line between the promise of the act as reported by the *enfances*, and the accomplished ‘reality to come’ of the oldest *chansons de geste*:

Or, tout ce qui précède le montre assez clairement, ce mystère est tout ce qu’il y a de plus concret. Il n’est nullement en idée. Il ne consiste point en quelque vérité intemporelle, objet de spéculation détachée. C’est une réalité en acte, la réalisation d’un Grand Dessein; c’est donc, au sens le plus fort qui soit, quelque chose d’historique encore, en quoi des êtres personnels sont engagés [...] L’objet de l’allégorie, par rapport aux faits que rapporte l’Ancien Testament, est donc une réalité à venir: c’est sa caractéristique la plus immédiatement tangible. *Ventura praenuntiant* [*they foretell things to come*].⁴⁰

The Grand Design of *Mainet* in relation to the rest of the Charlemagne epics is less a question of divine mandate than for the Bible, although the narratives themselves pay close attention to the will of God and the sacrality of the violence they undertake. Because the ‘reality to come’ in the future (relative to the *enfances*) is known, the Grand Design is in part the work of the poet; the expansion backwards therefore lends weight to the idea of an exegetical impulse that lies at the heart of the cyclicity of the *gestes*—destiny and design are more impactful the further back the signs go. Each occurrence needs a reoccurrence in order to function as echo (and indeed, to be a prefiguration in the first instance). Because of *Mainet*’s many lacunae, it is impossible to know the full scope of the action in between the initial hint of Galienne’s powers and the following passage—the experience of reading across the space between these passages is itself an ‘odd

³⁹ Paris’s footnote to this passage reads: ‘*Sebile* est le nom générique des Sibylles [...] Quant à *Othes*, je ne sais ce que c’est,’ p. 329.

⁴⁰ Lubac, II, p. 504.

temporality' in which a textual lack causes time to simultaneously extend and collapse. It is also a passage that relies heavily on external echoes, referencing the central catastrophe of the *Chanson de Roland*:

K'ele ert sage des ars et sot bien deviner:
Devers le ciel se torne por le mirour garder,
Et voit quan c'on ot fait et sor terre et sor mer:
Par les cours des estoiles que vit estinceler
A veu de Karlot com on l'ot fait mener,
Et con li serf le fisent fors de France geter,
Et Pepin le bon roi orent fait enherber
Et Bertain so moillier od le viaire cler;
Lui varent il mourdrir e par engien tuer
Quant Diu et si ami nel porent endurer:
Ce fu Hugues et Henri et David li bo...ler
Qui l'ont fait fors de regne avuec aus amener;
A la lune tornant prent tot a remirer.
Encor li velt li sors autre cose monstrar,
Que li doi serf felon qui France ont a tensor
Ont fait Milon d'Aiglent en lor chartre enserrer.
Autre merveille encor i prist a acerter,
Com Marsiles ses freres ot fait Turs assambler,
Par quatorze establies plus de trois mil joster:
Mainet vauront ochire ains qu'il doie ajoner;
Mais quant le sot Galie nel vaurra pas celer.
En sa cambre revint quant son sort vit finer,
Si apela Davi et duc Morant l'Escler: (5.85-107)⁴¹

In this vision, using a combination of her gift of sight and heavenly bodies (the stars and the moon) reflected in a magic mirror, Galienne is able to see in three times at once: Charles's past and his parentage, the events that led to his presence in Spain, and her brother's sinister plans for

⁴¹ This passage is bordered on either end by *lacunae*, so we can't know exactly what immediately preceded or followed it.

the future in the course of coming together. The mirror itself is important here insofar as it is both a physical object whose purpose is to reflect a sort of immediate reality (I see my face in the mirror, a reflection of what is), and a metaphor for the interpretive act of ‘mirroring’ that allegory as a device presents (a reflection of events yet to come). Through this mirroring, the audience ‘sees’ both literally and figuratively the image of a catastrophe yet to come. This is akin to the experience of looking into a mirror and seeing a familiar but somehow discomfiting reflection of something known, but changed in the process. The future the vision presents is also twofold. Galiene witnesses action that will, without her intervention, take place in the immediate future—Marsile is planning an imminent attack on Charles. It also no doubt echoes, and thus prefigures, the ambush at Roncevaux, whose action the audience knows is complete, but in which neither Galiene nor her vision can intervene. As such, the mirror’s reflection is both echo and allegory of violence yet to come—the inexplicable nature of Roland’s death (and Charlemagne’s failure) is thus foretold, guaranteed long before Roland was born. Within the movement of the heavenly bodies that facilitate Galiene’s divination a Grand Design is articulated. She sees the past, present, and future in the same mirror—an odd temporality indeed, in which the audience momentarily hangs at a sort of *charnière* of all time, at once between the relief of an ambush escaped, and the eventual catastrophe of one that cannot be avoided.

Godefroi and Renier foretell the success of the First Crusade

Not all prophecies end in catastrophe, however. Another *enfance* narrative relies on known historical ‘facts’ presented in a narrative ‘future’ relative to their composition in order to construct a similar feeling of foretelling, or Grand Design. I have already shown how the *Enfances Renier* ties the great heroes of the First Crusade to other epic lineages as part of a ‘historical’ reading, but these texts and their protagonists are also *figurae*, the subjects of prophetic visions laden with allegorical weight. Among the most obvious examples of this is the *Enfances Godefroi*, composed after the Third Crusade of 1189-1192 (and therefore after both the central Crusade trilogy and the *Chevalier au Cygne*), recounts the early life of Godfrey of Bouillon.⁴² The narrative begins with the marriage of his father, Eustace, to his mother Ida. On

⁴² Suard dates the *Chevalier au Cygne* quite explicitly before the Third Crusade, *Guide*, pp. 170-72.

their wedding night, Ida has a powerful vision relating to the future of her sons. In the later, much abridged, prose version of the *Enfances Godefroi*, Ida's vision is rendered as such:

Le dame sonja chele nuit un songe que ele estoit en Jherusalem devant le temple et l'escardoit. Et li sanloit qu'il fust tous plains de chievetes et issoient par se bouche uns grifons et .ii. aigles et getoient hors du temple ches dyables d'oisiâx qui avoient fait lors nis deseure l'autel. Li grifon et li aigles les cachoient tous hors et le porterent sur le tour et surveoit le chité et tout le païs et li metoient le une couronne d'or el chief. Puis li sachoit le boiele et passoit parmi Portes Ores et avironnoit les murs. (*Godefroi de Buillon*, p.17, lines 6-12)⁴³

In both prose and verse versions, Ida awakes, letting out two cries, then explains her vision to her husband:

Nos averons .III. fiex, par verté le vos di,
Qui moult seront vaillant, corajox et hardi.
Li ainsnés sera quens, si com est establi;
C' estra li mains poissans, est cil de menor cri.
Et li autres iert dus, si com trové l'ai chi,
De Buillon en Ardane, qui vos vint de par mi,
Et li tiers sera prinches, por verité le di,
D' une loigtaigne terre que tient Arrabi. (*Enfances Godefroi*, lines 535-42)⁴⁴

This vision, like the one in *Mainet*, refers to later action in the Crusade Cycle (and indeed, in history) making the outcomes of the *Antioche* and *Jérusalem* both known historical fact and part of a divine plan, the fulfillment of a destiny. The prefiguration here also relies on the audience knowing what the future holds in order for it to make sense; in this case, the premonitory quality of the vision extends only to the 'historical' life of the characters themselves, i.e. within the hero's own life, and not beyond it (as scriptural *allegoria* does in the context of the Old and New Testaments). This type of prefiguration is therefore perhaps more akin to biblical narratives in which angels announce future events to characters within their own Testaments. Ida's vision itself refers to the three sons she has already borne (in both the epic tradition, and in the

⁴³ *Godefroi de Buillon*, ed. by Jan Boyd Roberts (1996), X: *The Old French Crusade Cycle*, ed. by Jan A. Nelson and Emanuel J. Mickel, 10 vols (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1977-)

⁴⁴ *Les Enfances Godefroi*, ed. by Emanuel J. Mickel (1999), III: *The Old French Crusade Cycle*, ed. by Jan A. Nelson and Emanuel J. Mickel, 10 vols (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1977-)

historical record): Eustace III Count of Boulogne (c. 1050-1125), Godfrey, Lord of Bouillon and Duke of Lower Lorraine (c. 1060-1100), and Baldwin, Count of Edessa then King of Jerusalem (c. 1060s-1118).⁴⁵ Godfrey and Baldwin are, of course, major players in the central narratives of the Crusade Cycle. The prophecy of the *Enfances Godefroi* thus points both forwards and backwards in time—the outcome of the First Crusade is well known, and the prophecy is therefore fulfilled before it was ever even spoken. These are, in a sense, punctal moments—time collapses into single present moment that nonetheless contains visions of past and future. In accordance with the grandeur of his mother’s vision, Godfrey is given a figural quality that falls between the explicitly prophetic and Lubac’s description of *allegoria*. Aged fourteen, the young man is knighted and given a series of items whose figural, or symbolic qualities are undeniable:

.I. hauberc li vestirent, qui saffré ot les pans,
Cel jor en fu armés dant Tiebaus l'Aufricans,
Que Viviens li prox fu mors en Alissans;
[...]
El maistre quing en son .I. escharbogle ardans,
Maint jor l’ot em bataille li palasins Bertrans.
Puis li chaignent l'espee dont fu mors Agolans,
Bone est l'enheudeüre et meudres est li brans;
Letres i ot escrites, qui dient en romans
Que Galans le forja, qui tant par fu sachans.
Durendax fu ses pers, ce fu li quens Rollans.
Puis en ferì tex cox li hardis combatans
Al siege d’Antioche dont mains Tours fu dolans.
Escu ot fort et dur a .II. lionchax blans.
.I. cheval li amainent qui ot a non Bauchans,
Covert d’ un blanc diaspre qui’st par terre batans;

⁴⁵ For a detailed accounting of the Bouillon family’s place in the historical record, and as it relates to the Crusade Cycle, see Emanuel J. Mickel, ‘Introduction’, in *Les Enfances Godefroi*, ed. by Emanuel J. Mickel (1999), III: *The Old French Crusade Cycle*, ed. by Jan A. Nelson and Emanuel J. Mickel, 10 vols (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1977-), pp. 9-87 (pp. 56-69).

Godefrois i monta, qui tant fu combatans. (*Enfances Godefroi*, lines 1704-29)⁴⁶

His mother's vision means that Godfrey is already destined for greatness well before his birth but receiving armor with symbolic (or quite literal) ties to preceding heroes imbues him with some of their allegorical power.⁴⁷ In taking on their mythic items, or riding a horse named for Guillaume's famous Bauçant, he embodies them and stands for the world they have created, even as he moves to expand it through Crusade. This is also part of a legitimating trope: according to *Mainet*, Charlemagne's Joyeuse once belonged to Clovis, Roland's Durendal is won from Eaumont in the *Aspremont*, and Godfrey's weapons and armor here follow the same epic trope. In the context of his mother's vision, this gives him the tools to fulfill his destiny and endows him with the figural, or allegorical mandate to do so. In taking up these arms, he is part of a mythic lineage that gives him the figural power to fulfill his destiny (which we, in historical time, know he will). It is also part of a trope as laid out by Shirin A. Khanmohamadi whereby legitimating object genealogies are grafted onto Islamic representatives, rather than the Greco-Roman ones of the earlier *gestes*.⁴⁸ As part of one of the most historical cycles of the *gestes* the prophecy must therefore be read from a position of knowing how it ends (*ça a été, cela sera*). Godfrey carrying the sword that killed Agolant (forged by the same man who made Durendal) speaks clearly to legitimating the conquest of the First Crusade as a prophecy fulfilled, and as allegorically inspired divine mandate. Ida is not the only mother of the *Enfances Godefroi* to have such a vision; Calabre (mother to King Corbaran of Jerusalem, grandmother of Cornumarant, his heir) also foretells the arrival of brothers from France:

'Sire', dist la roïne, 'assés le savra on!
Or entendés a moi et nos le vos diron.
En la terre de Franche, qui fu al roi Charlon,
Sont né .III. damoiseil d'une conjoncion.
L'uns a non Godefrois, si est dus de Buillon.
Si doi frere sont joule, n'ont barbe ne gernon.

⁴⁶ Galen is the exceptionally long-lived *forgeron mythique* responsible for several of the epic swords, see: Martin Aurell, *Excalibur, Durendal, Joyeuse: la force de l'épée* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2021), pp. 43, 52, 161.

⁴⁷ On the motif of the beauty of armor and weapons, the identities they reinforce, and the ideologies they transmit, see: Haidu, 'Excursus I', in *Violence*, pp. 44-65, and especially pp. 44-49.

⁴⁸ Shirin A. Khanmohamadi, 'Durendal, translated: Islamic object genealogies in the *chansons de geste*', *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies*, 8.3 (2017), 321-33.

En mon sort ai trové, n'i sai autre raison,
 Qu'il conquerront Surie a coite d'esperon
 Et Niche et Andioche, Leliche et le Tolon,
 Et Cesaire le grant, et le port Saint Simon;
 Et si prendront par force le Temple Salemon;
 La tors David n'avra vers els deffension.' (*Enfances Godefroi*, lines 2230-41)

The visions in a way mirror each other, mother to mother; each seeing either the success or demise of her sons as part of the same inevitable series of events. In this way, one set of visions therefore confirms the other even if, in historical time, they were already confirmed in the epic tradition by the fall of Jerusalem reported in the *Chanson de Jérusalem*. Similarly, the three birds of Calabre's vision are an echo of the eagles and griffon (in the sense that it is both mythical and airborne) in Ida's. Indeed, echo plays a significant part here, as three successive *laissez* 84-86 repeat and clarify Calabre's prophecy regarding Godfrey and Baldwin as part of a system of repetition discussed previously in which echoes both confirm action and increase tensions. The fourth *laisse* in Calabre's prophetic sequence refers more obliquely to the lineage of the Swan Knight to which Godfrey and Balwin belong, and which relies on broad knowledge of the epic tradition, and the continuations of the Crusade Cycle.

Along these lines, Turner has contributed significantly to scholarship of motherhood in the *chansons de geste* and their prose *remaniements*, and although the texts that form the basis of her study are generally later than my corpus, the framing she offers regarding the prophecies of mothers is nonetheless compelling. In particular, Turner's assertion that motherhood is 'not simply about biological replication but about transmission' and that the genealogical determinism of the *Enfances* and the mothers they depict participate in 'legitimized genealogical structures that are set in relation to the broader march of Christian time, not just in relation to biological inheritance' are valuable to my reading.⁴⁹ Much of Turner's argument rests on women who are either religious converts, of mixed-race, or who give birth to mixed-race children; the women in this chapter never convert, never attempt to pass as Christian—though *Mainet* implicitly posits that Galienne might do both at some point in the future—and as such, they are not 'hybrid' in the way Turner suggests. That said, the changing valence of Calabre's prophecy across textual traditions is also key to the project of the *Enfances* within the *chansons*

⁴⁹ Turner, p. 178.

de geste insofar as it serves to complicate what prophecy does, and indeed, what representations of genealogy as destined, or prophetic can do:

In the *Gesta Francorum*, her words emphasize the military skill of Kerbogha yet the protective strength of the Christian God [...] In *Le Chevalier au Cygne et Godefroi de Bouillon*, Calabre's prophecy emphasizes instead the treachery of men and the effect on Kerbogha's defeat upon his family: his daughter will be married to Baldwin of Bouillon, his sister, Florie, to Godfrey of Bouillon, and his nephew, Abilans, baptized [...] Christians will not just succeed in the Holy Land because they are spiritually destined but because they are genealogically destined.⁵⁰

Rather than being set apart as 'hybrid' or 'Other', the prophetic women and mothers in the texts I examine are mirrors for one another; in this sense it is their commonalities that make them interesting, even across racial and religious boundaries. The same holds true for another set of mirrored characters, whose echoes serve to both increase the tensions of the narratives, and also the exegetical readings that are available to them.

Eaumont mirrors Roland in *La Chanson d'Aspremont*

La Chanson d'Aspremont provides an *enfance* and an early *chevalerie* for Roland in which both genealogical and spiritual destinies are at play, and, as I will show, it presages many of the events in the *Chanson de Roland*.⁵¹ The *chanson* opens at Pentecost, when Charlemagne receives a challenge from an African king, Agoulant, and his son Eaumont. There are few examples of allegory as powerful as the *Aspremont's* use of Eaumont's character arc to mirror and echo Roland's, and, as I will show, these two protagonists act as allegorical symbols that signal each other and rely on memories of the future in order to make sense. This is, in its way, also a prophetic figuring—after all, what is a prophecy but a memory of the future yet unlived. What also becomes clear throughout the *enfances*, but in the Roland tradition in particular, is the sense that in having been completed, the future events that are signaled by these 'further past' narratives add a heightened sense of destiny to the event known to have already taken place. In his article on war in *Aspremont*, Jean-Claude Vallecalle describes how the poem uses uncertain

⁵⁰ Turner, p. 180.

⁵¹ François Suard, 'Introduction', in *Aspremont: Chanson de geste du XIIIe siècle*, ed. and trans. by François Suard (Paris: Champion Classiques, 2008), pp. 11-67 (p. 11).

temporalities and repetition to make sense of Roland's story across time, and how this reflects attitudes towards war in a real, historical moment:

Car l'intégration cyclique du poème a pour effet d'en multiplier les perspectives narratives et de l'inscrire dans une représentation plus large de l'Histoire, qui en nuance la signification. Les brillantes *enfances* de Roland et de ses jeunes compagnons ne trouvent leur sens que dans l'implicite certitude des batailles futures et du drame de Roncevaux, si fréquemment évoqué en filigrane dans le poème.⁵²

The moments in 'real' historical time that the narrative mirrors are also interesting for this reason. According to Suard, the poem was likely composed in Sicily (possibly at the court of Messina) in the 1190s and has strong elements of both the crusading epic and the epic of revolt.⁵³ Suard posits a historical basis for the narrative: in 901-902 the African Emir Ibrahim of Kairouan sent his son Abd-Allah to Sicily to punish Muslim leaders who had allied with Christians. He also notes that this narrative does not appear in other epics and that this explains why a tradition localized in Calabria and Sicily:

conservée à la fois par la mémoire collective et par les chroniques, a pu être renouvelée et donner lieu à une élaboration épique dans les années 1190. Or l'hypothèse d'un poème de propagande en faveur de la troisième croisade, élaboré au moment où se produit une intense circulation d'hommes et de matériel à travers ces contrées.⁵⁴

The deployment, therefore, of Roland as the hero of this historical narrative as part of a more explicit propaganda effort is also interesting, insofar as timelines become blurred within the prophetic space of the lead-up to his death at Roncevaux. Vallecalle aptly signals the capacity of the *Aspremont* poem's characters and events to prompt 'une méditation sur l'Histoire' in which Roland's heroic promise is bound up with the necessity to ceaselessly take up arms against evil in the service of God, and that for its contemporary audiences, this might (in my view) rise to the level of a parable for the historical moment at hand.⁵⁵ This is made all the truer if Eaumont (bearer, as we will see, of Durendal, the horse Veillantif, and the famous oliphant) is, in fact, an analog of the aforementioned Prince Abd-Allah:

⁵² Jean-Claude Vallecalle, 'Aspremont, ou la guerre sans fin', *Op. cit. Revue des littératures et des arts*, 20 (Fall 2019), 1-9 (p. 2) <<https://revues.univ-pau.fr/opcit/512>> [accessed 18 February 2023]

⁵³ Suard, 'Introduction to *Aspremont*', pp. 11, 13.

⁵⁴ Suard, 'Introduction to *Aspremont*', p. 12.

⁵⁵ Vallecalle, p. 8.

Preuz fu Yaumonz s'eüst chrestienté.
De chieres armes ot son cors adoubé,
Tint Durendart le bon branc acéré,
Sor nostre gent an a maint cop donné. (*Aspremont*, lines 4560-63)

There is no question that Eaumont is a mirror for Roland; they share many characteristics in a narrative founded on 'les parallélismes et les oppositions' of which the most obvious is the 'construction en diptyque' in which they are the primary players.⁵⁶ These shared characteristics will ultimately guarantee their violent deaths, and, as such, Eaumont is not only an analog for Roland as part of a diptych but an allegorical figuration of his death at Roncevaux. Watching the events that culminate in Eaumont's death resonates with the knowledge audiences already have, and thus allows the linkages between the two deaths that might not otherwise be visible to not only be seen, but for their meaning to become knowable—for Roland's death to take on added figural interpretations. Haugeard notes that, although it is common for pagan characters to be presented as individuals, and indeed as worthy warriors, in his prowess and his *démeseure*, Eaumont's 'imitation' of Roland marks him out in ways that would have been immediately obvious to the medieval public.⁵⁷ Mirroring in this case takes on an increased symbolic meaning, far beyond the parallels drawn between enemy combatants designed to make the fights that take place in epic worthy of telling, insofar as there is no honor in defeating an unworthy enemy, as such:

Une des grandes inventions de l'auteur d'*Aspremont*, c'est d'avoir transféré sur un personnage de païen les caractéristiques de la figure probablement la plus glorieuse du personnel épique franc, et d'avoir imaginé que ce personnage de païen serait tué par son modèle, en qui il reconnaît d'ailleurs—ironie tragique—un possible digne continuateur de lui-même s'il devait mourir.⁵⁸

It is thus impossible for the spectator to avoid confronting at once the discomfiting familiarity of the mirror image of a catastrophic death yet to come, all while delighting in the eventual death of the enemy. It also allows both Durendal and the *oliphant* to enter into figural interpretation in ways that the Oxford *Roland* on its own does not. Much as the New Testament needs the Old in order to achieve the full completeness of its meaning, Roland comes to need Eaumont in order

⁵⁶ Suard, 'Introduction to *Aspremont*', p. 31.

⁵⁷ Haugeard, p. 2.

⁵⁸ Haugeard, p. 3.

for his death, as predestined, to make ‘sense’. This functions similarly to Lubac’s conception of *mysteria* as revealed by Christian allegory:

Seulement, comme l’histoire ne suffit point à contenir le mystère, il est très vrai que l’allégorie chrétienne ne se contente pas de la dimension historique. Pour l’accueillir toute entière et ne point la fausser, nous ne devons pas retenir dans les cadres de la ‘superficies historiae’ cette réalité ‘à venir’ qu’est le Nouveau Testament. Elle déborde ces cadres [...] L’allégorie nous découvre bien des ‘*mysteria futura*’,—mais ce sont des ‘*futura mysteria*’ et l’on peut mettre successivement l’accent sur l’un ou sur l’autre de ces deux mots accouplés.⁵⁹

Adding to the *littera* is therefore not the singular goal of such a narrative—although creating a further past can go a long way to explaining the ‘how’ of the world, the boundaries between past and future, or between reality and mystery, as Lubac describes them, are porous and demand reading. It is worth pausing for a moment to consider the implications of, as Lubac says, putting the accent on one or the other of the pairing ‘*mysteria futura*’ and what this might mean for the *gestes* within the context of the *enfances* specifically. *Mysteria* in this case denotes both the thing in need of interpretation—an unknown, or hidden thing—where *futura* is something ‘to come’. In changing the emphasis, the weight falls on either the futurity (the ‘to come-ness’) of the thing, or on its resistance to comprehensibility, or knowability. The *mysteria futura* demands that the things which linger behind the fact of ‘the letter’ always be read in the incompleteness of their becoming. As such, the mystery of the *chansons de geste* as revealed by the *enfances* is always present, and always changing, always *futura*. The overflowing boundaries between present (past) and future (perfect) are perhaps most laden with meaning when focus turns to first the *oliphant*, then Durendal as *figurae*. Like Roland, Eaumont, locked in an impossible combat, refuses to sound his horn not once, but twice. This failure to sound the oliphant is premonitory—both analog for and allegorical representation of Roland’s later refusal, which takes place in similar ways as the ‘hero’ lashes out at his more reasonable companion. Finally, Eaumont, overcome with sadness at the death of his friends, concedes and sounds his *olifant*:

Yaumonz l’antant, si geta .i. soupir,
Prent l’olifant, nou pot plus consentir,
Si le sona par merueilleus aïr.

⁵⁹ Lubac, II, p. 507.

Sonent li pui, les vaus fait retentir;

Rise fu loing, nou pot son pere oïr (*Aspremont*, lines 4821-25)

Then, again, only ten lines later, Eaumont's horn scene repeats. Although the repetition I have detailed in Chapter One is nowhere near as prevalent in the *Chanson d'Aspremont* as it is in the *Chanson de Roland*, it is nonetheless striking that the same uncertain temporality is preserved at the same key moment (and, indeed, again at a later such moment).

Hyaumonz est maz et espris de doulor;

Son olifant sone par grant vigor,

Que tuit li bois rententissent antor.

Trop fu loing Rise, la grant cité major:

No pot oïr Agoulanz l'aumaçor,

Que ne plot Deu, lou Pere Crïator. (*Aspremont*, lines 4834-39)

In addition to their repetitive quality, these passages resonate strongly with the sounding of the olifant over the mountainous landscape in the Oxford Roland (and indeed, other examples of the Roland tradition), 'Halt sunt li pui et la voiz est mult lunge' is echoed in 'sonent li pui' and the trembling woods across which Eaumont's call travels. The acts of blowing the horn and hearing also play out in a similar manner, though unlike Charles in the Roland, Agolant does not hear his son calling for help. Part of the catastrophe here is, perhaps, the reminder that in either case, help will not arrive in time. The tensions within each protagonist's horn scenes are different, however. Whereas part of the crushing, punctal catastrophe of Roland's call for aid is the hope that Charles will arrive, Eaumont's death is guaranteed long before his final combat begins. This repetition nonetheless provides both an allegory for, and indeed premonition of Roland's own death, as do the next set of repeated *laissez*.

The next set of echoes between the *Chanson de Roland* and *Aspremont* center on Durendal. It is well known in the epic tradition broadly that Roland bears the famous sword, so in this way the narrative of *Aspremont* provides Durendal's *littera*—an explanation for how it came into his possession.⁶⁰ In *Aspremont*, Eaumont engages in single combat with Charlemagne, but he cannot kill the great emperor because the latter has been equipped with a holy helmet that prevents Durendal from doing him any real damage. The two mythical objects cancel each other

⁶⁰ This is echoed in *Mainet* where Charles wins Durendal in battle, but then somehow loses it, 'Et puis la reconquist Rollandins au cuer franc | Quant il occist Yaumont fil le roi Agoulant,' lines 4.39-40.

out. The Durendal's *littera* in this instance is a demonstration what Khanmohamadi calls a genealogy of power, a version of *translatio imperii*, wherein Roland is marked 'as the legitimate heir and successor of Durendal's powers'.⁶¹ For Khanmohamadi, the translation of Durendal between Eaumont and Roland marks them both as worthy of bearing the sword, and this renders visible different systems of power and prestige that the sword, essentially, carries with it. She goes on to say that, 'in the *Aspremont*, objects of war display power and even personality in their uncanny ability to shape the destiny of their owners, whose fate is bound up closely with their own.'⁶² The fate of Durendal is an interesting one, which might be read as writing destinies into the transfer of objects, and which provides a prefiguration of the disaster to come at Roncevaux. It is also true that *Aspremont* makes a judgment about the value of the two mirrored heroes—in the *chanson*, despite their shared qualities and capacity to carry Durendal, one is nonetheless more worthy of the sword than the other. This is made quite clear by the contrasting attitudes of Durendal's two bearers at the moment where all is potentially lost. Eaumont denigrates Durendal when he cannot defeat Charlemagne, whereas Roland praises it when he cannot break it against the stone:

Yaumonz lou voit, n'a talant que il rie,
 Trait soi arrieres, si l'a molt laidengie:
 'Hé! Durendart, mar fusses tu forgie!
 Portee t'ai a molt grant seignorie,
 De vos pris l'ordre de la chevalerie,
 Puis ne feri home de vos an vie
 Qui devant vos am poïst vivre mie,
 Ne mais n'oi je mestier de vostre aïde;
 Et or vos vois si forment resortie,
 Ne trenchiez mes ne c'une viez coignie!' (*Aspremont*, lines 5278-87)

'E!' dist li quens, 'seinte Marie, aiüe!
 E! Durendal, bone, si mar fustes! (*Roland*, MS O, lines 2303-04)

⁶¹ Khanmohamadi, 'Durendal', p. 326.

⁶² Khanmohamadi, 'Durendal', p. 325.

‘E! Durendal, cum es clere e blanche!
Cuntre soleill si luis e si reflambes!
Carles esteit es vals de Morïane,
quant Deus del cel li mandat par sun angle
qu’il te dunast a un cunte cataignie;
dunc la me ceinst li gentilz reis, li magnes. (*Roland*, MS O, lines 2316-21)

‘Hé! Durendart, com iestes ampiriee!
Des icele ore que vos oi conquestee,
N’en feri home vie an eüst portee,
Et orandroit vos voi si acoitee!’
[...]
‘Hé! Durendart, à tort vos ai blasmee.
N’iert pas merveille s’estïez raüsee.’ (*Aspremont*, lines 5299-313)

‘E! Durendal, cum es bele e seintisme!
En l’oriét punt asez i ad reliques: (*Roland*, MS O, lines 2344-45)

Khanmohamadi also notes this figural quality, saying that:

it is actually Aumon’s blade that will conquer France unless despoiled of its owner (hence, flashing forward to the *Chanson de Roland*, Roland’s attempt to destroy the blade rather than let it return to Saracen hands). [...] So long as Charles wears his sacred helmet, he is under its protection; so long as Durendal is wielded, its wielder is victorious—these objects have laws and powers of their own.⁶³

The echoes between the two (even if inverted) are clear, and thus the only problem with Khanmohamadi’s interpretation, and indeed traditional views of Durendal as the ultimate weapon, is that neither Eaumont nor Roland are actually victorious. They both die similarly violent deaths after causing, by their excesses of pride, the deaths of many of their friends (and not just fellow soldiers—friends that were bound to them by more than just rank.) In this sense, both Durendal and the *oliphant* are harbingers of doom as much as they are sacred examples of ideal knighthood and translations of power; a curse as much as a destiny. This tracks with

⁶³ Khanmohamadi, ‘Durendal’, p. 324.

Vallecalle's assertion that, 'dans la conception du monde illustrée par *Aspremont*, la guerre ne peut que se perpétuer,' and that the 'ideal order' is both the necessary goal of the action, and never fully achievable.⁶⁴ The loss of Durendal and Eaumont's death thus prefigure the ultimate hopelessness of Roland's future situation—to carry Durendal is to carry the perfect symbol of a death that cannot be avoided. Furthermore, if Durendal, as 'Aumon's blade that will conquer France' cannot be destroyed, and indeed Roland fails to break it against the stone, then is France still conquerable by whoever should take up the blade in future? This opens a dual possibility resulting from the death of Roland at Roncevaux, read as part of a figural fulfillment: France is perpetually threatened and awaits the second coming of her future, perfect hero. As such, we might read Durendal as a sort of *quondam et futurus* symbol of a mythical hero who is always what is needed, but who is nonetheless always doomed.

Vivien and the promise of death

Although scholars have long debated the role of Vivien as an analog for Roland in the *Chanson de Guillaume*, or the later *Aliscans*, the information added by the *Enfances Vivien* and the *Chevalerie Vivien*, serve to further complicate the debate. There is some disagreement over the order in which the two youthful narratives were composed, but Suard asserts that they must have been written during the same period around the end of the twelfth, or beginning of the thirteenth century, and, in any case, both follow the *Guillaume* and *Aliscans* (for which they are a more direct set of prequels) by a good margin.⁶⁵ Of the *Chevalerie Vivien*, Suard says:

Ce poème relativement court, où les références au *Roland* sont fréquentes, rassemble, en les poussant jusqu'à l'hyperbole, les vertus héroïques de Vivien et conduit le personnage depuis son adoubement jusqu'à la bataille qui ouvre *Aliscans*. Il explique les causes de l'invasion sarrasine et fait de Vivien un personnage démesuré, promis à un martyre délibérément recherché.⁶⁶

It is within this sought out martyrdom so present in both the *Enfances Vivien* and his *Chevalerie* that a figural reading is most productive. Both narratives make it quite clear that the events take place well after Roland's death at Roncevaux, and yet, the potential for Vivien's own demise to

⁶⁴ Vallecalle, p. 7.

⁶⁵ Suard, *Guide*, p. 140.

⁶⁶ Suard, *Guide*, p. 141.

present an allegorical representation of Roland's is very real. If Roland exists at the pinnacle of the epic world that the *enfances* seek to expand, then it stands to reason that later heroes will seek to reach that height, even to their own destruction.

Insofar as Vivien engages in 'un martyre délibérément recherché', his death is allegory for Roland's death at Roncevaux—in both the *Enfances* and *Chevalerie Vivien*, death is a quest fervently undertaken motivated by a desire to achieve knightly perfection through Christian vengeance. It is, of course, known from the earliest *laissez* of both the *Guillaume* and *Aliscans* that Vivien will not survive the battle—his death, now promised even earlier in life, takes place before our eyes, and also in the past. This disaster as promised by the *Enfances* and *Chevalerie Vivien* adds a transcendental layer, in which this death is prefigured even from childhood and may present an allegory for the death of all heroes (and ultimately of all ideal knighthood in the epic world). Following the logic that the death of Roland is the death of an ideal that will never again exist, and which can never be recuperated, the strong links the *enfances* narratives create between their present moment and the ultimate disaster at Roncevaux creates a point of permanent comparison whose perfection cannot (and perhaps should not) be achieved. As such, Roncevaux signals the doom of the epic world broadly, with Vivien not only unable to escape the fallout, but willing to drive forward into it. The opening *laissez* of his *enfance* place Vivien squarely in his own *geste* (the Narbonnais, through Aymeri) and within the grand timeline of the 'vieles gestes anciennes'; gesturing both to the great families that make up the world and to the great deeds the genre recounts.

Plet vos oïr chançon de grant mesure
des vieles gestes anciennes qui furent?
Ele est mout bone, li vers sont par nature
et bien taillié a droit et a mesure.
De Vivien d'Aleschans en est une
et de son pere dan Garin d'Anseüne,
qui maint barnage ot en lui par nature,
et de la geste Aymeri est issue. (*Enfances Vivien*, lines 1-8)⁶⁷

The opening *laisse* goes on to draw a direct line between this song and the *Roland* tradition—even in this song about Vivien's youth, Roland's ghost looms. These brief lines also serve as a

⁶⁷ *Les Enfances Vivien*, ed by. Magali Rouquier (Geneva: Droz, 1997)

reminder (in case anyone forgot) of the central catastrophe from which Vivien will later derive much of his motivation.

Oï avez d'Olivier le baron
et de Rollant et del noble Charlon,
des .XII. pers que traï Guenelon
en Roncevaux au roi Marsilion:
les vendi Guenes, cui Damedé mal dont,
puis en ot il si mortel guierdon,
com vos orroiz es vers de la chançon,
qu'il en pendi a guise de larron:
si doit on fere de traïtor felon. (*Enfances Vivien*, lines 9-17)

The *Enfances Vivien* makes the motivating desires of his younger iteration abundantly clear. Furthermore, it is perhaps not a stretch to ascribe his recklessness later on to a desire to replicate Roland's sacrifice—Vivien's quest, the height of his desire, is to avenge Roland and Olivier. In the middle of a combat, he says:

Fuiez de ci, pute gent esgaree!
Mal soit des chiens qui tant en engendrèrent
et des putains qui tant en chaenlerent!
Lessiez seoir le barnage mon pere
et la grant gent qu'il ont ci amenee,
la flor de France, une terre loee,
que, par l'apostre qu'an quiert en Noiron Pré,
se je vif tant que je ceigne m'espee,
la mort Rollant vos sera demandee
et la grant perte qu'an France en est remese. (*Enfances Vivien*, lines 413-23)

Far from being an isolated declamation, this desire for revenge, to take up violence on behalf of Roland and Olivier, is repeated throughout the poem:

Bien le verrez ainz le jor de .VII. anz,
se vos vivez par le mien esciant,
que lor vendrai Olivier et Rollant,
les .XII. pers hardiz et combatant

et les .XX.M. c'ocistrent mescreant. (*Enfances Vivien*, lines 964-68)

Vivien is thus not merely an analog for Roland, but his willful embodiment —Vivien is Roland's figural echo, the doomed shadow and *héritier* of his *geste*. In taking on a Roland-like cursus, Vivien essentially participates in the prefiguration of his own death, which will pass from promise to fact, from figurative to real. This is akin to how Auerbach describes the position of Dante's Virgil as *figura*, representing neither his real self, nor something completely imagined: 'Virgil is not an allegory of an attribute, virtue, capacity, power, or historical institution. He is neither reason nor poetry nor the Empire. He is Virgil himself.'⁶⁸ Vivien is similarly not just allegory for aspects of Roland's personality, or for his capacity for perfection, he is both himself and the logical continuation of an epic heroic lineage that starts and ends with Roland's sacrifice; a *geste* in the blood, and of blood. He is also a shadow of the past, cast forth on the future:

With Dante, unlike modern poets, the more fully the figure is interpreted and the more closely it is integrated with the eternal plan of salvation, the more real it becomes. And for him, unlike the ancient poets of the underworld, who represented earthly life as real and the life after death as shadow, for him the other world is the true reality, while this world is only *umbra futurorum*—though indeed the *umbra* is the prefiguration of the transcendent reality and must recur fully in it.⁶⁹

Vivien's cursus, in which he promises to avenge Roland and thus to die, presents one possible reading of the *umbra futurorum* as future perfection—all will have happened in the future from whence we are watching, as known from the past where we are observing its prefiguration. The transcendent reality of Roland's death is that it must recur and yet, in its singularity, cannot; the same is true for his perfection, which allows him to carry Durendal. In this case, Auerbach's *umbra* is much like Lubac's *mysteria*—shades of the unknown mirrored or projected into a time yet to come, but that is always present, always becoming. This is particularly true insofar as inscribing death into the epic which is then read, or performed, is akin to bringing the shades of another world into the living world of audiences through time. The *umbra futurorum*, the *mysteria futura*, is thus a contemplation of epic, or mythic death as it relates to a world whose realities are constantly shifting, and for which the epic heroes are figures of both the possible and

⁶⁸ Auerbach, p. 70.

⁶⁹ Auerbach, p. 71.

the impossible at once. For Vivien, it is perhaps that he quite literally promises his own martyrdom that heightens the stakes of the death that is always *futura*:

Ceu fut a Pasques que l'on dist en esté;
Guillelmes ot Vivien adoubé,
Le fil Garin d'Anseüne sor mer;
Por soe amor en ot mil conreez.
Dist Vivïens: 'Beas oncles, entendez.
Par tes covens m'espee me donez
Que je promet, voiant vos Damedé,
Le glorïous, le roi de majesté,
Voiant Guibor qui m'a nour soëf,
Et voiant vos et voiant ces pers,
Que ne fuirai en tretot mon aé
Por Sarrazin, por Turc, ne por Escler,
Puis que j'avrai mon hauberc endossez
Et que j'avrai mon elme el cheif fermé,
Ja ne serai de Tours apresez
Que je fuie por home qui soit nez.' (*Chevalerie Vivien*, lines 6-22)⁷⁰

Guillaume, viewing this intractable promise as not within the bounds of what is required of knights (and therefore dangerously beyond reason) attempts to talk his nephew out of formalizing it. Vivien refuses, instead opting to verbalize the promise a second time:

'Oncle Guillelmes', dist Vivïens li frans,
'Par tel covent me seigneur hui cest brant
Que ne fuirai por Tours ne Persant
Plen pei de terre, pr le mein esiant.'

A Deu en tent les mains tot maintenant. (*Chevalerie Vivien*, lines 34-38)

The audience and poet knowing full well the outcomes of both the *Chanson de Guillaume* and *Aliscans*, understand the gravity of this promise and its outcomes (*cela a été*, and *cela sera*). An audience combining knowledge of the outcomes of the earlier poems with this promise to never

⁷⁰ *La Chevalerie Vivien*, ed. by Duncan McMillan, 2 vols (Aix-en-Provence: Centre Universitaire d'Études et de Recherches Médiévales d'Aix, 1997). Duncan McMillan died before finishing his edition—his work was reviewed and corrected by Jean-Charles Herbin, Jean-Pierre Martin, and François Suard ahead of publication.

flee a pagan living with his assertions in the *enfances* that ‘lor vendrai Olivier et Rollant’ and the Twelve Peers, can see the full scope of the quest towards death—the *umbra* of a future death. Indeed, to follow the letter of Roland’s example is to die, every time. Comparisons between Roland’s and Vivien’s suffering are made even beyond the texts where either knight appears. This notable example *Chanson d’Antioche*, shown for a slightly different purpose earlier in this thesis, is worth raising again as reminder of how imbricated representations of these characters are across the genre:

Cil qui a pié remest molt fu grains et dolans,
 Son escu triers son dos totes voies soufrans.
 Les grans paines que ot Oliviers ne Rollans
 Ne celes que souffri Iaumons ne Agolans
 Ne li bers Vivïens quant fu en Aliscans
 Ne valut a cestui le pris de trois bezans. (*Antioche*, lines 8612-17)

Curiously, the *Antioche* poet also draws a line between Roland’s suffering and that of his mirror-enemy Eaumont (and Eaumont’s father, Agolant, who lost his son and his own life). The echoes between characters and their narrative arcs are thus well established, though the *Enfances* and *Chevalerie Vivien* do serve to make the linkage already established between the two deaths more explicit; each heroic death is a figure of and for another. The presence of both Vivien (often put forward as an analog for Roland) alongside Eaumont and Agolant (seen briefly in *Mainet*) was not raised earlier but is particularly prescient as we move towards the next sense of scripture.

Anagogia—Paradise Lost

Perhaps the most curious and powerful position the youth narratives play within the *chansons de geste* as a genre, and within the context of an exegetical reading is the one they establish with regard to traditional understandings of anagogy. At its very basic level, anagogy is also figural, prophetic, but, unlike allegory in the context of the *chansons de geste*, it points not towards the known, but towards the end, yet unknown. Lubac defines it, in the first instance, as such: ‘Le troisième et dernier avènement est réservé pour la “consommation du siècle”, quand le Christ apparaîtra dans sa gloire et viendra chercher les siens pour les emmener avec lui: tel est l’objet

de l'analogie.⁷¹ As I suggested before, Roland's death at Roncevaux is the single organizing catastrophe of the *gestes* as a whole; read anagogically, it is also the focal point of a desire for recuperation and retribution that drives the ideology behind epic heroism and its world. If the Crucifixion forms the central sacrifice around which the Bible constructs its promise of the possibility for redemption, then Roland's sacrifice must, similarly, be redeemed—this is perhaps one of the reasons for which references to Roland and to Roncevaux are so present across the *gestes*, and fundamental to the reasoning behind the addition of the youth narratives to the wider corpus. If Roland's death seems (before the advent of the *enfances* as a subgenre) to be an avoidable disaster, the addition of a further past to a figural relay transforms tragedy into Grand Design. For example, in creating a figural mirroring between Roland and Eaumont, the *Chanson d'Aspremont* removes any sense of accident from Roland's death at Roncevaux and, instead, allows it to point outwards towards other narratives, other deaths, other losses. Suard notes that *Aspremont* combines elements of the crusader epic, with elements of the epic of revolt.⁷² This is surely not accidental, but part of a wider project of tying the epic narratives together across time thematically, as well as genealogically.

As for the Crucifixion of Christ, Roland's death, read anagogically, is the necessary sacrifice that orients the epic world. Just as Christ's sacrifice and resurrection creates the possibility of man's eventual ascent to Heaven, Roland's sacrifice is necessary because it opens the possibility of perfection to come. His death at Roncevaux guarantees Roland's place in a divine beyond and conveys this possibility on future sacrifices, even if steeped in extreme violence. Indeed, this guarantee of the purgation of sin through violence is part of the motivating promise of participation in Crusade, which as previous scholars have shown, is also part of the project of certain cycles within the *chansons de geste* as a genre. Far from being propaganda *pur et dur*, however, this promise of redemption, or of future perfection is, perhaps, at its core, a hopeful expression emerging from the *geste's* violence:

Plus concrètement, ce sera le sens qui fait voir, dans les réalités de la Jérusalem terrestre, les réalités de la Jérusalem céleste [...] Or ces réalités, quoiqu'elles ne soient plus choses du temps, sont néanmoins, pour nous qui cheminons et peinons dans le temps, choses encore à venir, désirées et espérées.⁷³

⁷¹ Lubac, II, p. 621.

⁷² Suard, 'Introduction to *Aspremont*', p. 11.

⁷³ Lubac, II, p. 623.

As such, the *enfances*, and the anagogic paradigm they help to establish between Roland's death and the loss of all heroism, presents a confrontation with the earthly realities of violence and the promise of a new, heavenly reality that might also be the result of such violence. This promise then allows audiences, in a limited sense, to recuperate Roland's catastrophic death and to code it differently, as the sacrifice that will lead those who follow his example to a heavenly reward. It also, as I will later note in more detail, points towards the failings of such violence in that such a death can never be truly recuperated. The project of the *gestes*, in part through the *enfances*, is to make sense of catastrophe; ultimately they are about the ardent search for meaning in violence. This drive to seek out, or to search is, as Lubac notes, one of the hallmarks of anagogy in the Christian context:

Si haut que mène donc l'anagogie, toujours elle laisse à chercher et toujours avec plus d'ardeur, parce qu'elle ne découvre pas encore la Face de Dieu. C'est là chez saint Augustin, comme chez tous nos médiévaux qui le suivent, le principe moteur de l'intelligence de la foi qui n'est autre à ses yeux que l'intelligence des Écritures: *Quaerite faciem ejus semper*. [*Always seek his face.*]⁷⁴

The *enfances* tying together the epic cycles and bloodlines is a means to seek Roland's face in the promise of an ideal yet to come—the second coming, in a manner, of the epic heroes. This is, however, doomed in the sense that, just as for Christic interpretations of biblical history, 'Tout se produit désormais, tout se prolonge et se boucle au dedans d'une même mystère: *Christus substantialiter semper idem; Christus seipsum significat*.' [*Christ is always substantially the same; Christ signifies himself.*]⁷⁵ Roland is the embodiment of his own sacrifice, which cannot be translated into any other—*Rolandus seipsum significat*. By entering a series of new heroes into the mythic space of the *chansons de geste*, poets attempt to recuperate the primary loss that has thus far proven intractable, but to no avail—by the end of epic composition, the very world of epic will have been lost. Roland will have been lost, Vivien will have been lost, Toulouse will have been lost, Jerusalem, hard won in its eponymous *chanson*, will have been lost. And yet, there remains a small glimmer of hope in the open-endedness of epic, and indeed, in the rhizomatic means by which the world expands; because they are composed out of order, audiences are able to simultaneously look forward and backwards across and between texts,

⁷⁴ Lubac, II, p. 639.

⁷⁵ Lubac, II, p. 650.

remembering, but also forgetting. In attempting to create a sense of purpose, or destiny for the epic's losses, they create a sense that audiences, no matter where they are situated in time are waiting for *that which is perfect to come*.⁷⁶ Despite the failure of the epic bloodlines, the loss of its most perfect heroes, the eventual loss of its sacred spaces, the *chansons de geste* nonetheless also imply the eternal hope for the return of the ideal, the recuperation of the purported paradise of the epic world. Despite this promise, this hope, as for biblical anagogy, the world of the *chansons de geste* is one trending towards apocalypse for which the *enfances* and *chevaleries*, by concretizing the figural signifying *relève*, provide the guarantee. This is perhaps the crux of the *mysteria futura*—the mystery is perpetually 'to come' because the epic world is a mythic space within which there can be no resolution.

⁷⁶ Lubac, II, p. 626.

Old and New Worlds: Ending the Chansons de geste

If an exegetical reading of the *chansons de geste* seems like a closed system, the fourth sense of scripture allows for an interpretation that branches out through historical time, through the needs and desires of audiences separated by centuries: *moralis quid agas*. Ryan McDermott has argued (through *Piers Plowman*) that exegesis was so central to medieval ways of understanding that poetry and scripture must have been read similarly, if to very different ends:

In terms of history, tropological theory enabled theologians and exegetes to articulate how readers in the present could re-present and collaborate with the distant persons, things, and events to which the text of the scripture granted access. In terms of the present, tropological reading of the scripture asks what a passage means for us, today. Tropological reading overlays the text with the reader's array of ethical options: it transposes the text's *Sitz im Leben* from its original lifeworld to the present life.¹

The 'transposability', or perhaps, transferability of meaning through the *chansons de geste* constitutes a sort of tropology, which allows audiences through time to extract the lessons that seem most relevant to them (the *Sitz im Leben*, or setting in life, of the *gestes*). This is where the link between heroes of the Old French and Old Occitan epics and Nora's *lieux de mémoire* is clearest, and most potent. The *moralis* that audiences might extract—that which should be done—depends on the world into which the lesson is transposed. The behavior of the heroes and how that behavior is received is key to understanding how the moral of the story shifts through time, even into the present day. Thinking through the epic heroes as *lieux de mémoire* reveals how repetition of their exploits across historical time in the form of performance, manuscript creation and transmission, art objects, etc., tells a story about the *moralis* that brought each iteration into being—a *lieu de mémoire* is, in its way, the moral of the story made perpetually present, even as it calls from the past.

That said, the word *lieu* more generally calls to mind places, or monuments. Even in this thesis, the battlefields at Roncevaux and Larchamp loom large, as do monuments—the

¹ Ryan McDermott, *Tropologies: Ethics and Invention in England, c.1350-1600* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), p. 3.

statue of *Charlemagne et ses leudes* or the *Vie de Charlemagne* at Chartres—and cities like Toulouse. Like the examples in this thesis, Nora's *lieux* are diverse: from the Panthéon in Paris, the cave at Lascaux, the Vendée (as *région-mémoire*), the café La Coupole, to works of art or literature (*La Marseillaise* or the *Grandes chroniques de France*), to concepts (*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*) and symbols (*les trois couleurs*). Notably, André Burguière's essay calls genealogy itself a *lieu de mémoire*—apt, given one of the many meanings of *geste*. Many of the *lieux* have deep roots in the medieval world and many are tied to historical people. The two most relevant for my reading of the *chansons de geste* are Jeanne d'Arc and Charlemagne (as discussed by Michel Winock and Robert Morrissey, respectively). These two very historical characters have seen immense variability in their representations and have had wide-ranging impacts on popular culture and politics over the course of centuries. And, as I claim for the epic heroes, both Charles and Jeanne have been made and remade through time according to community needs. The very nature of such *lieux* is to be rooted in the layered temporalities of historical, narrative, and affective time that, as Nora says, render the immaterial into material form, simultaneously stopping time and allowing their meanings to transform as they reverberate through successive audiences.² This is all compounded by the fact that, like Nancy's *relève dialectique* 'tous les lieux de mémoire sont des objets en abîme'.³ In this way, each *lieu de mémoire*, whether physical object, place, concept, or person is necessarily allegorical in that it stands for something outside of the 'text', for something beyond itself. This was palpable when, Charlie Josephine's *I, Joan* opened at London's Globe Theatre in August of 2022, to much controversy.⁴ Josephine's play opens with a monologue claiming the divinity of trans and nonbinary bodies and their Joan of Arc, divinely inspired and resolute, is a perfect example of how historical figures can be made to speak to contemporary problems and desires. Foremost among these for Josephine's Joan is the fear that the truth they embody is destined to be fatal, and that it will be obfuscated by those with the power to record it:

Men *will* write about me! (*Suddenly rooted, granite truth, fast and furious.*) And no doubt incorrectly. So comfortable writing as men, about men, for other men, these men will

² Nora, 'Mémoire', p. xxxv.

³ Nora, 'Mémoire', p. xxxvii.

⁴ Anya Ryan, 'I, Joan review – non-binary Joan of Arc proves a rousing protest piece', *Guardian*, 2 September 2022 < <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2022/sep/02/i-joan-review-globe-theatre-london-non-binary> > [accessed 13 November 2022].

cringe and frown at the letters of my name. Grumble their way through scribing my success. Call it a fluke. Call me a freak. Stamp on my grave. For make no mistake I *will* be killed for my courage.⁵

Insofar as the way lives and deeds, as *lieux de mémoire*, are remembered is at once fluid and intractable, this resonates quite strongly with Roland's fear that he might be the subject of bad songs if he lacks courage on the battlefield at Roncevaux, or Archbishop Turpin's exhortation to the remaining men that they fight in such a way 'Que nul prozdom malvaisement n'en chant'.⁶ Through this, it remains true that although where and when symbols are unveiled or mobilized can be controlled, how they will be received at any given moment, by any given group, cannot. A Joan *en abîme* is a medieval allegory for very modern concerns—because the historical Jeanne's life was spoken for her (and not necessarily *by* her) through trial records and letters, Josephine's Joan tells us *quid agas*, now, in the open air of Shakespeare's Globe.

Josephine, Winock, and Morrissey's visions of Jeanne and Charlemagne are a good example of how a *lieu de mémoire* might be at once historical, linked to people and places, but also ideological, community forming, and creative. Perhaps more importantly, as symbols, they exist at once within and beyond the capacity to control. Charlemagne, for example, can be at once 'conquérant, législateur, chrétien pieux' and the totem of the so called 'Charlemagne Division' of the Nazi SS, which recruited volunteers from across Vichy France.⁷ Jeanne, in her own right, 's'est ainsi fractionnée tout au long du XIXe siècle autour de trois représentations majeures, ou successives ou simultanées: l'image de la sainte catholique, l'incarnation du peuple patriote et la patronne du nationalisme exclusif.'⁸ This variability also holds for Roland, and, indeed, many of the other epic heroes both conceptually and in practice. The 'truth' of historical reality seems less important to Jeanne and Charlemagne as *lieux* than the multiple layers of meaning they have acquired over the centuries, and this is equally true of Roland, Guillaume, Vivien, etc. insofar as the ideologies each might communicate are malleable. This is possible because cultural memory resonates differently at different times, for different people, and in

⁵ Charlie Josephine, *I, Joan* (London: Samuel French, 2022), II. 4, p. 57.

⁶ *Roland*, MS O, lines 1466, 1474. Roland's line reads: 'male chançon n'en deit estre cantee'.

⁷ Robert Morrissey, 'Charlemagne', in *Les Lieux de mémoire: II Les France 3. De l'archive à l'emblème*, ed. by Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1992) pp. 630-73 (pp. 644, 670); Morrissey, *Empereur*, p. 414; See also: Tony Le Tissier, *SS Charlemagne: The 33rd Waffen-Grenadier Division of the SS* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2010).

⁸ Michel Winock, 'Jeanne d'Arc', in *Les Lieux de mémoire: II Les France 3. De l'archive à l'emblème*, ed. by Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), pp. 672-733 (p. 694).

different places. In this way, the *lieux de mémoire*, and the epic heroes within that framework should also be read as *morales*, or *figurae* whose meanings are temporally dependent:

Thus the figures are not only tentative; they are also the tentative form of something eternal and timeless; they point not only to the concrete future, but also to something that always has been and always will be; they point to something which is in need of interpretation, which will indeed be fulfilled in the concrete future, but which is at all times present, fulfilled in God's providence, which knows no difference of time.⁹

As *figurae*, *lieux de mémoire* stand for things beyond themselves, and the 'pointing', they do is multidirectional; telling a story about the past, to be sure, but just as relevant to visions of the present and future. A symbol is, in this way, like the axle of a wheel whose spokes radiate outwards, and whose directions each experience constant (but cyclical) change as they rotate through space and time. Auerbach's primary example of the *figura* informed by history is that of the poet Virgil, repurposed and reimagined in Dante's *Divina Commedia*. According to Auerbach, the historical Virgil is only himself and thus free of any allegorical baggage, whereas Dante's Virgil is at once historical and figural: 'the historical Virgil is only a *figura* of the fulfilled truth that the poem reveals, and this fulfillment is more real, more significant than the *figura*.'¹⁰ The epic heroes as a category similarly allow for two different readings of the *lieux de mémoire* and quasi-historical *figurae*. In the first instance, they are a trope that allows connections to be drawn between exploits and behavior across the genre, allowing the world of epic to be ordered, reflecting the attempts to order the historical world, and establish the broader *littera* from which meaning, *morales* can be extracted. As individuals, rather like Dante's Virgil, they are *charnières* around whom cults of personality and memory are established, appearing in the physical landscape as 'monuments' in the form of statues, monasteries, pilgrimage sites, etc. They are similarly present (as for Jeanne d'Arc) in the socio-cultural landscape, or political landscape as allegorical symbols that can be mobilized for a wide range of ideologies, all while representing the ongoing questioning, in their own era and beyond, of what the true nature and purpose of such heroes are. The marks they leave on the cultures around them, in their proliferation through cycles of epic poems and later adaptations (in textual and visual art) are the

⁹ Auerbach, p. 59.

¹⁰ Auerbach, p. 71.

fulfilment of cultural truths, which, as Auerbach suggests, may be more important than any historical truth in and of itself.

The work of this thesis has been to parse the ways in which the communities that touch up against the Old French and Old Occitan *chansons de geste* are assessing themselves by creating and expanding not only a mythological system, but a ‘myth’ of epic *tel quel*. As for Lubac’s rendering of exegesis in the Middle Ages, in building a world the worldview is revealed. The imbrication of themes of martyrdom, monasticism, sacrifice, and holy war all laid alongside extreme violence and death is telling. Indeed, rather than becoming more ordered as the political situation in France and Occitania might be seeming to stabilize, the *enfances* and *chevaleries* appear to introduce more elements of *démésure* into the epic narratives, undermining rather than supporting the image of a ‘perfect’ hero. This attempt to contend with a world that seems increasingly imperfect is entirely in line with what the Occitan epics appear to be doing with Roland in the Occitan *Roland a Saragosse* and *Roncesvalles*, as well as in the *Canso de la crozada* (where both Raoul and Guillaume are similarly presented as examples of imperfect Frenchness, and not of heroic *paratge* in the Southern style).

As I suggested in my introduction, and as the chapters that followed have shown, viewing the *chansons de geste* and their heroes as anachronic—as *lieux de mémoire*—allows for a reframing, or reconsideration of how they work through time. Indeed, the assumption that the *chansons de geste* celebrate the world around them unproblematically is bound up in the way a *lieu de mémoire* remakes meaning as it moves through time. The epic poems are, without doubt, stories of great deeds, great and noble families, stories that reach towards ideal representations of the Christian warrior elite. It is also clear that none of this is undertaken without nuance. As such, I contend that any purely laudatory view of the *chansons de geste* or their heroes is necessarily faulty, and that unpacking the cracks in this logic must extend far beyond acknowledging a small number of examples of bad behavior and instead implicate the entire world, the entire society within which the heroes operate. I would not be the first person to suggest that the worldview of the *chansons de geste* is complex, far from it. Cowell, for one, has shown that the epic hero is at once exemplar and other; inside and outside of a world built on an economy of violence:

But the listener to the epic must also use the trope as a point of reflection, and recognize that he must himself stop short of the apotheosis of the hero, and work hard to stop others

short as well. The incredible social holocausts that mark the end of so many epics, with their impossible tens of thousands of deaths, as well as the extreme fates of the hero—whether assumption to Heaven in the arms of angels or the most brutal condemnations and deaths—serve to remind the listener that the world depicted is a world pushed to its speculative limits, and not a world to which the listener can—or would wish to—attain.¹¹ Cowell is right to highlight the extremes present in *chansons de geste* and to call this a world ‘pushed to its speculative limits’. At the most basic level it is these extremes that make the epic poems entertaining. Deeper down, the act testing of norms and limits (however speculative), and of doing so repeatedly, should provoke, as Cowell also notes, a larger-scale cultural reflection on the real-world implication of these limits as such. For Bloch, the threat of social and political unrest is reflected in the increasing duration and dimension of war, and in the disordered violence depicted in the epics as the genre progressed.¹² The conflicts against foreign enemies, or invading armies, that mark the cycles of the King, and of Guillaume d’Orange, and the Crusade Cycle, become ‘internecine conflicts’ in the Rebel Barons Cycle, marking ‘a shift in the locus of violence toward its geopolitical center’.¹³ The speculative limits of epic violence thus creep closer and closer to home, even as they remain firmly in an imaginary world.

One of the reasons that it made sense to end this thesis with a chapter on the exegetical impulses of the *chansons de geste* is that the *Biblia Vulgata* itself ends with Apocalypse—a book of revelation, prophecy, and disaster. I have argued that anagogy plays a significant role in how we should understand the impact of Roland’s death on the epic world as a system hurtling towards its ideological limit—a limit that is inherently apocalyptic. Attempts to contend with the meaning behind violent catastrophes were not unique to the *chansons de geste*, but rather part of a larger cultural movement that saw medieval people increasingly interested in John’s Apocalypse and its real-world resonances.¹⁴ Along these lines, Rubenstein has shown that the sense of living through an apocalypse was central to many accounts of the First Crusade—and that the place of apocalypse as a concept within historical understandings of the world is necessarily fraught: ‘Apocalypses and history are, from any perspective, uncomfortable

¹¹ Cowell, p. 114.

¹² Bloch, pp. 79-81.

¹³ Bloch, p. 79.

¹⁴ Julia Eva Wannemacher, ‘The Interpretation of John’s Apocalypse in the Medieval Period’, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Book of Revelation*, ed. by Craig R. Koester (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 414-28 (p. 414).

bedfellows. History is the study of what happened, and the Apocalypse, by definition, hasn't happened. At least not yet. When it does, there will be no more history.'¹⁵ The 'already-not-yet kingdom'¹⁶ promised by or resulting from apocalypse, and the relationship of these apocalyptic events to something resembling 'history' (or, at least, seated within a historical logic) resonate strongly with the difficult, imbricated and interlocking temporalities of the *chansons de geste*. Indeed, the narratology of the *gestes* follows, as I have shown, an exegetical logic that is also eschatological—trending towards a theory of the end, even as it writes its own beginnings. The 'already-not-yetness' of Apocalypse is thus also punctal—the world has ended and the world is going to end. In being both promised and unaccomplished, Apocalypse, and the apocalyptic limits of the *chansons de geste* are deeply rooted in the time of each telling and yet entirely atemporal; both in and out of time.

As Cowell shows throughout *The Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*, the *chansons de geste* vacillate between presenting a world that is celebrated and desired but, ultimately, not wanted. The strongest and most convincing examples of this seeming dichotomy are the genre's heroes for whom violent gratuity 'is not an act of resistance, but an act which is simultaneously a perfecting and a "going beyond"; the acts must be understood not as resistance, but as the extreme affirmation of a system which they nevertheless also potentially destroy'.¹⁷ It would not be unreasonable to draw a link between the personification of such troubled perfection in the form of a mounted warrior elite running rampant across the countryside and the bringers of Apocalypse's initial destructive power.¹⁸ Indeed, all arrive on horseback, bearing weapons (even if symbolic): Conquest, Bloodshed, Scarcity, and Death might just as well be analogs for both the hallmarks of epic and the ideological faults that bring about its end.¹⁹ That said, as a punctal space Apocalypse is an inbetween, transitional space between worldly disaster and access to the divine. Death, in this version of the end is not an end: 'Hæc dicit primus, et novissimus, qui fuit

¹⁵ Jay Rubenstein, *Armies of Heaven: The First Crusade and the Quest for Apocalypse* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), p. 318.

¹⁶ I borrow this excellent formulation from Elizabeth Phillips, 'Eschatology and Apocalyptic', in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Political Theology*, ed. by Craig Hovey and Elizabeth Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 274-95 (p. 276).

¹⁷ Cowell, p. 108.

¹⁸ As Haidu notes, the knight is 'transformed into a sign of potential and actualizable violence in the daily cavalcade through peasant spaces, a sign whose pragmatic effect would have been fear and terror', *Violence*, p. 52.

¹⁹ Commentaries on the various symbolism of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse fill volumes going back centuries. Other related options are War, Strife, Famine, and Pestilence, or variations thereon. In all cases, violence and lack are central to these symbols. See: Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation: Revised Edition* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), p. 140.

mortuus, et vivit [...] Qui habet aurem, audiat quid Spiritus dicat ecclesiis: Qui vicerit, non lædetur a morte secunda.²⁰ Apocalypse is both a catastrophe (that which is not survivable) and a promise of a different kind of survival. The *chansons de geste* are themselves similarly punctal—a place of collapse but also a locus of recuperability and promise (if only the future, perfect hero was to emerge).

In the context of the Old French and Old Occitan epics, the mythic space they create is therefore also an apocalyptic space, and this is as prescient for its heroes as it is for the battlefields and cities in which they operate. If John is given the vision of a New Jerusalem, descending from Heaven, the same might hold true, ideologically for the promise of Toulouse as a mythic space.²¹ An apocalyptic vision of the *chansons de geste* might yield a Roncevaux, a Jerusalem, or a Toulouse that are lost and yet always recuperable (even if, perhaps, the cost might be too high). Along these lines, the other promise the *gestes* present is that each ‘historical’ hero could be the next Roland, and thus the coming full circle his sacrifice. Rubenstein cites Ralph of Caen’s *Gesta Tancredi* (c. 1110s) in which he says of Hugh the Great and Robert of Flanders during the First Crusade: ‘You would have seen Roland and Oliver reborn, as you watched this count strike with his spear, and the other count with his sword.’²² Like John’s Apocalypse, however, the promise of a New Roland remains unfulfilled; he is dead and yet always coming.

Ultimately, given the way it all plays out, it seems clear that the epic poets and their medieval audiences could see, better than nineteenth-century scholars did, and better than we do, what the *chansons de geste* are doing. This is a world that must end, where the cost of perfection is too high, and which must therefore be passed through and beyond. A new, and different world must be allowed to emerge; one not of apocalypse, but of utopia. The myth that grew up around the epics when they were rediscovered in the nineteenth century—that the foundations of the French Republic were built on the backs of principled, stalwart warriors, or that the French nation might assert a singular, continuous lineage whose Enlightenment values

²⁰ Apocalypse 2.8-11: ‘These things saith the First and the Last, who was dead, and is alive [...] He, that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches: He that shall overcome, shall not be hurt by the second death.’

²¹ Apocalypse 21.2 reads: ‘Et ego Joannes vidi sanctam civitatem Jerusalem novam descendentem de caelo a Deo, paratam sicut sponsam ornatam viro suo.’ [And I John saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.]

²² Rubenstein, *Armies*, p. 119.

were rooted in a unified and unique national spirit reflected by Roland et. al.—is just that, a myth.

Whereas the questions that the *chansons de geste* raise seem irrecuperably past to modern audiences, they must have felt crushingly present to their closest historical audiences. Where we see the events and heroes they depict through centuries of recuperative tint, the disaster of their world must have been glaringly obvious to medieval people, and perhaps less appealing as a result (despite the undeniable entertainment value, the dark delight, of violence). Epic, as war poetry, as a poetry of violence, lives on different borders than other genres and pushes against a different set of needs; satisfies and disappoints in different ways. This is perhaps why romance takes a more utopic view, compared to the apocalyptic trend of the epics.²³ As Kay asserts, ‘the epic poem, by virtue of its generic associations, responds to the historical problems of social order and violence differently from the way romance texts do,’ and as such the poets and audiences of the epics also intervene differently in their culture than those of romance.²⁴ It is therefore a question of presenting alternative strategies to the anxieties that culture presents that gives rise to the different means by which these genres cope with and contend with violence, and its impact on the future. It is also a good explanation for, as Kay’s work shows, the historical overlap between the genres; how it is possible that both worldviews might at once differ fundamentally in their outlook, yet inform one another, and be enjoyed by overlapping publics. This is why, as Bloch contends, the *chanson de geste* ‘best captures and expresses the military aspirations of the feudal warrior aristocracy’ that is ‘is designed to encourage feats of prowess, adherence to a well-defined code of knightly honor, and strict loyalty to the global warrior group’ all whilst at once being ‘paradoxically, also the genre of war’s decline, a chronicle of its decreasing effectiveness as a tool for the resolution of human conflict’.²⁵ Epic, perhaps more than any other medieval genre, in its own time and now, occupies the borderline between what we want poetry to say, and what it does, revealing as much about our own natures and desires through time as it does about the poetry itself. This is how it is possible to build and delight in a world driven by death and ruin but disguised as the pinnacle of glory—decorations for the

²³ Boutet highlights ‘une modification profonde du rapport de l’homme au monde’ between the epic of Charlemagne and the romance of Arthur, on either side on the year 1200, p. 611. For more on romance as utopian see William Burgwinkle, ‘Utopia and Its Uses: Twelfth-Century Romance and History’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 36.3 (2006), 539-60.

²⁴ Kay, *Political Fictions*, p. 10.

²⁵ Bloch, p. 71.

funerary monuments of a world in full collapse. The poets, like Heaney's chorus, mediate you and the me and the it of it, between the gods' and human beings' sense of things.

And that's the borderline that poetry
Operates on too, always in between
What you would like to happen and what will—
Whether you like it or not.²⁶

²⁶ Heaney, p. 2.

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