Tant ai fet mal: Reflections on Violence in the Old French Cycle of Guillaume d'Orange

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In dedication to Dani and Luca for their love and support.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

1 **Chapter 1: Introduction 1**

2 **Chapter 2: Desirable Violence: Guillaume d'Orange, the Church and the State 18**

3 **Chapter 3: The *Chanson de Guillaume*: The Pleasure and Pain of War.. 57**

4 **Chapter 4: *Moniage Guillaume*: The Role of Violence and Sincerity in the Epic Poem 99**

5 **Chapter 5: The *Enfances Guillaume* as a Murderous Continuation: Reimagining an Epic Beginning...140**

6 **Chapter 6: Epilogue 181**

References 200

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This dissertation will look at violence in the light of the *Couronnement de Louis*, the *Prise d'Orange,* the *Charroi de Nîmes*, the *Chanson de Guillaume*, the *Moniage Guillaume,* and the *Enfances Guillaume* in order to show that the cycle of Guillaume d'Orange analyzes the hero's life, regret, religion and renown to elucidate how its characters deal with the constant violence of the literary knight's existence. The Cycle of Guillaume d'Orange is the largest subset of the *Garin de Monglane* cycle. It focuses primarily on the adventures of a fictionalized version of the real-life Guillaume de Gellone, or Saint Guillaume, founder of the Gellone Abbey in the eponymous Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert. Scholarship has often credited him as one of the most well-known heroes of the Middle Ages.[1] Connected to the *geste du roi* (Bodel vv. 7-8) by virtue of Guillaume working for Charlemagne and his son Louis, the *chansons de geste* of this cycle explore Guillaume's relationships with his liege lord – on occasion Charlemagne but most often the incompetent Louis. To this end, the Guillaume cycle often deals directly with questions of loyalty, territory, and feudalism. As expected from tales of chivalry, these themes are examined most often in the context of war and conquest – which manifests itself throughout the cycle as battles against the non-Christian Saracens.

[1] "Guillaume d'Orange est, après Charlemagne et Roland, le héros le plus célèbre de l'épopée médiévale." (Frappier 9)

True to the archetype of the medieval warrior, the fictional Guillaume is often impetuous, quick to anger, and immensely powerful. However, the *chansons de geste* of which he is the main protagonist hint at an unexpected reflective side within this hulking man-child. As the cycle continues and as Guillaume ages, he will prove to be more complicated than his initial appearances would imply. This is likewise the case for the *chanson de geste* as a genre. While the medieval French epic will sometimes depict a crazed, violent warrior class there exist a large number of texts that hint at an introspection that has long been ignored or discredited by scholarship. It is these lesser-explored viewpoints on violence that interest the following study.

Transmission of the *chansons de geste*

The *chansons de geste* of medieval France were first composed as early as the twelfth century with the majority of extant manuscripts dating from the thirteenth century or later. The events of all these epics are directly referenced in previous texts, save for the *Enfances Guillaume*, pointing to the existence of an oral tradition. Each of these texts is presented as a tale spoken aloud by a narrator to an audience. This further hints at the oral tradition of recounting the tales. What is more, there exists within the texts various references to extinct and extant manuscripts that reveal a longstanding history that predates any written sources. However, scholars are only able to work through the evidence present in the written manuscripts.[2] As such, the chapters of this dissertation will use the written text as the basis for analysis while

[2] Scholars believe that they were transmitted orally even into the manuscript age: Dominique Boutet, for example, believes that the very name of the texts gives us the necessary proof to make this claim: "La chanson de geste, comme son nom l'indique, est un texte chanté et non simplement lu ou récité" (7),

acknowledging the presence (or absence) of allusions to previous texts that can be inferred to have influenced these *chansons* whether or not they exist in an extant form.

The oral and written tradition led to an interconnected dialogue between texts and author(s). Any given *chanson de geste* from the Guillaume d'Orange cycle exists within a state of intertextuality[3] with its sibling texts – often this occurs whether they precede or succeed the texts' dating in the manuscript tradition. This means that intertextuality is a constant presence in the texts, as allusions to the other adventures of the cycle's protagonist abound. Philip Bennett summarizes this process with great clarity: "Toute chanson de geste subsistant dans un MS n'est que l'hypertexte d'une ou de plusieurs versions perdues, transmises par la tradition orale, ou consignées déjà dans des MSS perdus, dont on aperçoit l'existence soit dans les erreurs des versions actuelles soit dans des allusions qu'y font des chroniqueurs médiévaux" (Bennett 14). This constant interplay of references elucidates the importance of the cycle as a whole in the existence of any given *chanson*.[4]

The web of intertextual references is evident across epics as each *chanson* seeks to place itself within the literary past of "dolce France" (*Couronnement de Louis* v. 13). This process of recalling and predicting the events of the cycle hints at a knowledge of a narrative world that is constantly referred to and that exists within each text.[5] It is

[3] Defined by Gérard Genette as "a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts: that is to say, eidetically and typically as the actual presence of one text within another" (2).

[4] In fact, this sort of analytical approach has been historically important among scholars. See Jean Frappier's opinion on the role of references in the cycle of Guillaume: "Qu'on prenne n'importe quelle chanson du cycle, jamais on ne constatera son indépendance totale; toujours elle paraîtra englobée dans une légende plus vaste qu'elle ; aucun de nos poèmes n'a l'air d'un commencement absolu, même ceux qui peuvent passer pour les plus anciens, la *Chanson de Guillaume* ou le *Couronnement de Louis*" (64).

[5] This is a common interplay between past and present in the narratives of each *chanson de geste*: the text can present a current reality and a past story ("The Chanson de geste as a construction of memory" 138).

therefore the goal of the present study to take the cyclification of the epic into consideration when analyzing any given text, as each text works in unison with (and, on occasion, antagonistically against) the other texts.

In this way, it is important to understand and cross-compare the events and themes between *chansons*. This approach elucidates the analyses of this study as each chapter will reflect on the role of the text(s), and the themes analyzed therein, with Guillaume's cycle as a whole in order to give a sense of a narrative arc that starts from his youth and ends with his saintly death.

Violence as reflection

Violence in the medieval French epic is most often portrayed as a cycle of retaliation which focuses on the themes of fealty, manhood, and honor. It is often, with much disservice, explained away as a primitive, joyous violence, as illustrated in the scholarship of Jean-Charles Payen. In his analysis of violence within the *Chanson de Roland,* Payen refers to the French epic as depicting a genocide which is characterized by its joy for killing.[6] This joy is evident not only in the gusto with which knights undertake violence but also in the description of the world. Payen explains that the epic world is a "lieu d'un imaginaire démesuré, qui est une fête des sens. Car cet imaginaire est décrit de façon très concrète, et il arrive que le paysage se charge de couleurs: le sang vermeil déferle sur l'herbe verte (cette herbe qui est si volontiers associée à la mort dans la poésie universelle)" (ibid. 231). With this "fête des sens," the reader is shown the happiness that occurs simultaneously with the horrors of war.

[6] Something he describes as, "Le plaisir de tuer" ("Une Poétique du Génocide Joyeux" 229).

In regard to the epic's relationship with violence, Payen does generalize the approach to violence in all epics by saying that "L'épopée est par définition apologie de la violence. Plus encore, *elle est violence elle-même*, parce qu'elle prend parti, au nom d'un groupe, contre un autre groupe qu'elle condamne et voue à l'extermination" (227).[7] By categorizing all epics as violence personified, Payen furthers the already unjustly simplified view of the *chansons*. This idea will continue to permeate scholarship on the epic, whether explicitly cited or not, and is used by certain scholars to define a large portion – if not all – of the *chansons de geste*.

To his credit, Payen himself, after describing the epic in such broad terms, does acknowledge that there are other epics that show more remorse in regard to homicide. In fact, he cites, among others, two *chansons* from the Guillaume d'Orange Cycle, the *Moniage Guillaume* and the *Charroi de Nîmes*.[8] What is more, Payen had also released a lengthy study on repentance.[9] Unfortunately, this study is often trumped by his claims on the violent qualities of the epic, and so the joyous genocide has been taken as the norm by many scholars. By virtue of his previous scholarship and acknowledgment of remorse, Payen explicitly acknowledges the complex nature of violence and penitence within the chivalric world of the *chansons de geste*. Despite his other work, the influence of his description of the joyous genocide has taken a stronger hold on scholarship.

Part of the issue in seeing violence as continually joyous may lie in the fact that the typical character of the *chansons de geste* is a member of the warrior class. In this

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[7] Emphasis mine.
[8] "Qu'ils sont encore lointains, les remords de Guillaume d'Orange dans le *Charroi* ou dans le *Moniage*, et les scrupules de Galaad dans la *Queste*, à l'idée de commettre l'homicide même en état de légitime défense" ("Une Poétique du génocide joyeux" 230)
[9] In fact, *Le motif du repentir dans la littérature française médiévale* (1967) comes well before his "Une Poétique du génocide joyeux" (1979).

way, a large number of characters of the epic may fall into a stock category of warriors who regret nothing done in the name of renown. However, the main heroes are quite developed and nuanced. Guillaume, for one, will lament his violence in old age and he will seek penitence for his sins in the *Moniage Guillaume*.[10]

In fact, though scholarship has hinted at the ability of these character types to truthfully depict humanity, it bears repeating: the epic is full of character types, but each individual character is capable of deep exploration and insight into societal themes and concepts. As William Calin explains, the poet's ultimate goal is create a believable experience: "The medieval poets' need, unlike that of the modern novelist, is not to give universal significance to specific individual incidents and emotions but rather to incarnate the universal archetypes he already possesses into a believable human framework" (148). As such, it is clear that characters such as Guillaume have much more in common with those of later literary periods that history has deemed more "modern."[11]

Despite a variety of dismissive preconceptions, when closely analyzed, the entire main cycle recounting the *geste* of Guillaume d'Orange exhibits a remarkable and heretofore understudied reflection on violence. This reflection on violence arises in large part as a questioning of religious morality, warfare, and the impact of violence on one's quest for salvation. It will likewise present itself as a nuanced analysis of race, gender, and religion.

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[10] As early as 1906, W.W. Comfort acknowledges the difference between the character of Roland, who lives for violence, and that of Guillaume, who retains more humanity: "The heroes of the poems of this second period are painted from life. There is a satisfying quality of humanity about Raoul de Cambrai, Garin and Begon, Guillaume au court nez and Girart de Rossillon which is lacking in the older heroes" (308)

[11] This is something that is evident in scholarship from as early as the mid-nineteenth century. William Calin explains: "We are still dealing with clearly defined personalities within a symbolic framework, but these personalities now encompass tragic, romantic, and heroic literary modes at will and, in their own way, tend in the direction of the modern novel." (179)

Unlike other epic cycles, Guillaume's cycle explores the long and full life of its main protagonist. From childhood to old age, the audience is able to follow the character. This opposes the lives of many other epic French heroes who die in the midst of battle or as victims of reprisal. Roland, the most well-known hero of all the *chansons de geste*, for example, dies a passion-like death while leading Charlemagne's rearguard. Raoul de Cambrai, a rebel baron, dies in the middle of the eponymous *chanson de geste*. Lastly, Garin le Loherain and many of his relatives will die as a result of a decades-long blood feud. Guillaume, himself, escapes this fate by the grace of his historical counterpart's life. With his long life and nonviolent death assured, Guillaume will have much more time to reflect upon his life and his deeds. The task of recounting a life such as Guillaume's presents its authors with the opportunity to consider how, at different stages of one's life, one would feel about violence.

Displaying Emotions in the Medieval Fashion

It is worth noting that these simplistic views of character and violence are being rethought and re-envisioned in the last few years as scholars have begun incorporating a variety of new theoretical approaches to the epic. The genesis of this dissertation, thus, owes its theoretical approach to the work being done on emotionality, memory and violence from a variety of scholars.

While not often lauded for its psychological development, the *chanson de geste* has its own ways of depicting emotions and psychology: emotionality. Emotionality is the exteriorizing of emotions, the act of showing one's feelings through, among other reactions, gestures, actions, and facial expressions. This process is present in a variety of French medieval texts. Chapter 2 will go further in-depth on the topic; however, a brief overview of its importance is useful in demonstrating its ability to refute

statements of the French epic's simplistic and one-sided view of emotions and violence.

Grief is nothing new to the Middle Ages; both men and women cry at the loss of loved ones. Even Charlemagne cries and faints when he finds Roland's body (*Chanson de Roland* vv. 2879–2880). In fact, emotionality, particularly when shown through crying, will demonstrate how few differences exist in the expression of emotion between the epic and its counterpart, the romance. It will become clear that these two literatures represent and express emotion in similar ways when analyzing the physical expression of characters' feelings. It will be extrapolated, then, that a reader or audience member would have similar reactions to these two episodes from supposedly distinct genres.

When compared side by side, two moments of grief from the epic and the romance will exemplify the similarities. Starting with the romance example will give the clearest idea of similarity. In *Érec et Enide*, the first romance from the well-known Chrétien de Troyes, exteriority is as poignant will be depicted as poignantly as in the *chanson de geste*. When Énide believes Erec to be dead, she exclaims: "Ha ! fet ele, dolante Enyde, / De mon seignor sui omecide" (Erec et Enide vv. 4823-4).[12] To further emphasize to the audience the depth of her feelings, Enide even faints right before this announcement. In her grief and guilt, she commits another series of physical actions to exteriorize her overpowering emotions:

> […] sa dolor mie ne cele
>
> An haut s'escrie et tort ses poinz;
>
> De robe ne li remest poinz

[12] "Oh! said sad Enide, / 'I am the murderer of my husband'"

Devant le piz a dessirier;

Ses chevox prist a arachier

Et sa tandre face desire (Erec et Enide vv. 4607)[13]

Faced with the loss of her husband, she exteriorizes her emotions in multiple ways that make evident her grief. The mental imagery being developed becomes more heart-wrenching with each verse. While she begins with some vocalizations, the actions culminate in two memorable acts of self-harm – tearing out her hair and scratching her face. Such a psychosomatic reaction would undoubtedly affect the medieval reader in a poignant way. Ultimately, Erec will be shown to be alive, and Enide's reaction will prove to be unnecessary. However, the purpose of the emotional exteriorization has been served – the emotions have been successfully communicated.

Not to be left behind, the *Chanson de Guillaume* contains a similarly touching scene in which both Guibourc and Guillaume cry out in anguish. This scene comes at the time of Guillaume's return from battle, one where Guillaume loses all his men and where he finds Guibourc's nephew, Guichard, dead. Guibourc's emotions will open a new role for Guillaume, he will comfort her after he presents the body of her nephew. However, shortly after he will blame himself for the deaths of his vassals:

La franche femme li tendi ses braz,

E il li colchat desus le mort vassal.

....

Plurad Guiburc, dunc la confortat Willame :

"Par Deu, Guiburc, tu as dreit que tu plurs !

[13] "She does not hide her pain / She cries aloud and wrings her hands; / She places her hands on her dress / and tears at the front of it; / She took to tearing out her hair / And scratching at her tender face."

………………………………………….

Or estes femme a un malveis fuieur,

Un cuart cunte, un malveis tresturnur,

Qui de bataille n'ameine home un sul (*La Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 1290-91, 1302, 1306-9)[14]

Compared to the first scene, Guibourc does not commit any self-harm, but she does cry out and express herself in a way that evidences her raw emotions. She laments the loss of her nephew as she holds his dead body in her hands. With no more words shared on the topic,[15] the audience is still able to understand the emotional impact of the scene. Guibourc has lost a loved one and has been brought face to face with her nephew's death.

Furthermore, we see empathy from Guillaume, who wishes to comfort his wife in this difficult moment. He blames himself for her loss, claiming that he acted in cowardice and as a runaway. He laments her current marriage to a worthless deserter whose lack of valor has led to the deaths of his men. In this short passage we see everything that matters to Guillaume and the sadness he faces, as he must tell his wife of his failures. As a man, he has failed his family (allowing a nephew to perish) and as a count he has failed his vassals. He can do nothing else but cry along with his wife as they both try to come to terms with the devastation of war. While the passage from

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[14] The noble women reached out her arms, / and he laid the dead vassal [Guichard] onto her / […] Guibourc cried and Guillaume comforted her: / By God, Guibourc, you have reason to cry! / […] Now you are married to a worthless deserter, / a cowardly count, a worthless runaway / who returns no men from battle."

[15] Rikhardsdottir explains how unimportant vocalization is for the audiences, when describing the events of an Icelandic Epic saga, although one scene is "devoid of emotion words" (77), the lack of speech and description, one still reacts to the scene: "The reader (or audience) is not informed of the feelings of Egill as he hoists the body of his drowned son upon his horse and rides home with the corpse. Yet no reader would be unaffected by the scene." (78) Though it may be cliché, the actions speak louder than words in the epic.

Erec et Enide may be more emotionally charged by virtue of Enide tearing out her hair and scratching her own face, the passage from the *Chanson de Guillaume* is clearly employing similar tactics to transmit the feelings of its protagonists.

The combination of sadness and the physical manifestations of one's emotions is not unique to the literary characters above. In fact, in the Middle Ages such a connection was to be expected.[16] The dual reaction, the physical and the mental, are inextricable from both romance and epic and, consequently, show how alike the two literatures truly are. It must, therefore, be remembered that these two genres were constantly influencing one another as they developed simultaneously. If the *chanson de geste* and the romance share this sense of emotional anguish being vocalized and depicted, why do scholars still insist on viewing the *chanson de geste* as some primitive underdeveloped version of the romance? Is introspection exclusive to the romance? Of course not. As such, this study will demonstrate that the outward expression of emotions can be analyzed in order to further explore the psychological responses of epic characters and to show the complex issues addressed in the *chansons de geste*.

Premodern versus Modern

In analyzing these medieval texts, it is likewise important to combat the overpowering binary of the modern versus the pre-modern. In its general use, the term modern is often used as a way of dismissing the past. Though there exists a variety of differences between the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, qualitative comparisons between the past and present are

[16] "Emotions were also critical to the ties between body and soul." (Boquet 145)

difficult to make. In fact, while many morals and values have changed,[17] many realities have stayed the same.

The French medieval epic often presents a world of constant altercations and bloodshed, but this is not the singular reality within its literature. There are many *chansons de geste* that acknowledge the existence of years of peace only to pass them over with a one sentence explanation. This explanation has less to say about the realism of peace, and more to say about the genre conventions surrounding action and audience reception. This is because times of peace are not expanded upon in the *chansons de geste* – instead, the narrator will quickly describe years of peace. These moments can thus be described as "unnarratable" (*Rebel Barons* 199). Consequently, a reader cannot state with true certainty that the Middle Ages were a place of constant violence. It is, then, impossible to compare the perceived violence from the Middle Ages to the documented realities of the last two centuries.

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have seen an explosion in the scale of violence the likes of which would be inconceivable to the medieval. The sheer destructive capabilities of countries around the world point to this difference in scale. Moreover, it should also be noted that with prolonged involvement in East Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Africa, the United States' Military is continuously involved in some form of combat. Despite claims to the contrary, violence in the present day and in the Middle Ages is quite similar.

[17] In explaining the themes of the cycle of rebellious barons, Luke Sunderland explains the differences in the connotation of vengeance from the Middle Ages to now: "Revenge is nowadays often mistakenly identified with illegal and socially disruptive vigilante activity, but it retains moral, social, and legal possibilities" (*Rebel Barons* 212)

Cycle of violence

As discussed above, the French medieval epic has a desire to continue the cycle. This desire exists in and outside the text: the extradiegetic audience desires continuations to their favorite stories while the diegetic heroes must continue their violent ways to defend their lands and lords, to gain renown, and to avenge past wrongs done to them. Scholarship on the cycle of violence tends to focus on classical examples – René Girard, in particular, focuses his studies on the plays of Greek Antiquity and the books of the New Testament. Though his approaches to the study of violence are enlightening and foundational – Girard's work in particular plays a large role in chapters 2 and 3 – a lack of evidence from the Middle Ages has left a noticeable gap in the understanding of violence across a large period of human history. This in spite of the large corpus of medieval texts dealing with violence and the effects of violence upon the individuals and communities who commit and are subjected to these acts – more specifically, members of the warrior class, the aristocracy, the clergy, and the commonfolk.

Within the *chanson de geste*, the cycle of violence is perhaps best evidenced in the Lorraine cycle. These *chansons* recount a series of reprisals and blood feuds that breed future conflict and thus future *chansons de geste*. In fact, the *Vengeance Fromondin*, one of the cycle's sequels, is perfectly titled after the cycle of violence. However, the Guillaume cycle is no stranger to the violence, and Guillaume's life is full of recurrent conflict. While the text does not always presage the conflict of the next chronological poem through direct reference to previous events in the way other poems may, the Saracens will often remark how they despise Guillaume due to his actions in the previous epics.

In the case of the Saracens, then, revenge is their primary motivation for invading lands and challenging Guillaume. This is due to the compulsions brought about by vengeance as described by René Girard: "the only satisfactory revenge for spilt blood is spilling the blood of the killer [...] every reprisal calls for another reprisal" (*Violence and the Sacred* 14). Girard's cycle of violence, thus, explains part of the mechanism upon which the narrative of these texts are founded.

Analytical approach

In each of these chapters, then, a different theme relating to violence will be analyzed using a variety of analytical approaches respecting the overall *geste* and its characters. While many of these ideas about the realistic depiction of violence may be evident in past scholarship, by bringing them together with memory, emotionality, reception, and intertextuality, a path toward understanding the complex views of violence in medieval France becomes clear.

The first chapter will conduct an in-depth look at licit and illicit violence in the deeply intertwined trio of the *Couronnement de Louis*, the *Charroi de Nîmes*, and the *Prise d'Orange*. By looking at the intertextual references between the texts of this trilogy and analyzing Guillaume's actions using ideas of desire and analysis of God's commandments, it becomes clear that Guillaume's relationship with (il)licit violence changes as he moves from bachelor to lord. In his youth, *Couronnement de Louis* and *Charroi de Nîmes*, Guillaume is a wholehearted fan of violence who will use violence in defense of his honor without hesitation. Once he is faced with love and a chance at land, he becomes more hesitant and chooses to avoid violence when possible. Ultimately, from the earliest moments of his fictional biography, we will see how his view on violence acquires more gradations.

The second chapter will focus on the *Chanson de Guillaume*, a text found in only one extant manuscript that predates the majority of the extant literature of the Guillaume cycle, and the dual experience of war: pleasure and pain. This chapter tackles the spectre of Jean-Charles Payen's idea of the joyous genocide using an analysis of emotionality to depict the two sides to war and violence. An in-depth analysis of the language used to describe character's reactions in the first half of the text will communicate the burden loss and the reception of violence on the home front. The second half will glorify the violence by way of lauding fantastical feats of strength by knights other than Guillaume. This bifurcated path continues Guillaume's rethinking of violence and glory, preparing the reader for the final chapter of Guillaume's life.

The third chapter will analyze the *Moniage Guillaume*, the final text in Guillaume's chronological fictional life, and the way violence and penitence are perceived at the end of one's life. Guillaume will attempt to escape from violence by becoming a monk, but he will be dragged back into chaos time and again. This return to violence will be analyzed using Girard's theories on the cycle of violence and mimetic desire. Consequently, the role of religion and desire will demonstrate the struggle between fealty to one's lord and fealty to God.

The final chapter will venture to show how distance of time and space may adversely affect the understanding of violence in the *chansons de geste* combining analysis of the 13th-century *Enfances Guillaume* with the *Prise d'Orange*. This chapter will focus on the intertextual adherence and disassociation between these two texts and their role in the overall *geste* along with the changing role of the *chanson d'aventure*. As such, it will help elucidate an understanding of the changes that occur

over time in the epic tradition and how distance in time and space change the perception of themes.

In this way, each chapter of this project will address a popular scholarly misconception or oversimplification of violence using a text or series of texts from within the cycle of Guillaume d'Orange. Beginning with the first chapter, violence within the early trilogy of the *Couronnement de Louis, Charroi de Nîmes*, and *Prise d'Orange* is analyzed to show the subtle changes across Guillaume's narrative life in regard to perpetrating and lauding violence. The second chapter will focus on the simplification of the epic as a "joyous genocide" by relating the dichotomy of joy and suffering present in the *Chanson de Guillaume*. The third chapter will continue the chronological narrative trend and analyze the reflections on violence and psychological self-discovery that occur in Guillaume's later life as depicted in the *Moniage Guillaume*. The fourth and final chapter will analyze the violence and expansion of themes in the *Enfances Guillaume* while positing it as a text which brings the epic into the thirteenth century – a relative modernity.

Addressing the (non)violent reality of the Middle Ages

In analyzing the *chansons'* themes of violence and regret, it is important to note that these literary examples will not depict a mirror of the times. Rather, the corpus of texts will show how the *chansons* addressed the reality of the Middle Ages while recounting adventures set in a fictional past.[18] As such, these texts may be examined as reflections on violence, religion, and war. As Catherine Jones explains, scholars and

[18] Sarah Kay argues that one cannot use literary texts as anthropological evidence, but they must instead be seen as a "privileged space" where one can see certain aspects of socio-political commentary. (*Chansons de Geste in the Age of Romance 18*)

readers should consider the epic "as tales of heroism, friendship, and faith, [that] participate in a broader meditation on the human experience" (*Introduction to the Chanson de Geste* 148). Consequently, the following study combines the use of audience reception and literary evidence as a key to presenting the complexities of the far too often dismissed psychological insight that exists in the medieval *chanson de geste* as evidenced across multiple texts from the Guillaume cycle. These epics, rather than a joyous genocide hint at a remorseful, half-hearted genocide, to play on Payen's phrase.

The genesis of this project arose from the comparative readings of scholarship on romance, which describes the medieval romance as a literature filled with psychological insight and development of characters, with the scholarship on the epic which often enumerates stock characters and accepts the theory that the characters show no psychological development. However, in reading about the scholarship done on the theory of emotionality, it becomes clear that the modern standards by which medieval texts are judged most often does a disservice to the epic. As this project will argue, the *chanson de geste* contains and depicts a variety of complex emotional and psychological responses to violence.

CHAPTER 2

Desirable Violence: Guillaume d'Orange, the Church, and the State

Guillaume d'Orange, a ferocious, fisticuff-prone, loyal knight, is asked to protect the young prince Louis by the Emperor Charlemagne. Later, he becomes the future king's protector. Little does he know that the two will be linked for the rest of their lives. Through each adventure Louis's presence hangs over Guillaume. Whether it is to protect him from traitors and invading forces or because the future king does not endow his most worthy subject with a fief, Louis's (in)actions cause many of Guillaume's adventures. Faced with a duty to his lord, Guillaume protects and conquers lands for Louis throughout the many *chansons de geste* of the *Geste de Monglane*.

He is known to audiences of Medieval France by many monikers, Guillaume *au nez cort*, Guillaume d'Orange, *Fierebrace*, the somewhat satirical Guillaume l'Amïable among others, that recur in the ten *chansons de geste* dedicated to his legend. In these names, we see hints of an oral tradition, of a man whose *gestes*[19] are renowned and widespread. Each of these names hints at victory in battle: he gains his signature nose in battle with the Emir Corsolt, as Guillaume l'Amïable he conquers Orange and marries Orable, leading him to be known as Guillaume d'Orange. Among these titles

[19] The word geste "comes from the latin *gesta* which can mean a variety of things, from family lineage, exploits, deeds, to history" (*An Introduction to the Chansons de Geste* 2). And in fact, all four of these definitions can be applied to the Old French use.

and epithets, *Fierebrace*, in particular, gives the audience a sense of his imposing physical strength and his occasionally inhuman capacity for violence.

It is this eventual Guillaume, he who conquered the city of Orange and its lady Orable, whose beginnings will be recounted in *Le Couronnement de Louis, Le Charroi de Nimes,* and *La Prise d'Orange*. These three texts contain a multitude of episodes, each of which builds toward the Guillaume of, in diegetic terms, later *chansons de geste*, as in the *Chanson de Guillaume* and the *Moniage Guillaume*. *Le Charroi de Nîmes, Le Couronnement de Louis,* and *La Prise d'Orange* are taken together as a trilogy within the "*petit cycle*"[20] due to their references to one another and the interconnectedness of the stories they tell.

In many studies on Guillaume and the epics about him, they tend "in one way or another to deal with questions of coherence or unity within the cycle" (Schenck 2). This idea of unity of course is disrupted by scholarship in many ways; while the trio of *Prise, Charroi* and *Couronnement* is often pointed to and classified as a separate unit of the cycle unto itself, the *Prise* is simultaneously maligned due to the presence of "romance" tendencies.[21] While both *Charroi* and *Couronnement* seem to have been composed before the 13th century, the *Prise d'Orange* is found only in extant cyclical manuscripts of the 13th century.[22] Despite this, scholars have continuously linked the latter to the two other texts.[23]

In spite of the complex and at times contradictory nature of this categorization, it is clear from the prologues and explicits of these three *petit cycle* texts why scholars

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[20] Term used to refer to the trio of *Le Couronnement de Louis, Le Charroi de Nîmes* and *La Prise d'Orange*.
[21] Above all, this is due to the prominence of Guibourc and the themes of love.
[22] With the earliest of these texts coming from the middle of the 13th Century (Lachet 11-14)
[23] In his translation of *Prise d'Orange,* Claude Lachet connects these three texts with a term separate from the *petit cycle*. He instead refers to them as a tryptich, and the *Prise d'Orange* as the third section (55).

group them together. Most importantly to scholars, the three texts of this trilogy refer backward and forward in narrative time, using intertextual references which, according to Sarah Kay, further complicates the separation of these stories from one another.[24]

While the *Couronnement de Louis* lacks explicit reference to the later texts, its sequel text, *Charroi de Nîmes*, predicts the the events that are to come. Within the first few lines, the audience is reminded of the forthcoming capture and conquest of Nîmes and the future conquest of Orange:

> C'est de Guillelme, le marchis au cort nes,
>
> Comme il prist Nymes par le charroi mener,
>
> Aprés conquist Orenge la cité
>
> Et fist Guibor baptizier et lever.
>
> Qu il toli le roi Tiebaut l'Escler;
>
> Et l'epousa a moillier et a per (*Charroi de Nîmes* vv. 5-10)[25]

Here, the audience is given all the information they could possibly need about Guillaume's actions in *Charroi de Nîmes* and in the *Prise d'Orange*. They are told of his future conquest of Nîmes and the ruse of the caravan, they are told of the conquest of Orange, and they are told of Guibourc's conversion to Christianity and her future marriage to Guillaume.

With the *Charroi de Nîmes* being a sequel, the prologue adds another wrinkle of reference. It recalls for the audience some of the important events from the

[24] This is, as she claims, because "Any citation of one chanson de geste within another has something of the character of self-citation, and the distinction between mise en abyme and intertextuality is insecure" (*Chansons de Geste in the Age of Romance* 208).

[25] "It's about Guillaume, the marquis of the short nose, / How he took Nîmes while leading the cart, / After, he conquered the city of Orange / And had Guibourc baptized. / Whom he took from the pagan Tibaut; / And married her as his wife and equal"

Couronnement de Louis: “Et desoz Rome ocist Corsolt es pres. / Molt essauça sainte crestïentez” (*Charroi de Nîmes* vv. 11-12).[26] Clearly, the author(s) of this version of the text are relying heavily on the legend of Guillaume and his narrative *gestes*. What is more, the narrator goes as far as to recount the destiny of the hero, “Tant fist en terre qu’es ciex est coronez” (*Charroi de Nîmes* v. 13),[27] effectively recounting the entirety of his life within 13 lines.

As seen in the above examples, the prologues of the *Charroi de Nîmes* and *Prise d’Orange* are written in a way that implies an audience’s previous knowledge of both the events that have already taken place and the events that are about to unfold. These intertextual citations hint at the greater tradition of Guillaume’s cycle, heavily implying that the audience is already familiar with the events and that they are aware of the overarching narrative.

In the *Prise d’Orange*, the narrator again recounts to the textual audience Guillaume’s past deeds while foreshadowing the events to come: “Tuit ont chanté de la cité de Nyme: / Guillelmes l’a en la seue baillie / [...] Et Dex! Orenge nen ot encore mie!” (vv. 13-14, 17).[28] The narrator in each of these instances has given away the plot before the events have been related, but above all he has prepared the audience for the events to come and re-established the narrative world.

Given the poem’s intertextual references, it becomes clear that audiences would become generally aware of these texts[29] as a large cycle recounting the life and *gestes* of Guillaume d’Orange. In fact, if we look at most of the texts from this cycle, we see

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[26] “And below Rome he killed Corsolt in the fields. / He greatly exhalted holy Christendom”
[27] “He did so much on Earth that he was crowned in Heaven”
[28] “All have sung of the city of Nîmes: / Guillaume ruled it on his own / [...] And God! He has not yet taken Orange!”
[29] In this way, Paula Leverage champions focusing on audience reception because it “is an intrisically medieval approach which stands in contrast to anachronistic and ulitmately, in many cases, futile attempts to define authorship.” (108)

that the vast majority of the *chansons* from the *Geste de Monglane* can be defined as *chansons* "autoréférentielles,"[30] or self-referential. This self-referential quality makes clear that medieval audiences would be aware of the adventures and deeds of Guillaume. As such, Schenck states "it would appear that a single mythic conception informed all of these poems" (2). The greater Guillaume legend is, it seems, relatively unaffected by the variety of extant and/or extinct manuscripts.

Therefore, if we consider that Guillaume's tradition is a unifying force transcending space (from different manuscripts from different regions) and time (from the twelfth to the thirteenth centuries), then this allows for an analysis on the effects of violence on these characters who adhere to the tradition of a greater myth, legend, or tradition. For in all the epics that will be examined, Guillaume's character, his past and his future, stays steadily the same – with minor variations of details and narrative continuity. Guillaume is loyal, he is steadfast in his beliefs, and he is always quick to anger. With this understanding, the argument can refocus on the instances of violence and the reflections that characters experience toward violence in the cycle of Guillaume d'Orange.

In the *Couronnement de Louis,* the *Charroi de Nîmes,* and the *Prise d'Orange* the focus is on Guillaume's early exploits, he has yet to earn all his acclaim, and these three *chansons* relate how he eventually realizes his own legend. The Guillaume described in these three *chansons de geste* is more often than not superbly impetuous, proud, boisterous, and violent. He does not often reflect upon his actions, as will be noted in multiple episodes throughout the grouping. He will attack fellow Christians

[30] Bennett, in using this term, refers specifically to the *Couronnement de Louis* and *Le Charroi de Nîmes,* but given the many references in each of the texts it can be used to describe most any epic in the Guillaume branch of the Monglane cycle.

(knights, clergyman, etc.) without hesitation, and he will of course battle countless Saracen foes. There is likewise a comedic/carnivalesque element permeating each of these epics (tying them in further with the epics depicting his later life, the *Chanson de Guillaume* and the *Moniage Guillaume*), which, along with the inescapable violence, shows the sheer excess of heroism.

The cycles of peace and violence

These three texts are closely linked and take place directly after one another Thus, to fully understand the thematic changes, it is important to summarize the events of the three poems. The *Couronnement de Louis* is the starting point of Guillaume's youth – though later it will be supplanted by the *Enfances Guillaume*. It begins with a young Guillaume who has arrived at the royal court at Charlemagne's behest to look after his son Louis, whom Charlemagne wishes to crown before his death. At this time, Guillaume uncovers a plot by Arnéïs d'Orléans to overthrow the Carolingian rule. Guillaume confronts the traitor in the church and kills him with one strong blow of his fist. Guillaume then crowns the young Louis. After this, Guillaume heads to Rome for a pilgrimage. In Rome, Guillaume meets the pope and defends him from the Saracen king Galafre and the Saracen champion Corsolt – during this battle he will gain his renowned nose. Guillaume will then be forced to return to France to defend Louis from a new series of traitors. Guillaume quickly defeats these men only to find out that he is needed back in Rome. Guillaume fights and defeats Gui d'Allemagne and his army. This final foe defeated, Guillaume will give Rome to Louis and solidify his role as warrior of God and king.

The *Charroi de Nîmes* follows directly behind the events of the *Couronnement de Louis*. Louis will dole out fiefs and lands to his vassals. Guillaume will however be

forgotten by his liege lord. To make up for this slight, Guillaume promises to conquer Nîmes for Louis. Before leaving, he is slandered by Aymon, and, as he did to Arnéïs, he strikes Aymon dead. En route to Nîmes, Guillaume takes part in a ruse to enter the city – he and his men disguise themselves as merchants.[31] He subsequently conquers the city, and the story sets up the events for the *Prise d'Orange*.

After the events of the *Charroi de Nîmes,* Guillaume finds himself awaiting a new conquest. He learns of the city of Orange and the beautiful Orable from Gilbert, a former prisoner of the Saracens. Guillaume falls in love immediately with both the city and the lady. He enters the city and meets Orable before being discovered and attacked by the Saracen host. Overcome by love, Guillaume is not his normal violent self, so Gilbert and his nephews – Bertrand and Guibelin – fight and conquer the city. Orable is baptized Guibourc, and Guillaume gains his titular lands.

The French epic poems, the *chansons de geste,* recount tales of great deeds done and family lineages past. The heroes and heroines of these epic poems accomplish these deeds and cement their lineage through acts of war and battle against Christian and Saracen foes alike. Conflicts are often described in graphic detail with lines of the poem dedicated to describing the violence in beautifully (and grimly) poetic ways. Such scenes, therefore, permeate the texts. Their presence, in many ways can be used to interpret morals, norms, and customs of the time.

It is of course, difficult to broadly impose modern meaning onto violence from a different time. In trying to gather communicative meaning from physical violence,

[31] It is important to note that Guillaume often makes use of deceit and traps to gain the upperhand in advance of combat. However, this is tactic is seemingly frowned upon by critics. For example, Fassò believes that two such moments of deceipt (the taking of Orange while disguised as a Saracen and the use of a ruse instead of force in taking Nîmes) are classified as two of the three "péchés du guerrier" that Guillaume commits in his lifetime. (433)

Hannah Skoda, in her description of instances of street violence, tavern brawls, and domestic violence among other sorts, in a Northern French town, demonstrates the centrality of real-life violence to a subset of the people of Medieval France:

> Physical violence [in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries] was a kind of language. But no communication can be meaningful in the absence of shared norms and conventions: grammars. Grammars shaped the complex ways people engaged in, and responded to, violent gestures, and provided interpretative frameworks: they circumscribed meanings of certain physical gestures and specified the relationship between different violent enunciations, their contexts, and their speakers. And these grammars were expressed in a variety of discursive contexts: moral, legal, literary. (18)

This definition can be problematic when applied to the epic. While it is clear from the parataxis, the continuous linking of actions by words like *puis* and *et*, present in the medieval French epic's *laisses,* that violence can be expressed in the foundation level of grammar in Old French, it is important to note that this does not inherently mean that all violence is easily readable or definable. This is due in large part because there are many acts of violence that communicate across "discursive contexts."[32]

What is more, as Skoda's examples come from the late Middle Ages and from a concentrated scope (in terms of both time and space), it is difficult to superimpose her impression of violence on the violence that takes place in the *chansons de geste* which span centuries and whose provenances hail from all across *langue d'oc* and *langue d'oil* regions. Nonetheless, *chansons de geste* from no matter which century can help

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[32] Peter Haidu and Emmanuel Mickel's respective works, *The Subject of Violence* and *The Trial of Ganelon*, for example, both demonstrate the complexity of violence on the legal, moral, and literary future of the French epic.

us to interpret the expression of violence in specific moments within the Middle Ages, in their role as texts that have been interpreted to depict a form of tradition and of history.[33] Given the presence of trials and moral judgments (from characters and the narrator), the *chansons de geste* also appear to attempt a conversation about the repercussions of violence. This step toward realism allows the epic to shed light upon contemporary receptions of violence on multiple levels.

In these three texts depicting Guillaume's early life – *Couronnement de Louis, Charroi de Nîmes, Prise d'Orange* – heroic violence tends to communicate to the audience a positive situation in which the hero will be lauded for his actions. Guillaume is rewarded with new lands and new titles as the spoils of warfare.[34] When perpetrated by the hero, physical violence is often permissible and it is often encouraged, by the audience, the narrator, feudal customs, and the characters within the text. Furthermore, Guillaume's renown is built almost entirely upon his own violence: his strong fists, his *fierebrace*, that he uses to strike down numerous foes, his famous nose, injured in battle by the Saracen Corsolt, and his many titles, each earned through conquest.[35] Without violence and strength, his legend would not be so widespread, and it would be hard to imagine him as the subject of multiple epic poems.

These violent norms may seem hard to accept in our current time given the temporal and cultural distance between our modern world and the world of Medieval France as described in the epic. Peter Haidu, while writing about the *Chanson de*

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[33] See Jean-Pierre Martin's idea of a communal past: "it celebrates a communal past, and by the same token, the events it relates belong to a culture that is shared by the minstrel, the audience, and – through a kind of transitivity – by the characters themselves." ("The Chanson de Geste as a Construction of Memory."145)
[34] As in *Charroi de Nîmes* where he conquers Nîmes for himself and King Louis, or in *Prise d'Orange* where he conquers Orange, and earns his epithet.
[35] Though his titular nobiliary partitive d'Orange is in large part earned by a romantic, rather than physical, conquest.

Roland, further develops the disconnect between the two epochs in *The Subject of Violence*: “Our term ‘violence’ perforce bears a seme of disapproval, of condemnation: our culture assumes peace as the desired and desirable norm, and negativizes its opposite [...] To some degree, and from some perspectives, the use of force in forms we consider violent was a social norm in medieval society: society was unimaginable without its presence” (3). Peace, while undoubtedly the preferred state for the physical and mental wellbeing of those involved in war, was not the inherent or expected reality. In this way, war as a reality holds true in our time as well, wars and skirmishes continue year after year, but our ideal is one of peace.[36] While we hope to achieve the ideal, our reality is, perhaps, and somewhat (un)surprisingly, closer to the reality of the Middle Ages.

In the beginning of *La Prise d’Orange*, Guillaume laments the peacetime in which he finds himself, wishing instead for the chance at a new adventure. As in the beginning of *Le Charroi de Nîmes*, Guillaume finds himself returning from a hunting trip.[37] This *anuie* (*Prise d’Orange* v. 99) is felt so strongly that Guillaume’s waiting at the window expectantly is described across multiple *laisses*:

> As granz fenestres s’est alez acoster;
>
> ....
>
> ‘Que trop me nuist ici a sejorner !
>
> Ensement somes ça dedenz enserré

[36] The stark contrast between ideal and reality can be seen, for example, in President Donald Trump’s statement after a drone strike on an Iranian military leader in January 2020: “We are a peace-loving nation and my administration remains firmly committed to establishing peace and harmony among the nations in the world” (cited in Loveluck et al.). Which led to speculation that there would be “severe revenge” (idem) on the United State Military according to the Pentagon. Thus, the purported peace-keeping nature of the attack is expected to provoke a continued cycle of violence.

[37] An act which according to Bennett is representative of peace time. (69)

Comme li hom qui est enprisonné.'

De grant folie s'est ore dementez:

Ja ainz n'iert vespre ne le soleil esconsé

Que il orra une novele tel

Dont il iert mout corrocié et iré. (vv. 48, 67-73)[38]

Here, Guillaume insists on the harm to his reputation, or less severely the annoyance, that plagues him in his stay at Nîmes. In fact, he even goes so far as to compare this time of peace to the experience of that of a man in prison (v. 68).[39] While the narrator gives the audience the welcome news that soon he will hear "une novele," it is also forewarned that this news will lead to Guillaume becoming furiously angry (v. 73). It is clear from the outset that Guillaume is fed up with his lack of options and would rather be elsewhere as he stares longingly out the window.

The above *laisse* is then immediately followed by a second *laisse* recounting similar events:

Or fu Guillelmes as fenestres au vent

……………………………………………………

'Des or m'anuie le sejorner ceanz

Quant ge ne puis prover mon hardement.'

De grant folie se vet or dementant:

Ja ainz n'iert vespre ne le soleil couchant

[38] "At the large windows he went to lie down; / […] / 'How it annoys me to stay here! / We are closed in here in the same way / As a man who is imprisoned.' / Of great madness he has now lamented: / Before vespers and sunset / he will here of such news / of which he will become furiously angry."

[39] Sharon Kinoshita agrees with Guillaume's assessment but makes even more explicit the connection to boredom that causes Nîmes to look like a prison: "Nimes, so recently the scene of his triumph, now assumes the aspect of a prison" (48) His quest for adventure is stalled by peace, and he grows anxious for further conquest.

Que il orra une novele grant

Dont mout sera corrocié et dolant. (vv. 74, 99-104)[40]

Here, Guillaume remains by the window, continuing to stare outside in hopes of news. In this second *laisse* he takes it upon himself to voice his cabin fever to his nephew Betrand, saying that he is beginning to be bored, "m'anuie" (v. 99) of the peaceful life in Nîmes. This boredom is now explicitly revealed to be a consequence of the lack of opportunity to prove his "hardement" (v. 100), his courage. Again, it is clear that time has not passed; we still await the end of the day to hear the news of the events that will cause him to become furious and, this time, sorrowful.

By the final *laisse* events will unfold as time is close to resuming:

Or fu Guillelmes as fenestres del mur

....

Icil [Gilbert] dira tex noveles encui

A noz barons qui parolent de bruit

Que plus torra Guillelmë a anui (vv. 105, 127-129)[41]

In this third *laisse,* Guillaume is staring out the window, but this time he sees Gilbert. It is now revealed that it is Gilbert who will soon reveal "tex noveles" (v. 128) that will bring pain to Guillaume. In this third and final *laisse*, the final description of boredom is changed by the narrator into a description of pain, "anui" (v. 129), growing ever more severe from what began as boredom in the first *laisse* and transitioned in the second *laisse* to "dolant" (v. 104). With three *laisses* devoted to little narrative

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[40] "Now Guillaume is at the windows / [...] / Now I am becoming bored of our stay here / When I cannot prove my courage.' / Of great madness he dressed himself: / Before verspers and sunset / He will hear such great news / That he will become angry and pained."

[41] "Now Guillaume was at the windows of the wall / [...] This one will tell of such news today / to our barons who speak loudly / Which will cause Guillaume much torment"

advancement, boredom is being emphasized at the expense of narrative advancement, but it also shows a wary attitude toward the adventure that will lead him to another cycle of violence. It is only after these three *laisses* that Guillaume and Gilbert speak, finally advancing the plot and pointing the narrative toward Orange.

Through this repetition, the narrator seems to impart to the audience the anticipation for a new adventure. However, instead of hastening the story, the above *laisses* allow the audience to experience the anticipation as much as Guillaume who eagerly awaits new violence. This reaction on Guillaume's part is expected, for in the epic poems of Medieval France, "Political or military success is never more than transitory" (*Chansons de Geste in the Age of Romance* 50). It serves only to set the stage for the next adventure. Peace exists as seen above only to be interrupted. Once Gilbert has escaped Orange, he brings back tales of beauty – of both the city and the lady who resides within – and riches, introducing the catalyst for the new adventure. A similar series of events occurs at the beginning of most all the medieval French epic poems to varying degrees. Though all of Guillaume's stories begin *in medias res,* with each prologue initiating the story that leads into the new adventure, as William Calin points out, they begin "at the very nadir of cyclical action" (189). As such, the audience, much like the protagonists, eagerly awaits the beginning of the next adventure. In these three *chansons de geste*, the door is left open for a continuation of violence, if not through a declaration or announcement of war, then by hints of further adventure, often evoking specific intertextual moments.

The end of the *Couronnement de Louis*, for example, will foretell Louis's future disloyalty, revealing the impetus for the next poem's adventure: "En grant barnage fu Looïs entrez: / Quant il fu riches Guillelme n'en sot gré" (v. 2695). While this manuscript's explicit describes an attitude and not action, such as news of a new

opponent, it still foretells the continuation of conquest and violence born from Louis's ingratitude. Likewise, in the *Prise d'Orange*, the poem's explicit foretells of future battles following Guillaume's acquisition of new land and a new title: "Li cuens Guillelmes ot espouse(e) la dame; / Puis estut il tiex .XXX. anz en Orenge / C'onques un jor n'i estut sanz chalenge" (vv. 1885-1887). [42] Thus, Guillaume will have what he seemingly desires: no days "sanz chalenge" (*Prise d'Orange* v. 1887), or no days without combat. With the cycle allowing itself the chance to renew, future violence and adventures are assured and encouraged.

Violence is expected in many situations – though it will not be accepted in all moments as shall be demonstrated in later chapters – and it is a constant presence in the *chansons de geste* of the Guillaume cycle. In Guillaume's early life, as depicted in the three epic poems that will be analyzed in this first chapter, he continuously pushes the boundaries of acceptable violence. In this seemingly paradoxical world, Guillaume d'Orange and his violent heroism fit right at home. Thus, it is through this lens that the analysis will continue. However, instead of violence *in toto*, specific instances of violence will be analyzed to determine what defines permissible violence. In each of these texts, Guillaume commits an act of violence that would seem to be questionable if not outright illegal, and yet, he is neither blamed nor judged for these acts. These early instances of violence will show how the texts depicting Guillaume's early life lay the groundwork for the remorse shown in the later moments of his narrative life.

[42] "The count Guillaume married the lady; Then he stayed in Orange for 30 years / Never a day was he there without a challenge."

The *Couronnement de Louis* and the *Charroi de Nîmes*: the commandments and desires

In one of the earlier stories of the Guillaume cycle, *Le Couronnement de Louis*, we encounter a young Guillaume who wishes to prove himself to the aging Emperor Charlemagne and the future king, Louis. The episodic epic focuses mainly on Louis's rise to power, Guillaume's defense of the young monarch, and the threat of Saracens against Christendom. Guillaume will thwart two attempts to overthrow Louis, the first a baron who is plotting to become king regent, and the second a group of barons who wish to overthrow the new king after Charlemagne's death.

It is Guillaume's first attempt to stop treason that is of greatest interest. At the beginning of the narrative, Charlemagne wishes to ensure a peaceful transfer of power from himself to his son. However, his barons do not share his confidence in Louis's ability to rule, and one in particular, Arnéïs d'Orléans, intends to take the crown for himself. When he learns of this plot to disinherit Louis, Guillaume leaps into action to defeat the traitorous Arnéïs. Before doing so, however, he reflects upon the act of killing another Christian, even recalling God's seventh commandment against killing: thou shall not kill (*Exodus* 20:13). While this episode seems rather perfunctory, it is in fact one of the pivotal moments of the text.[43] It is the here that the titular act, the crowning of Louis, takes place for a second time – the first was Charlemagne handing down his empire, and now Guillaume ensuring Louis's reign. Thus, this episode's influence and the precedent it sets for the rest of the cycle is worth analyzing.

Before beginning on a close analysis of the scene in question, it will be important to note some criticism and theoretical views on the seventh

[43] Described by Andrea Fassò as "une scène célèbre" (428).

commandment's interpretation. In the early 20th century, Walter Benjamin, discussing the differences between sanctioned and unsanctioned violence as it pertains to Judaism, writes that the commandment against killing is put forth in such a way that, after one has committed the deed, killed another human being, "[n]o judgment of the deed can be derived from the commandment" (298). God does not further develop the commandment by adding explicit punishment for disobeying it. Thus, killing can be committed with little fear of reprisal, either from God or, of course, from the victim. With no inherent divine judgment linked to the act, the commandment instead serves as "a guideline for the actions of persons or communities" and not as a "criterion for judgment" (ibid). The commandment therefore does not condemn a transgressor to an eternity in Hell, for example. Benjamin later intimates this difference, when explaining that the individual or group who commit these acts must "wrestle with it [the act of killing] in solitude" (ibid). While this view could be seen as a pessimistic one, it seems to be proven correct by Guillaume's actions in *Le Couronnement de Louis* and throughout his cycle. Guillaume, after reflecting upon the commandment, decides nonetheless to advance his own worldly desires by killing Arnéïs, forgoing the spiritual restriction on this act. Guillaume himself will not dwell on his violence in his youth; however, he will one day wrestle with his transgressions.

To delve further into Guillaume's internal debate, it will be necessary to analyze the link between desire and violence. In *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair*, René Girard uses examples from the Old Testament to further his theory on mimetic desire. At the beginning of this work, Girard discusses the role of the Ten Commandments, or the Decalogue, in shaping human desires. According to his analysis, the later commandments serve to aide humanity in their imitation of Christ, who in turn imitates God (*Satan* 13). Girard claims that working backwards through these final

commandments shows their overall function as a device to curb desire: "If the Decalogue devotes its final commandment to prohibiting desire for whatever belongs to the neighbor, it is because it lucidly recognizes in that desire the key to the violence prohibited in the four commandments that precede it." (*Satan* 11-12) Because of this, if one were to rid oneself of desire for worldly pleasure or goods, then the violent crimes that arise from mimetic desire would cease. It is, thus, with the goal of eliminating desire that the commandments look to shape the people. God is not exacting on his followers; He is looking to better them. When seen this way, the claims by Benjamin are justified; there is not punishment involved in the commandments. God's instructions to His followers are therapeutic rather than punitive.

With this new lens, the episode in question from the *Couronnement de Louis* can be properly examined. After Charlemagne has decided to crown his son, Guillaume's nephew Bertrand reveals a plot to dethrone the new king, led by Arnéïs,[44] Enraged by this disloyalty, Guillaume heads directly to the church where the traitor is located in order to confront him. Upon arriving in the church, the narrator describes Guillaume's hesitation at the thought of killing another man:

> En talent ot qu'il li copast le chief,
>
> Quant il remembre del glorios del ciel,
>
> Que d'ome ocire est trop mortels pechiez.
>
> Il prent s'espee, el fuere l'embatié (*Couronnement de Louis* vv. 125-128)[45]

In the end, Guillaume hesitates before chopping off the traitor's head; he even sheathes his sword, and he recalls God's commandment. He remembers that to kill a

[44] This is announced to Guillaume and the public: when Betrand reveals "j'ai oï grant tort et grant pechié / Arneïs veult son dreit seignor boisier" (vv. 118-119).

[45] "He meant to cut off Arnéïs's head / When he remembered the Glorious of the heavens / That to kill a man is a great mortal sin. / He took his sword and placed it back in its sheath."

man is a "trop mortels pechiez" (v. 127), but he does not think about what it would mean to disobey this teaching. Nonetheless, he seems to take the idea of disobeying God seriously enough to second-guess killing a traitor. Through this hesitation and the sheathing of his weapon, the audience is led to believe that he may perhaps spare Arnéïs.

However, this rare moment of reflection is swiftly dispelled once Guillaume proceeds to kill the traitorous vassal with his bare hands:

> [Guillaume] se fu rebraciez,
>
> le poing senestre li a meslé el chief,
>
> Halce le destre, enz el col li assiet;
>
> L'os de la gole li a par mi brisié;
>
> Mort le tresbuche a la terre a ses piez. (*Couronnement de Louis* vv. 129-133)[46]

Guillaume, in a literal sense, takes justice into his own hands, and, faithful to his reputation as *Fierebrace*, he manages to strike down his enemy with one swift blow of his mighty arms. If the blow itself was not enough to show the disdain he had for the traitor, he then proceeds to insult the corpse, blaming the deceased for the result of the disagreement: "Ge te cuidoe un petit chasteier, / Mais tu iés morz, n'en dorreie un denier" (*Couronnement de Louis* vv. 140-141).[47]

This is not a case of mistaken identity,[48] nor is it brought about by a trial by combat,[49] and while Guillaume is justified in his killing in the court of popular

[46] "Guillaume rolled up his sleeves, / he grabbed Arnéïs's head with his left hand, / Raising the right one, on the neck he struck him; / The bone of his throat Guillaume broke in half; / He dropped him dead on the ground at his feet."
[47] "I intended to punish you just a bit, / But you are dead, and I will not give you a single denarius"
[48] See Catherine M. Jones's article "Je ne soz queil home j'oz ocis."
[49] See Ganelon's trial in the *Chanson de Roland*.

opinion,[50] the death is still utterly shocking. Much of this shock is in part exacerbated by the location of the event: inside a church, in front of the altar. As Andrea Fassò describes, "le *mortex pechié* a été commis. Guillaume voulait se borner à épouvanter ou à réprimander le baron, mais c'est sa force irrésistible qui lui fait commettre cet excès, et devant l'autel. Ce n'est pas seulement un homicide: c'est un sacrilège" (429). So sacrilegious is this act, that Fassò claims it as one of the three great faults that Guillaume commits in his lifetime, which will prevent him from carrying on his lineage,[51] The episode ends with no interjection from the narrator, and instead, with Louis's transition to power seemingly assured, Guillaume takes the crown and places it upon Louis's head and says: "'Tenez, bels sire, el nom del rei del ciel, / Qui te doint force d'estre buens justiciers'" (*Couronnement* vv. 145-6).[52] Thus begins his role as Louis's faithful vassal and fierce bodyguard – a role of which he will not easily rid himself.

After desecrating the church and ignoring the commandment, Guillaume does not seem to feel guilty, nor do the narrator or other characters blame him for how the events unfold. Yet he will, as Fassò points out, head to Rome on pilgrimage immediately after these events (429). While we do not know if the adventure could have led Guillaume to Rome regardless of his previous actions, one thing is clear: as the episode develops and ends, a discourse between following the teachings of God and following the rules of the state is brought to light. The question of which rules to follow will continue to permeate the cycle.

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[50] According to popular opinion, skipping trials for treason and exacting punishment posthaste was the preferred course of action (Mickel 33).
[51] See Fassò (423).
[52] "Here, good sire, in the name of the king of heaven, / that he may give you the strength to be a good ruler."

In the *Charroi de Nîmes,* Guillaume returns from a hunting trip and is once again pulled into an adventure by the oft irresponsible king Louis. After being overlooked by Louis as the the king doles out fiefs to his loyal subjects, Guillaume decides to conquer Nîmes and Spain, which are at this point controlled by Saracens, in order to earn his own lands. By entering the city disguised as merchants, Guillaume and his company take the Saracens by surprise. He quickly dispatches the enemy and conquers Nîmes.

Despite the importance of this conquest and what it means for his overall legend, the analysis shall focus on a rather unremarkable and understudied moment that occurs at the beginning of the epic. As he prepares for the upcoming adventure, Guillaume learns from the knight Gautier that the former has been slandered by Aymon, one of Louis's advisers. In the archetypal role of the sneaky traitorous baron,[53] Aymon tells the king that Guillaume will not succeed in his mission and that the king will thereby lose all the soldiers he has assigned Guillaume. Shortly afterward, Gautier alerts Guillaume to the denigration he has suffered; the two knights and the narrator then proceed to declare this counsel as treasonous. Bad counsel (here slander) constitutes treason, which in the Middle Ages warrants death:

> Foi que dois vos, ç'a fet Aymes le viell;
>
> Envers le roi vos pense d'empirier
>
> . . . .
>
> D'une chose vos vorroie proier :
>
> Lonc le servise li rendez son loier. (*Charroi de Nîmes* vv. 707-708,715-717)[54]

[53] In an apt description of the macho environment seen in Guillaume's conflicts with other men, Sarah Kay points out that "real" men go off to fight battles, while "Traitors, residing with the king, turn [the king] against these absent barons" (181).

[54] "By the loyalty that I owe you, here is what Aymon the elder has done: / Toward the king he

This description shows that disparagement merits punishment and that vengeance is required as well as desired in order to protect Guillaume's reputation. Gautier implies that Aymon should die, or that he should at least pay dearly, for his calumny. Instead of holding a trial, Guillaume decides to take matters into his own hands: he decides that he must kill, or "rendez son loier" (v. 717) to, Aymon in order to protect his lord and his reputation. The narrator will show no problem with Guillaume ignoring due process.

In spite of Gautier and Guillaume's decisions and reasoning, it is the narrator who indicates to the audience that Aymon will deserve his utlimate death. When Aymon first appears, the narrator immediately calls upon God to strike him down: "Par mi la sale ez vos Aymon le viell; / Dex le confonde, le glorïeus del ciel" (*Charroi de Nîmes* vv. 678-9)![55] A similar call to God will occur later on when Guillaume addresses the Saracen king Otran – the main antagonist of the epic poem: "Otran… Damedex te maldie" (*Charroi de Nîmes* v. 1442).[56] Both the narrator and Guillaume ask for God to annihilate their foes – those who have gone against their feudal lords or against God. The invocation of God against Otran and Aymon shows that they are enemies of not only Guillaume but of Christians as well, and that the narrator judges them in a fashion deserving of their lowly status.

Instead of condemning Guillaume for killing another, he condemns Aymon for having betrayed his king and by conspiring to "molt empirier" (*Charroi de Nimes* v. 739) Guillaume in front of his king. As was the case with Arnéïs, the narrator does not comment on Aymon's death, the only thing he says to that effect is "par les fenestres le

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has thought to denigrate you […] / I ask one thing of you: / Pay him back his actions."
[55] "Behold Aymon the Elder in the room; / May God destroy him, the Glorious one!"
[56] "May God curse you!"

gietent" (*Charroi de Nîmes* v. 749).[57] Even without outright approval after the act, by not condemning the act the narrator implies that Guillaume has reacted in an appropriate manner without fault. If Guillaume were culpable of committing treason, the narrator would tell us without issue as he did when he asked God to smite Aymon.

In this manner, the killing and lack of attention to the commandments receive no criticism. In fact, throughout the story, the narrator describes Guillaume as the model Christian knight, who "molt essauça sainte crestïentez" (*Charroi de Nîmes* v. 12).[58] As a model knight, it is clear that Guillaume's ferocity in threatening Louis and hastily killing of Aymon will not change the narrator's opinion of Guillaume as near infallible. In the *Charroi de Nîmes* and the *Couronnement de Louis*, Guillaume has his faults, he is irascible and impetuous, but « en nule terre n'a meillor chevalier » (*Charroi de Nîmes* v. 692),[59] thus the narrator and by consequence the audience is unable to pass judgment on him.

In fact, when compared against the cycle as a whole, the death of "le vieil Aymon" is more than just an anecdotal tale of what happens to one traitorous old man. The episode is, according to Jean Frappier, a direct imitation of the values present in the *Couronnement de Louis*: "Ces passages imitent presque textuellement les vers du *Couronnement*, non point par manque d'invention, mais en vertu du procédé conscient de répétition signalétique [...] soyons sûrs que le public, dont la sympathie était acquise d'avance au héros, attendait le châtiment automatique des traîtres" (96). As Frappier states, the audience has already placed their sympathy with Guillaume, and traitors will receive no sympathy. Therefore, the episode of Aymon is another

[57] "Out the windows [Guillaume and Gautier] threw him."
[58] "Greatly exalts holy Christianity"
[59] "There is no better knight in any land."

intertextual link calling back to the *Couronnement de Louis*. Furthermore, the "répetition signalétique" that Frappier mentions further links the two texts of the petit cycle, along with the self-referential quality that Bennett claims is key to the grouping, it shows the intertextuality of the songs and furthers the role of audience memory on the reception of these texts.[60]

It is here that the close reading of these texts highlights a key difference between the killings of Arnéïs and Aymon. In both situations, the victim is guilty of a grave offense, treason, but Guillaume's intentions toward the two acts differ greatly. In the case of Arnéïs, Guillaume tried to show restraint in his actions, but the death had resulted from his excessive force. With regard to Aymon, the death was intentional and Guillaume along with the narrator condemn the traitor from the start. Guillaume here seems to have had every intention of killing Aymon – the text gives no hints of restraint or thoughts to God.

Memory, echoes, and intertextual references:

Apart from their thematic similarities, these two episodes are in fact full of self-referential uses of similar phrasing and themes that would give the audience the ability to recall the events of other *chansons*. This recall happens through the syntax of the text, disjunctive echoes, as well as the overall narrative arc, as heroes recall their past deeds. Consequently, the epic cycle of Guillaume d'Orange is itself concerned with the varying strata of memory. As seen above for the prologue of the *Prise d'Orange*, the audience is asked to recall past, present, and future events, relative to the narrative

[60] It is, according to Paula Leverage, this stylistic choice, the repetition, and continued reference across epics that characterize "the chansons de geste as cognitive exercises which engage the audience's memory" (107).

point of time or reference. Events past and events to come are discussed simultaneously, creating a new space-time in which the reader/audience member and Guillaume travel backward and forward through the narrative plane together. For example, the narrator reminds the public of Guillaume's deeds, "conquist Orenge la cité" (v. 7), "desoz Rome occit Corsolt es prez" (v. 11). These events are from the *Prise d'Orange*, events to come, and the *Couronnement de Louis,* events past, respectively.

This is not the last we will hear of memory and events from previous epics. When Guillaume encounters his nephew, Bertrand, at the beginning of the *Charroi de Nîmes,* he is told that Louis has been endowing his vassals with fiefs. Unfortunately, the pair have not been given any land. In fact, as Bertrand puts it, they have been forgotten:

> Nostre empereresa ses barons fievez:
>
> Cel done terre, cel chastel, cel cistez
>
> Cel done vile selonc ce qu'il set;
>
> Moi et vos, oncle, i somes oublié (*Charroi de Nîmes* vv. 36-39) [61]

Louis has forgotten to gift any land to his most loyal vassal, Guillaume. In so doing, he has forgotten the person whose actions had allowed him to take power. In *Le Couronnement de Louis,* as seen above, Guillaume protected Louis and guaranteed his ascension to the throne, even going so far as to kill the traitorous Arnéïs. Guillaume, of course, has not forgotten, and will promptly remind his suzerain: "Looÿs sire [...]/ Dont ne te membre del grant estor champel / Que ge te fis par desoz Rome es prez"

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[61] "Our emperor is giving fiefs to his barons: / To this one he gives land, that one a castle, this other one a city / To that one he gives a city according to his abilities; / You and I, uncle, have been forgotten in all this."

(vv. 134-147)? The audience with gentle priming from the narrator during the prologue would recall these events with ease.

In the deaths of Arneïs and Aymon at the hands of Guillaume, the audience will see the insistence on the part of different characters to behave a certain way toward one's lord. In the *Couronnement de Louis,* after killing Arnéïs, Guillaume chides the dead vassal:

> Por quie voleies ton dreit seignor boisier? /
>
> Tu le deüsses amer et tenir chier,
>
> Creistre ses terres et alever ses fiez.
>
> Ja de losenges n'averas mais loier (vv. 136-139)[62]

It is clear through this citation which values Guillaume believes to be the most important in a vassal. Vassals should not search to lower the status of their lord, and instead they should do their utmost to elevate their suzerain. In spite of this moralistic diatribe, later on, according to Catherine Jones, Guillaume come dangerously close to becoming a rebellious baron in the vein of Raoul de Cambrai, but he is saved by his nephew Bertrand who reminds him how a knight should behave toward his lord (*An Introduction to the Chansons de Geste* 83).

In the *Charroi de Nîmes,* after Louis's frustrating forgetfulness upsets Guillaume, the king will try to give him a large portion of his lands. Guillaume, as a loyal knight, vehemently refuses:

> Non ferai, sire, Guillelmes respondié.
>
> Ce ne feroie por tot l'or desoz ciel,
>
> Que ja diroient cil baron chevalier :

[62] "Why did you want to denigrate your rightful lord? / You should love and hold him dear, / Grow his lands and raise his fiefs. / Now you will have no further need for flattery."

'Vez la Guillelme, le marchis au vis fier,

Comme il a ore son droit seignor boisié ;

Demi son regne li a tot otroié,

Si ne l'en rent vaillissant un denier (vv. 396-402) [63]

He does not wish to weaken his king because it goes against that which a loyal knight should do. Were he to accept these lands, he would damage the status of his suzerain, and this would be seen as the equivalent of treason to not only Guillaume but to the other knights as well. If Guillaume were to take Louis's lands, then Louis's knights and barons will claim that he has weakened his lord without properly compensating him, so Guillaume decides not to weaken/lower his rightful lord (*Charroi de Nîmes* v. 400). Guillaume follows Bertrand's advice regarding the relationship between a lord and vassal: "le devez lever et essaucier / contre toz homes secorre et aïdier" (*Charroi de Nîmes* vv. 439-440).[64]

This repetition is what Heinemann calls an *écho disjoint* (237), a disjunctive echo, and it continues the trend of the role of memory and repetition within the epic. As Leverage explains: "The aesthetic effects of the disjunctive echo depend not upon the similarity of each instance of the repetition to the next, but rather on the alignable differences" (Leverage 200). What is meant by alignable differences can be explained as follows: if a certain verse or hemistich is repeated verbatim multiple times, it is the moment when a difference arises that it stands out to the audience, such as a new term or word in place of what was used in a previous verse.

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[63] "I will not do so, sire, responds Guillaume. / I would not do so for all the gold on Earth, / What would the noble knights say: / "Look at Guillaume there, the marquis with the fierce face, / How he has denigrated his rightful lord; / Half of his kingdom he has taken. / And he does not pay him a denier."

[64] "You should elevate him and raise him / against all men help and aid him."

While Heinemann and Leverage only apply this to instances within single epics, the idea of echoing is applicable across epics in any particular cycle. The critical application of these echoes and repetitions would help to further demonstrate the adherence to tradition seen across Guillaume's characters in the texts analyzed in this chapter. When one hears these echoes, it is clear that Guillaume's violent tendencies tend to come from his fierce loyalty. He wishes to exalt his "droit seignor" above all else.

***Prise d'Orange*: the trilogy closes**

While the *Prise d'Orange* is as "auto-référentielle" to the other members of the petit cycle as they are to one another, unlike the *Charroi de Nîmes* and the *Couronnement de Louis*, it is often criticized as a *roman d'aventure* or a *chanson d'aventure*.[65] This is due in large part to the prominent role of Orable, later baptized Guibourc, and the theme of love that takes central position in the text. Sharon Kinoshita further points out that the criticism is due to a disconnect between the desire to group this song with the other two and to separate it from the "typical epics" because the "love plot and the comedic elements it entails have proven an embarrassment for critics concerned that they compromise the poem's seriousness and generic coherence" (46). Despite the tendency to discredit the role of *Prise d'Orange* as a true epic, there are many connections that link this poem to the previous two. For example, the overall plot follows the typical structure of other epics even when it

[65] Both terms are dismissive of the *Prise d'Orange*, relating this epic more to the romance than to other epics. Sarah Kay claims that part of the problem in accepting its status as an epic is that the *chansons de geste* "conçoivent la société comme le domaine propre aux hommes, elles en éclairent de manière dramatique les maux, et elles mettent les femmes dans la place de l'Autre" ("La représentation de la féminité" 236). So, the *Prise d'Orange*, by bringing Orable/Guibourc to the narrative foreground has brought subjectivity to women in a way not often seen in the epic.

concentrates on Guillaume's love for Guibourc. This is because, rather than suffer from the theme of love, the story's emphasis on love strengthens its ties to other epics: "Guillaume's infatuation with and seduction of the foreign and female Other constitute a quintessential scenario of desire, crusade, and conquest" (Kinoshita 48).

Further nullifying the criticism this text receives is the fact that the events of *Prise d'Orange* gives the epic hero his most well-known moniker, Guillaume d'Orange. As mentioned above, during the prologue Guillaume is in search of a new adventure after capturing Nîmes. He heads to Orange after hearing about the beauty of Orable and Gloriette. Upon arriving in Orange, he sneaks his way into the city disguised in blackface as a Saracen, though he will be quickly found out and battle will ensue.

It is Guillaume's reaction to the prospect of battle that will be key in understanding how reception of violence begins to differ in these texts. In this song, the interplay of licit versus illicit violence is less central than the repercussions of violence from the other two epics. Here, Guillaume is faced with direct reprisals for past violence, specifically for his capture of Nîmes. The Saracens of Orange want him dead in large part because of the deaths of their kin at Nîmes. Aragon, Guibourc's son-in-law, describes the hate he has for Guillaume and describes the punishment he wishes to inflict upon him because of his role in killing and imprisoning Saracens:

> … 'Tant sui ge plus dolant.
>
> Par Mahomet, en qui ge sui creant,
>
> Se ge tenoie Guilelme ci dedenz,
>
> Tost seroit morz et livrez a torment,

L'os et la poldre en venteroie au vent.' (*Prise d'Orange* v. 490-494)[66]

Aragon's wishes will of course not come true, but the hate he holds for Guillaume and for the Franks in general is representative of his enemy's reception to violence perpetrated by Guillaume himself. For the killings of Aymon and Arnéïs shown above, retribution was not necessary, nor was it desired. However, any killing of a Saracen implies retribution from a family member or fellow Saracen down the line.

In fact, when face to face with the prospect of another's revenge, instead of his usual braggadocio in the face of combat, Guillaume responds not with bravado, but with fear:

Guillelmes l'ot, si se vet enbrochant,

Mielz vosist estre a Paris ou a Sanz.

Deu reclama, le pere, escordelement:

'Glorïeus Sire, qui formas tote gent

....

Gardez nos cors de mort et de torment,

Ne nos ocïent Sarrazin et Persant.' (*Prise d'Orange* vv. 495-498, 507-508)[67]

In this moment, all Guillaume can think of is being anywhere but Orange. He then begins a long prayer asking for God's mercy. This sort of prayer, the *prière du plus grand peril*, is common throughout the cycle of Guillaume d'Orange. He has a long prayer before the battle against Corsolt, but in that battle, Guillaume is ready for the

[66] "... 'I am so pained. / By Mahomet, in whom I believe, / If I had Guillaume within these walls, / He would be completely dead and tormentuously tortured, / I would scatter in the wind his bones and ashes."

[67] Guillaume heard this, and he saw himself run through, / He would rather be in Paris or in Sens. / He invoked God, the father, fervently: / 'Glorious Lord, who made all people / [...] / Protect our bodies from death and torment, / Do not allow the Saracens or Persians to kill us."

fight and is not wishing to be anywhere else. In Orange he is surrounded by enemies with no immediate help from his fellow Frankish knights.

In this way, *La Prise d'Orange* shows the transition between the violent, gung-ho Guillaume to one who becomes more cautious and wary of confrontation – a theme that continues as he ages. In this epic, Guillaume, will still exhibit many of his typical characteristics, but, for the most part, he will distance himself from his ferocious persona and embody the mocking title of Guillaume *l'Amïable*. To evidence this transition, his nephew, to tease him for his newfound passion, mockingly claims that he is no longer Guillaume Fierebrace: "L'en soloit dire Guilleleme Fierebrace, / Or dira l'en Guillelme l'Amïable" (vv. 1561-2).[68]

This insistence on Guillaume's changing attitude is among one of the criticisms that scholars have of this epic's place in the overall tradition. For example, the song has been described by Claude Lachet, who translated the text into modern French, as an epic where "deux des thèmes majeurs du Cycle de Garin de Monglane, à savoir l'exaltation de la foi chrétienne et le loyalisme à l'égard du roi, développés dans le *Couronnement de Louis* et le *Charroi de Nîmes*, sont pour le moins négligés dans la *Prise d'Orange* où le héros n'est plus au service du christianisme ni de Louis totalement absent, mais au service de lui-même." (64) While it is clear that he is acting in his own interests, searching for love and adventure outside of the feudal structure, this does not inherently prove a lack of loyalty to his king or that he is not exalting Christianity.

Nonetheless, Lachet's assessment does elucidate one important change between *Prise d'Orange* and the other two texts: Guillaume is not undertaking this conquest

[68] "One used to call you Guillaume Fierebrace, / Now one will call you Guillaume the Lover."

directly because of his king. Unlike the impetus for adventure in the *Charroi de Nîmes*, here he is not being forced to conquer land to avoid stealing another knight's title. This difference may, in fact, be the key to the new outlook from Guillaume in regard to violence. No longer the conquering knight who took Nîmes almost singlehandedly, in taking of Orange, he needs help from an army and his nephew, Bertrand. By the end of the poem, Guillaume is even supplanted by this more glory-driven nephew as the true hero of the final battle. It is not Guillaume, but rather Bertrand who delivers the final blow to the Saracen Aragon,[69] Guillaume is of course still violent throughout the text, he grabs a *tinel* to clobber his enemies and he fights even when outnumbered, but he shares the glory with his comrades.

There exist theories on the differences in content across manuscripts. In some theorized versions Guillaume exhibits more morally questionable violence. For example, it is believed that in one composition he may have killed the child of Orable and Tibaut.[70] However, in the extant version, Guillaume shows a reluctance toward violence, a characteristic that functions as an intertextual link to the epics that depict his later life – the *Chanson de Guillaume* and *Moniage Guillaume*.

Though some events of the legend will be changed from manuscript to manuscript, the main structure remains. Guillaume is destined for a life of violence. Because the legend of the cycle is set, characters and events will have to perform certain roles: "The geste works in this way, conferring meaning backwards and forwards through time: characters are keen to uphold the tradition of their geste

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[69] In representatively gruesome fashion, he cleaves Aragon's chest with his lance striking him dead in a single blow (vv. 1841-3).
[70] Proposed by Claude Lachet in his prologue to the *Prise d'Orange* (52) and by Andrea Fassò in his article "Le Petit Cycle de Guillaume et les trois péchés du guerrier" (423). The proof according to Fassò lies in the older poems, who make only passing reference to the event (425).

(lineage), but also concerned to shape the future – in terms of the geste (textual tradition) that will be told about them – by behaving and ultimately dying in a particular way" (*Old French Narrative Cycles* 25). The characters have a certain expectation, and they will fulfill those expectations no matter what. Even when manuscript dates vary, the *remanieurs* are beholden to a certain history. As Claude Lachet explains in the introduction to his edition of *La Prise d'Orange*, "Malgré son désir d'innovation, l'auteur de la *Prise d'Orange* reste en partie soumis au poids des traditions, aux goûts et aux habitudes du public" (63) No matter the modern reception of these texts, the medieval audience would still recognize in this *chanson* the echoes of the greater tradition.

In fealty of God or King

Though the violence in each of these three texts differs subtly, what they seem to have in common is a negotiation of violence and religion. In returning to Guillaume's reflections upon the commandment, we are shown another moment of conflict separate from the killing of Arnéïs. The question of whether to kill or not begs the question: to whom is Guillaume beholden? Is he, as a warrior of Christ, more loyal to God (i.e., the Decalogue and the teachings of the Bible), or is he, as a vassal in feudal France, more loyal to his earthly kings, Charlemagne and Louis? It is clear in these early texts which he follows closest, those of his liege lord. He is the loyal knight, and his first epic adventure shows his defense of the young Louis on several occasions. This continues in each of his epics to varying degrees of involvement, particularly in the case of the *Moniage Guillaume* wherein he returns from his hermitage on multiple occasions to defend his king. In his quest to be the best knight, Guillaume follows worldly ideals and laws. Instead of imitating Christ as the commandments, according

to Girard, recommend, he has decided to follow the path of a knight who puts nothing above loyalty to his suzerain.[71] In searching to become the best knight possible, Guillaume has left behind his religious teachings, although he will return to them later in his life in the *Moniage Guillaume*.[72] By imitating the knights of the time, he has abandoned the ideal of imitating Christ and the teachings of the Bible.

Both the Christian men that he will strike down, Arnéïs and Aymon, have committed treason, and according to the state they are to be punished. And as Benjamin and Girard explained, there is no religious punishment for transgression of the commandments. Thus, Guillaume is fully within his right to follow feudal customs; however, in so doing, he has chosen an earthly path above a religious one.

His decision to follow the feudal ideal instead of God's will is further rationalized by his comedic meeting with the Pope in *Le Couronnement de Louis*. The Pope tells Guillaume that if he helps the Vatican, and thereby Christianity, by defeating the encroaching Saracen forces, he will be able to eat meat for the rest of his life, marry as many women as he wishes, and he will be likewise assured of spiritual salvation with a place in heaven for he will never again commit sin.[73]

While the Pope's promises seem to be comedic, it is telling that within this literary universe Guillaume's excess and violence would be encouraged and pardoned by the highest spiritual authority of the material world. When presented with this carnivalesque moment, can he be faulted for his continued wanton disregard for

[71] An Adjuvant as Sara Sturm-Maddox refers to him in her paper, "From Couronnement to Moniage the Jovente and the Eage of Guillaume" (492).
[72] Not unlike Chrétien's *Perceval ou le conte du graal*, Guillaume in a way abandons his religion during his quest for renown.
[73] "Se por lui, sire, fais ui cest vasselage, / Char puez mangier les jorz de ton eage, / Et feme prendre tant come il t'iert corage; / Ne feras mais pechié qui tant seit aspres, / Se tant puez faire de traïson te guardes, / N'en seies quites en trestot ton eage. / En paradis avras ton heberjage" (*Couronnement de Louis* vv. 389-395)

human life? No, surely not; instead, we can see how in his youth, Guillaume does not yet comprehend the gravity of his actions. It, of course, does not help his tendencies that, when he meets the Pope, he is given free rein to sin in whatever ways he wishes. This comedic moment will not be mentioned again in later texts, and the Pope will make no further appearances in other epics. By consequence of the Pope's decree, comedic and flippant as it may seem, Guillaume can begin to act in whichever ways he deems fit. Though he will not flout the commandments in an outright manner, his behavior becomes more focused on the material world and spiritual ideals will be forgotten as he struggles to find a balance between the two ideologies.

This balance is further compromised when Guillaume is faced with the impending doom of Christendom. The Saracen champion Corsolt challenges him to combat, and so Guillaume decides to become a warrior for God, inextricably linking his violence and his faith until his old age. He heads out to fight Corsolt as the champion of his faith to defend the Holy City of Rome. But before he fights this formidable foe, the Pope, in another satirical moment attempts to bribe the Corsolt by offering him all the Church's relics and treasure: "Je vos donrai le tresor del mostier; / N'i remandra calics n'encensiers, / Ors ne argenz qui vaille un sol denier" (*Couronnement de Louis* vv. 457-459).[74]

The Pope, like Louis, has shown a lack of honor and courage. He is dependent on Guillaume to defend his city and the papacy. Coming moments after the offer to expel all Guillaume's sins, it is obvious why Guillaume prefers the strength of the chivalric code to the weakness that this religious figure represents. It appears, then, that even in his role as a champion of Christ, he is instead forced to defend the papacy

[74] I will give you the Church's treasure; / There will remain no chalices nor insencers, / Gold or silver that is worth a single denarius"

in the same way he defends France, by violent, deadly force. The stakes of the battle are then doubly high; he must defend God's honor as his champion and defend the papacy.[75]

Guillaume is committed to the combat, even when Corsolt attempts to dissuade him.[76] Although, before his combat, as in each of these three songs, Guillaume prays to or invokes God for protection. He says a lengthy prayer which references numerous acts of kindness from God and Jesus throughout the bible[77] and then he invokes God with great humility.[78]

This prayer to God further demonstrates the confusing connection of religion and earthly violence, and it is a motif present in much of the *petit cycle*. In *Prise d'Orange*, he likewise seeks God's protection, although this time it is used in order to avoid violence – or at least injury to his own person. When presented with danger it is not only the narrator who pleads for God to protect the hero, but Guillaume himself beseeches Christ to protect him, with variations on the phrase: "gardez nos cors de mort et de torment" (*Prise d'Orange* v. 507).[79] As they are surrounded by Saracen forces, Guillaume despairs to his nephew, "Niés Guïelin, comment le porrons fere? / Tuit somes mort et livré à domage" (vv. 1054-5).[80] This hesitation and fear continue to develop as Guillaume and his companions are imprisoned two separate times in the poem. As he approaches the transition from youth to lord, he realizes the gravity of war and combat, and the Guillaume looking for adventure at the beginning of the

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[75] As Maddox and Sturm-Maddox claim: "la signification de la lutte de Guillaume contre le champion du roi Galafre dépasse de beaucoup l'enjeu immédiat de ce combat judiciaire" (611).
[76] Corsolt will offer him money to convert to Islam and to not fight him: "Se tu voleies Mahomet aorer, / Et le tuen Deu guerpir et desfier, / Je te donreie onor et richeté / Plus que n'ot onques trestoz tes parentez." (*Couronnement de Louis* vv. 807-810)
[77] (ibid. vv. 695-789)
[78] "Deu reclama par grant umilité" (ibid. v. 694)
[79] "Protect our bodies from death and torment"
[80] "Nephew Guielin, how can we do so? / We are all dead and destined for pain."

poem is showing new tendencies. Guillaume's path of destruction catches up with him and he is faced with many hesitations. It is in this moment of hesitation that he implores God to save him from violence – as he did before the battle against Corsolt.

While there is no violence against his fellow Christians in *Prise d'Orange*, it is concentrated on the Saracen foes, there still exists a conflict between God's will and the will of the state. In fact, Guillaume must eventually reckon with all the violence he has committed – despite what the Pope had promised. As such, the Saracen vs. Christian violence does not make this text a prime example of Payen's "joyous genocide." Rather, as the text's explicit makes clear, it illustrates the devastating repercussions of violence even when dealt out solely to one's enemies. After seeing his changing attitude toward violence, the explicit seems to acknowledge the cost of the conquest: no day without a challenge (v 1887), ergo no day without violence.

These moments point to a larger argument between the state and the church as those who are not forgiven by the Church will try to seek royal pardon (Gauvard 277). It is clear from the above examples, that the *chansons de geste* of the 12th and 13th centuries are likewise having difficulties mediating the separation of the church's laws and those of political leaders. When the two moral codes are at odds with one another, fealty to Louis as the adjuvant most often takes precedent over Guillaume's role as a Christian. This is of course further complicated by his role as a defender of Christendom – as seen time and again in his expelling of the pagan enemy. While Guillaume rarely questions his role as Louis's protector as it compares to his duty to God in the larger cycle, it is important to note that the seeds of doubt have been sown.

Conclusion

Due to the bounty of intertextual references present within this trilogy of texts, it is evident that, despite a difference of many decades, each *chanson* uses violent episodes to continually examine the line between desirable and undesirable violence. However, the consensus always appears to be that no matter the shocking or horrid actions he commits, all that Guillaume does is desirable. In this way, his possible transgressions, the killing of a vassal in front of a Church altar in *Couronnement de Louis* or the historical traces of a more violent *Prise d'Orange* in which he murders the child of his future wife, are proven to be acceptable to the public. Though the killing of Aymon is noteworthy for its questionable morality – while he is supporting his right to defend his name, the rudeness of the death is quite shocking – the episode ends with no criticism or complaints from any other parties. In these three epics, Guillaume's violence does not exist in a binary of right or wrong, just or unjust – there is no gradient here – his actions are always approved and desirable, they will be supported by the state, the Church, the narrator, and the audience. Consequently, the aftermath will be scarcely considered.

Throughout the texts of this trilogy, Guillaume is faced with many decisions when presented opportunities of violence: is he to follow Louis or God? Is he to stay loyal to his king or to himself? In the end, he follows Louis every time, and, by so doing, he chooses the state over religion. This leads to the following of his earthly desires. Guillaume, in imitating the world around him, acts violently and is rewarded for this as he gains land, renown and love.

He is therefore predisposed to a desire for honor, respect, glory, renown, and all other knightly recognitions, which leads him to a life of violence. Though as seen above, it is not only Guillaume who has failed to end the cycle of violence: the fictional

Pope, the primary figure of the Church, continuously encourages and rewards Guillaume's violence. This fictional encouraging of violence through indulgences is not always aligned with the historical Church, which will try to halt violence and instead seek to promote pardoning transgressors (Gauvard 277). Nonetheless, the disconnect between the Earthly desires of violence and those as pronounced by God is laid bare.

When one examines the many episodes in Guillaume's early life, it is clear that violence is a complex issue in the literature of the time and also in the quotidian. The episodes described above are often the desired and therefore licit forms of violence. Though in deeply analyzing the examples, there are clear hints of undesirable or illicit violence. Of course, the line becomes harder to see when a party's violence is received positively by the audience or public. This ambiguity between what is defined as licit or as illicit is interrogated by historian Claude Gauvard when she asks: "Comment condamner une violence que tout le monde loue" (273)? The answer is unclear because violence that is desired is often praiseworthy.[81]

As was the case for the Pope in the *Couronnement de Louis* and for Louis and Charlemagne, any medieval institution presented in the *chansons de geste* can and will praise the acts of violence that benefit them. It becomes a question of: what are the repercussions? The immediate repercussion for Guillaume is a never-ending cycle of violence. This cycle of violence opens and reopens with influence from within and from without. Saracens who have lost their friends and families swear vengeance and Christian knights swear continuous conquest and combat in the name of fealty and Christianity.

[81] "Car la violence est louée par l'ensemble du corps social, par les nobles et par les non-nobles, mais aussi par les institutions judiciaires les plus glorieuses du royaume, qu'il s'agisse du Parlement ou de la justice propre du roi, celle que le souverain retient personnellement pour choisir condamner ou de gracier" (Gauvard 273)

The future repercussions remain to be seen in this trilogy of texts, but it will be expanded upon in the *chansons* exploring Guillaume's later life. In spite of the overwhelming approval for violence, there are moments of trepidation in Guillaume's psyche, particularly in *Prise d'Orange,* where he hints at a more complex relationship with violence, one that takes center-stage in the *Chanson de Guillaume* and the *Moniage Guillaume*.

CHAPTER 3

The *Chanson de Guillaume*: The Pleasure and Pain of War

Gruesome combat is present in each of the texts of the cycle of Guillaume d'Orange, but one of the greatest examples of the disruptive violence of warfare is found in the *Chanson de Guillaume*. After his marriage to Guibourc in the events recounted in the *Prise d'Orange*, "*dan Willame*" (*Chanson de Guillaume* v. 4) finds himself at a new stage of his life. In his rarely mentioned role as the lord of Barcelona, Guillaume has transitioned from a youthful knight who is easily bored during peacetime to a lord who laments the consequences of war and who hesitates to involve himself in combat. Despite its title, this epic does not center solely on Guillaume. Throughout this particularly episodic work, the story will follow three main heroes: Vivien, Guillaume and Rainouart. Each of these heroes will leave behind a trail of bodies as they defend Christendom from an invading Saracen scourge.

The focus on combat of this poem may reflect the time of its creation. The *Chanson de Guillaume* is one of the earliest French epic poems, and it survives in only one manuscript (Frappier 113). Furthermore, the poem suffers from a lack of continuity within the multiple episodes depicted. According to Jean Frappier, it is full of "contradictions internes" (142). Chief among these contradictions is the fact that Guillaume begins the story located in Barcelona, where he leaves his wife, but the next

time he returns home, he will be back in Orange.[82] Furthermore, scholars have found that the song seems to be two different stories merged with one another. François Suard refers to the first 1900 lines of the poem as the *Chanson de Guillaume* and the rest of the poem as the *Chanson de Rainouart* (18). Thus, the two sections of the *Chanson de Guillaume* have been named G1 and G2.[83]

In the *Chanson de Guillaume,* a series of bloody battles at Larchamp between Saracen and Christian forces takes place over several days and leads to the deaths of countless soldiers from both camps. These battles restart and continue throughout the length of the poem with little respite for the audience or the characters. The episodic nature of this poem is inseparable from its propensity for bloodshed, and the aftermath of this violence will leave a stark impression on the survivors[84] and will be mentioned in the epics that depict the later lives of the protagonists. While the first chapter focused on instances of desirable and questionable forms of violence, there exists another more prevalent form of violence in the French Medieval epic: warfare. Whereas the *petit cycle* contains many references to differences between the Church's and the State's reaction to violence, the *Chanson de Guillaume* instead focuses on how the violence of battle affects the characters: the victims and perpetrators alike. At no point will Guillaume question whether he should be committing these acts; however, he does lament the loss of life.

Because the events of *Chanson de Guillaume* occur within the context of a war, there is no questioning whether the violence is licit or illicit. The rationale behind this

[82] Philip Bennett explains that in the second half of the poem, Orange is used 12 times as Guillaume's residence (38)
[83] See Jean Frappier's *Les Chansons de geste du cycle de Guillaume d'Orange* vol.1 (145)
[84] François Suard, in his introduction to his modern French translation of the *Chanson de Guillaume*, refers to the poem as "L'histoire d'un conflit prolongé et sanglant" (9).

is explained by historian Hannah Skoda who defines violence in Medieval France as: "physical damage done by one human being to another" (2). Since the morality of military combat is of little concern throughout this poem, there is no disapproval from the narrator (or the implied audience) of the Frankish knights' actions, especially when considering that they are repelling an invading force. They are justified in their actions, and the narrator and audience will look at their predetermined losses with pity.[85] However, any ambivalence towards the violence done against the Saracens does not mean there will be no negative psychological effect on the Frankish knights who are engaged in combat.

The moments of violence explored in the previous chapter were often focused on single combat between Guillaume and an antagonist. However, violence in the French medieval epic is not limited to these fleeting moments. In fact, throughout all of the texts of Guillaume's cycle, violence will most often take place in traditional combat settings. To this end, Catherine Hanley's description of warfare as not only combat, but other associated acts – training, preparations, strategy, and casualties – is important to note (4). Warfare, whether it ends in victory or death for the Frankish knights, in the French medieval epic will often be lauded and placed at the center of the action through the glorifying descriptions of the Christian warriors' valor and might. Unsurprisingly, like the other *chansons de geste*, the cycle of Guillaume shows the same propensity for violence. The epic hero's *geste,* after all, requires battle and victory to grow larger.[86]

[85] "Qui donc veïst les danceals enseignez / Lier lur plaies e estreindre lur lez !"

[86] So much so that Guillaume proudly exclaims to Gloriant that none of his family members are located in crypts for they have all died bloody deaths in battle (*Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 3166-9)

Continuous warfare brings the personages within the *chansons de geste,* as well as the audience, face to face with a violence that addresses the realities of those entrenched in warfare during the Middle Ages, specifically the aristocratic audience. By listening to or reading these stories, the audience is confronted with ideas of mortality, along with the long-term impact of losing loved ones, and of the psychological ramifications of a solider or knight dispatching their foes. Compared to the relatively brief descriptions of combat between characters in the *Charroi de Nîmes*, the *Prise d'Orange,* and *Couronnement de Louis*, the *Chanson de Guillaume* focuses more heavily on the wartime feats of its protagonists. This chapter will analyze the visceral description of combat within the *Chanson de Guillaume,* demonstrating how the results of violence negatively impact the psyche of the characters. In this epic, we see that the author(s) of the text examine(s) violence and the characteristics of grief as the protagonists are subjected to immense loss of life and recurring and enduring psychological distress.

Lauding violence in warfare

Due to its long, episodic nature and its interest in three main protagonists, it is useful to restate the events of the *Chanson de Guillaume* before continuing to an analysis. The song begins in the midst of an oncoming invasion of Saracens. Vivien, Guillaume's ill-fated nephew, counsels his lord, Thibaut to send for Guillaume. His lord, full of pride, refuses, and will unsurprisingly abandon his vassals on the battlefield. Vivien will nonetheless lead the army against the enemy, inspiring each knight with his prowess. In the span of many *laisses*, the entire Frankish army has been defeated. Vivien sends Girard, another of Guillaume's nephews, to ask for reinforcements. In Girard's absence, Vivien suffers his first of two deaths.

Guillaume eventually arrives with 30,000 knights in tow. Once again, the Frankish side is decimated and Guillaume finds Vivien, who dies for the second and final time.[87] Soon after, Guillaume returns to Orange for reinforcements. He must beg king Louis for reinforcements before returning to battle. Among the new soldiers is Rainouart, an enormous man who will be revealed to be Guibourc's long-lost brother. This newcomer proves to be a boon, and the Franks dispatch the Saracens with Rainouart landing the final blow on the Saracen leader. Ultimately, Guillaume and his friends celebrate their victory, and the song ends with the reunion of Guibourc and Rainouart.

The *Chanson de Guillaume* will focus on the actions of the protagonist knights, exalting, above all their qualities, their military prowess. This interest in combat between knights can be seen across different epic traditions, because as Philip Bennett claims: "Dans l'épopée, qu'il s'agisse du Mahabharata indien ou des chansons du cycle de Guillaume de la France médiévale, tous les héros sont des guerriers" (17). Thus, the French medieval epic poems privilege a "chevalocentric" view of combat, which celebrates the feats of its heroic protagonists and functions "as a form of self-validation for the aristocracy and the chivalric classes" (Hanley 162). It is, then, through scenes of combat that these warriors are celebrated, with their deeds taking center-stage throughout each episode of the *Chanson de Guillaume*.

In the beginning of the *Chanson de Guillaume,* bloodshed and combat are described in precise and detailed verses, throughout which the Frankish knights are praised for their actions and their skill. The first of the three main knights to

[87] Vivien's first death occurs after he endures a series of punishing blows from the enemy, culminating in the scattering of his brains across the grass. The second death happens in Guillaume's arms as he expires after receiving communion.

participate in battle is Vivien, a hero whose fate is sealed from the beginning of the *chanson*. The prologue begins by forewarning the listeners that during the battle at Larhamp Guillaume "Si perdi de ses homes les meillurs, / E sun nevou, dan Viviën le preux, / Pur qui il out tut tens al quor grant dolur" (*Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 7-9).[88] The tone of the poem is set from the very beginning: Larchamp will be a place of great pain and sorrow for Guillaume and his companions. Nonetheless, given the epic's interest in warfare, Guillaume and other knights will still need to prove their worth by fighting against the enemy.

With the stage set for great losses, the poem transitions to the first set of battles at Larchamp. Here, Vivien and his suzerain Thibaut's host seek to defend their lands from the encroaching Saracen forces. However, Thibaut and his son, Estourmi, will quickly discuss abandoning the battle once they see the size of the opposing army and the sea "coverre de barges e de nefs" (*Chanson de Guillaume* v. 186).[89] This cowardice on the part of his liege lords will consequently serve as a direct contrast with Vivien's bravery.

Even when faced with such insurmountable odds, the heroic protagonists seek out battle. For example, just before the battle begins, Thibaut tries to assign Vivien to be a lookout, but Vivien does not obey. He only knows one way to be a knight: to charge straight into battle. Vivien then credits this trait to a lesson learned from his mentor.[90] Nonetheless, the joy for battle does not lead to a misunderstanding of their circumstances. Vivien is not so foolhardy as to imagine that he and his small force will

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[88] "[He] lost here [at Larchamp] his best men, / Including his nephew, Vivien the brave, / For whom he will always have great pain in his heart."
[89] "Covered with barges and ships"
[90] "Nel me devez ja requere: / Encuntre val dei bas porter mun healme / Desi qu'al champ u fiere od le poig destre, Car si m'aprist li miens seignurs Willame" (*Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 163-167)

be able to withstand the opposing host, in fact, he wisely[91] chooses to recommend that Thibaut call for Guillaume. Though Thibaut and Estourmi are too prideful to ask for help, Guillaume's legendary reputation for warfare is the inspiration for his brave nephew. Vivien will prove himself to be the exemplary model of knighthood, and although it will not stop their suzerains from abandoning them, it will convince the noblest knights to stay by his side in spite of the dire situation: "Li couart s'en vont od Tedbald fuiant / Od Vivien remistrent tut li chevalier vaillant" (*Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 330-331).[92] With his bona fides established, Vivien takes the role of leader and leads them nobly into combat.

In addition to his model behavior, Vivien's skill in combat is likewise exemplary, and once the battle is underway, he sets himself apart as a stellar warrior. Early in the battle, Vivien deals a deadly blow to an enemy knight who is equipped with full armor and a shield:

> Point le cheval, il ne pot muer ne saille,
>
> E fiert un paen sur sa doble targe,
>
> Tute li fent de l'un ur desqu'a l'altre,
>
> E trenchat le braz qui li sist en l'enarme,
>
> Colpe le piz e tranchad lui la coraille,
>
> Parmi l'eschine sun grant espée li passe,
>
> Tut estendu l'abat mort en la place.
>
> Crie: "Munjoie!", ço fu l'enseigne Charle. (*Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 320-327)[93]

With incomprehensible might, Vivien crushes the Saracen's targe and cuts off his

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[91] Jean Frappier compares this to the "sagesse" shown by Olivier in the *Roland* (159).
[92] "The cowards run away with Tiébaut fleeing / With Vivien remain all the valliant knights."
[93] "He spurs the horse, ... / And he strikes a pagan on his double targe, / He completely crushes it from one side to the other, / And he cuts his arm that he had in the straps, / He cut the chest

enemy's arm in a single blow. It is made clear that the Franks are without reproach in their use of extreme violence because the amputation points to a greater moral judgment by the text against the enemies. David S. King explains that the suffering of an amputation reveals a moral failing on behalf of the victim: "one type of war injury, however, distinguishes itself from the rest. Amputation is a defaming wound. In these songs, only the villains lose their limbs" (35). This injury thus adds to the lack of moral quandary to the poem's approach to violence. What is more, Vivien cries out "Munjoie!", which connects him to Guillaume and more importantly to Charlemagne. Later Girard will also cry out this same word: "Crie : 'Munjoie!', ço est l'ensegne des noz" (*Chanson de Guillaume* v. 440).[94] This cry primarily connects the Franks with Charlemagne, given that this is the "enseigne Charle," but it also functions as a way for the narrator to increase the audience participation by placing the audience directly alongside the heroes by describing it in the second instance as the "ensegne des noz." Morality decided implicitly, the audience is able to focus on the detailed recounting of Vivien's (at this point) unparalleled skill in combat.

Later in the poem, Vivien will again show inhuman strength when he slices through an enemy's hauberk all the way through the body to the ground: "Qui qu'il fert sur halberc u sur healme, / Sun colp n'arestet desque jusqu'en terre" (*Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 795-6).[95] This impressive violence, however, is laced with over-exaggeration, and despite Catherine Hanley's claim that "[m]any of the features of war which they [the corpus of *chansons de geste*] reflect the reality of warfare in our period

and cut his innards, / Through the spine his great sword passed, / Laid out, he struck him dead on the very spot. / He cried: 'Montjoie!', this was Charlemagne's sign."

[94] "He cries out: 'Montjoie!", this is the sign of our [side]."

[95] "Whoever's hauberk or helm that he struck, his blow would not stop until it reached the ground."

[the 12th and 13th centuries]" (106), it is hard to believe that Vivien could realistically defeat his enemy in a single strike. Alongside more "realistic" elements, the hyperbolic descriptions of strength will continue as the battle rages on. The *Chanson de Guillaume* abounds with similarly outlandish descriptions of the Frankish knights' combat, and they set up what Jean-Charles Payen has referred to as the beauty of blood and carnage ("Une Poétique du génocide joyeux" 226).

As the battle continues, and subsequent knights take the field, the descriptions of violence must continue to surpass the lofty standards of their predecessors – in both hyperbole and in the escalation of gore. Therefore, when "little" Gui[96] joins the fight much later in the poem, he will up the ante. The young knight will crush an enemy's helm and, in one blow, cut through his foe's horse:

Fert un paien sus en le halme de sun chef,

Tresque al nasel li trenchad e fendit,

Le meistre os li ad colpé del chef.

Grant fud li colps e Guiot fu irez,

Tut le purfent desque enz al baldré,

Colpe la sele e le dos del destrer,

En mi le champ en fist quatre meitez (*Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 1845-1851)[97]

Much like Vivien, Gui strikes his enemy with unbelievable force. However, Vivien's offensive pales in comparison to Gui's. The latter strikes through the enemy knight, his armor, and his horse in one swift blow. As the narrator succinctly describes, he split

[96] So called for the description given upon his introduction to the audience: "n'out uncore quinze anz, asez esteit petiz, / N'out point de barbe [...]"

[97] "Gui struck a pagan on the helm on his head, / To the nose-piece he cut and crushed, / He cut the top of his skull from his head. Great was the blow as Gui was angry, / He split him open to the waist, / Striking the saddle and the back of the destrier, / In the middle of the field he cut the horse and pagan into 4 halves."

these two in four halves that fell to the ground. Such strength is in fact as unrealistic as it seems at first glance. In regard to the injuries inflicted by Gui, it was possible for a sword to inflict a wound from shoulder to thigh, but the commonplace epic description of cutting a horse in half is unlikely (Hanley 40). Nonetheless, the effect of this violence is awe-inspiring.

Given the increase in bloodshed and decimation, it is no wonder that soon after Gui creates these 4 halves, he will find himself wading through a field of blood: "E Gui, sis niés, le vait a pié siuvant, / D'ures en altres desqu'al genoil el sanc" (vv. 1887-1888).[98] Heavy amounts of blood covering the terrain is a common description of the epic's violence; the ground becomes inundated with the blood of the combatants, and the bright red contrasting with the green grass creates a morbidly beautiful image. The violence of combat is described in beautifully poetic terms according to Payen: "le monde épique est le lieu d'un imaginaire démesuré, qui est une fête des sens. Car cet imaginaire est décrit de façon très concrète, et il arrive que le paysage se charge de couleurs: le sang vermeil déferle sur l'herbe verte (cette herbe qui est si volontiers associée à la mort dans la poésie universelle)" ("Une poétique du génocide joyeux" 231). Vibrant colors and vivid descriptions add to the "fête des sens" of the poem's battles, once again creating a seemingly illogical appreciation of the beauty of death.

In fact, the violence of the epics is so visceral and detailed that the audience can often picture the bloodshed that has taken place. Overall, when describing the fidelity of the depictions of war in the epic, Hanley states that the *chansons de geste* do not paint a realistic picture of injury and fatigue: unlike their romance counterparts, the epic hero often pushes through injuries to vanquish his foes (Hanley 169-170). Part of

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[98] "And Gui, his nephew, goes with his foot forward / From time to time he is up to his knee in blood."

this is influenced by the nature of the epic as a literature and tradition that abhors descriptions of peacetime, but part of it is also influenced by the depiction of the epic national past. This unrealism is, of course, expected in part because the heroes of the epic past are thought to be greater in every degree than the everyday people of the present (be it the medieval or modern present).[99] José Enrique Ruiz-Domènec argues that this is a frontier story, that it serves as a memory of "la vida de frontera en tiempo de las abuelas [...] Más bien, el autor (o autores) nos invita a ser testigos de una realidad que ya nadie puede ver, pues era una realid del pasado" (Ruiz-Domènec 504).[100] While this past no longer exists for the 11th or 12th century medieval audience, it further explains the mythical status of the knights.

Despite the impressive strength of the heroes, the situation is bleak. The Franks are heavily outnumbered, and their ranks will quickly begin to diminish.[101] Yet, even as their numbers dwindle, there exists a definite thrill for battle throughout the poem. The idea of death (either their own or their enemy's) leads to an excitement that spurs them forward. The prospects of being welcomed by God or of killing the enemy lead to an erotic pleasure, or ecstasy as Bataille describes it (142). Jean-Charles Payen furthers this rapprochement of death and ecstasy by explaining that in the heat of battle, the soldiers of the French epic experience, "le plaisir de tuer" ("Une poétique du génocide joyeux" 226). [102] That joy can be found on both sides of death (whether the knight

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[99] As Jean-Pierre Martin states in his article on memory, the past of the epic was one where men were both larger and stronger than those of the present ("The *Chanson de geste* as a Construction of Memory" 139).

[100] "The frontier life in the time of the ancestors [...] Better yet, the author (or authors) invites us to be his/her witnesses to a reality that no one can see anymore, for it was a reality of the past" (504)

[101] "Paens les pristrent a merveilus turment; / De dis mil homes ne li leissent que cent. / Dolent poet estre le vaillant chevaler, / Qui od dis mil homes se combati, / Et de dis mile n'out ore que cent chevalers, E de cels sunt nafré tote l'une meité! / Car si poet estre Viviën le guerrer!" (vv. 553-559)

[102] Which comes from his title for the influential article, "Une Poétique du génocide joyeux:

experiences death firsthand or whether they send another knight to their death), makes clear that Payen's idea of the *génocide joyeux* is present in the *Chanson de Guillaume*.

The Passion of Vivien

Vivien perishes because his suffering and subsequent death will play a pivotal role in Guillaume's legend. It must play out this way regardless of the characters' or the audience's wishes: "The geste works in this way, conferring meaning backwards and forwards through time: characters are keen to uphold the tradition of their geste (lineage), but also concerned to shape the future – in terms of the geste (textual tradition) that will be told about them – by behaving and ultimately dying in a particular way" (*Old French Narrative Cycles* 25). The diegetic and extradiegetic *geste* requires that even tragic events transpire as foretold (either by the prologue or by the later poems). In the *Chanson de Guillaume*, given the prologue's announcement of the poem's tragic events, there is little wonder what will happen to Vivien and the Franks.

Against a wave of reinforcements, and without Guillaume's help, the Franks are destined for defeat. In a presaging of his own fate, Vivien acknowledges the likely obliteration of his companions and himself by the Saracen force, but he chooses to fight valiantly as a soldier of God, nonetheless. He reiterates a claim that he will make several times throughout the poem about his promise to God:

> Jo remaindrai ici al champ aduré,
>
> Ja n'en turnerai, car pramis l'ai a Dé
>
> Que ja ne fuierai de bataille champel.

---

devoir de violence et plaisir de tuer dans la *Chanson de Roland*", but is not directly used in the text.

Jo les veinterai ben solunc la merci Dé. (vv. 586-589)[103]

His commitment to battle continuously inspires the audience and other knights. However, it will make little difference, as the unequal strength between the two hosts will eventually lead to massive losses on the Frankish side, and the heroes will pay the price. In this early moment, Vivien reveals a promise to God which helps explain his steadfast determination to remain on the battlefield. According to Jean Subernat, this determination reveals Vivien's dedication to his promise to God, and that "aux yeux de Vivien, la crainte de la mort ne justifie pas la fuite devant l'ennemi" (316). In this light, it is clear why he will continue until he and his companions perish.

Even when he is the only knight left standing on his side, he still makes the opposition pay dearly: "Od sul sa lance en ad cent abatuz" (*Chanson de Guillaume* v. 762).[104] Soon after this astounding last-stand Vivien will undergo a Passion-like ordeal (*Le Motif du repentir* 144). His body will be pierced by lances, and he will be tortuously injured by his enemies as he looks for any assistance. After not eating or drinking for three days,[105] he suffers immensely. While injured he decides to drink from a non-potable water source[106] as he will go to great lengths to continue fighting. Though this desire proves difficult to fulfill as he begins to succumb to the effects of the water which he expels from his body: "Sailli li est arere de la boche e del niés; / Grant fu l'anguisse, les oilz li sunt troblez" (*Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 866-7).[107] He

[103] "I will remain here on the hardened field, / I will not turn, for I promised God / That I will not flee from a battlefield. I will vanquish them according to God's good grace."
[104] "With only his lance he struck down 100 [Saracens]"
[105] "si n'out treis jours mangé / Grant est la faim, e fort pur deporter, / E la seif male, ne la poet endurer." (*Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 839-841)
[106] "Grant est la faim, e fort pur deporter, / E la seif male, ne la poet endurer. / Par mi la boche vait le sanc tut cler, / E par la plaie del senestre costé" (*Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 840-843)
[107] "It gushes back out from his mouth and from his nose; / Great was the anguish, his eyes were pained."

soon struggles to defend himself and suffers a grave injury as "jus a la terre li cheent les boels" (*Chanson de Guillaume* v. 881).[108]

After a multitude of injuries, Vivien is eventually killed by a Saracen foe:

Fert en la teste le vaillant chevaler,

Que la cervele sur l'erbe li chet ;

Sur les genoilz abat le chevaler:

Ço fu damage quant si prodome chet. (vv. 920-923)[109]

Here the narrator speaks to the audience's suspected feelings toward the death, stating that it is a pity, "damage," when a knight such as Vivien perishes. It is tragic for the noble and exemplary Christian knight to be struck down, yet it was inevitable. As with the descriptions of the Franks' combat, the Saracens exhibit an excessive tendency: the narrator continues to explain that, after he falls "chet," "Sur li corent de plusurs parz paens, / Tut le detrenchent [...]" (*Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 924-5).[110] Even after falling, Vivien is further punished by his enemies. The intercession by the narrator will create a moment of reflection free of the chaos of battle, which "has the effect of manipulating the emotive state of the audience by shifting the focus from the glory of war to the reality of death" (Rikhardsdottir 86). These distinct juxtapositions of the glorification of war and the sobering depictions of death (on the Frankish side) will permeate the text when Guillaume arrives at Larchamp.

Vivien's death is indeed a key moment of the text; the in-depth recounting of his pain and tribulations builds up until the narrator alerts the audience to his death. However, there are in fact two moments of death in the text. Vivien dies as examined

[108] "To the ground fell his bowels"
[109] "[The Saracen] struck the valiant knight on his head, / So that his brains fell onto the grass; / On the knees he hit the knight: / It was such a pity when such a noble man fell."
[110] "From all over, the pagans run to him and slaughter him"

above, but, when Guillaume arrives to the battlefield to find his nephew, a scene later plays out with a second equally emotional death. François Suard believes that this is one of a the major disparities of the text's continuity: "Sur le plan narratif, des disparates majeures apparaissent, dont la plus importante tient à la succession de deux récits de la mort de Vivien" (Suard 17). While at first glance this would seemingly negate the effects of the first death, such is the emotive power of Vivien's death(s) that the second moment is as powerful as the first.

Of course, not all the violence is perpetrated by the heroes against their enemies. The protagonists are likewise damaged from the melee. When they are not dying in battle, their wounds and exhaustion weigh heavily on their bodies.[111] In fact, the physical toll is extreme and can be seen on both men and their horses. As Girard heads to Barcelona in order to call upon Guillaume, he is carrying his dying warhorse on his back. Eventually he must unload his horse and weapons due to his own exhaustion. Girard is then forced to use his bloodied sword as a crutch:

> 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,
>
> E la mure vers terre reposant. (*Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 731-735)[112]

This imagery of course highlights the pain and exhaustion felt by Girard, but it also

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[111] Though as explained by Hanley (40), often the epic heroes are able to return to form and continue no matter the injuries – at least when they are not killed in battle.

[112] "The Frank had thrown aside all his weapons, / Except for his sword, of which the blade was made of steel, / It was vermillion from the hilt upwards, / The scabbard was filled with liver and in blood; / He held it unsheathed, and he went forward leaning on it, / And the point of the sword against the ground."

serves to remind the audience of the toll of battle. The duality of battle is clearly present in this citation: the sword's scabbard is filled with the blood and flesh of his enemies, but he is forced to use it as to support his beaten and battered body.

After wandering without a horse for an indeterminable amount of time, Girard finally arrives in Barcelona. When he relates his account of the events at Larchamp to Guillaume the former is faced with an unanticipated hesitation from the would-be hero of this poem. Guillaume is weary from a previous combat and explains the decision to Girard:

> Uncore nen ad que sul treis jurz passez
>
> Que jo sui venu de bataille champel,
>
> Que ai fait grande a Burdele sur mer,
>
> S'i ai perdu mun nobile barné.
>
> ………………………………………
>
> E ensurequetut nel purreie endurrer:
>
> Fer e acer i purreit hom user.
>
> Ben se combat Viviën l'alosé;
>
> A iceste feiz nel puis mie regarder,
>
> Ceste bataille pot ben sanz mei finer. (*La Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 1016-1019, 1022-1026)[113]

Guillaume begins by explaining that he recently returned from battle, hinting at the continuous violence expected from the *chanson de geste*.[114] However, this is not a case

[113] "Three days have yet to pass, / Since I arrived from the battlefield, / At Bordeaux-sur-mer where I did many great things, / And it was there that I lost my noble army / […] / And above all else, I could not withstand it: / Iron and steel, a man could use there. / The esteemed Vivien fights well: / At this time I cannot go see him, / This battle can very well end without me."

[114] As Philip Bennett states, this hesitation speaks in part to Barcelona's greater role as a place of recovery and peace: "Guillaume vient de rentrer d'une autre bataille où il a perdu une bonne partie de ses effectifs, ne manque pas de renforcer l'impression que le héros se trouve isolé et à

of one tired soldier. Guillaume has lost his "nobile barné." Contrary to the expectation for which the poem has prepared the audience, help from Guillaume is not guaranteed. Guillaume believes, upon first being asked for help, that Vivien can handle the situation, and, unlike the audience who already knows Vivien's fate,[115] Guillaume has no knowledge of the predicament in which the Franks find themselves.[116] Girard will soon disabuse him of his expectations in regard to Vivien's ability to win the fight, and Guillaume learns that he has spoken an ironic truth in saying that "Ceste bataille pot ben sanz mei finer."

The second episode of the poem will thus show Guillaume faced with the death of his friends and family. He will experience true adversity and despair for the first time in his legend. However, the violence and warfare does not stop once Guillaume finds Vivien. A third hero arrives in the second half of the poem to first "éclipse Guillaume lui-même" and then "assure la victoire des chrétiens et venge la mort de Vivien" (Frappier 204-5).

Rainouart: taking up Guillaume's mantle

As was the case at the beginning with Vivien, by the end of the poem, Guillaume's status as primary protagonist has been supplanted by Rainouart, Guibourc's long-lost brother. Rainouart is the epitome of the carnivalesque, he is as comedic as he is excessive.[117] Upon first meeting him, the audience learns of his

l'abri des affres de la guerre dans un îlot [Barcelona] consacré à la paix" (41-2). For this reason, we should not be surprised by Guillaume's initial hesitancy. Bennett also explains that Larchamp is the antithesis of Barcelona and has negative effects on the characters (56).

[115] The audience's witnesses Vivien's death only 100 verses before seeing Guillaume.

[116] Nor is he aware of the hope that VIvien place in him earliy in the poem: "N'obliez mie Willame al cur niés: / Sages hom est mult en bataille chanpel, / Il la set ben maintenir e garder; / S'il vient, nus veintrums Deramed" (*Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 55-58).

[117] Though Jean Frappier makes clear that his comedic qualities do not make Rainouart ridiculous (205).

impressive strength: his weapon of choice is a mace which no one else is capable of wielding.[118] According to Philip Bennett, the mastery of weaponry is the pinnacle of knightly prowess, whereas a primitive weapon links heroes to the marginalized other, the Saracens, the giants, etc. (18). Rainouart's use of the *tinel* perfectly captures his status as a marginalized personage (at least as it pertains to this particular epic). He is both gigantic and Saracen-born, so while he will ultimately put an end to the fighting, he is not a knight, and his combat will be characterized by brute force. Despite his outsider status, it is clear from the beginning that he is a formidable fighter who will continue the "joyous genocide."[119]

Just as important as his carnivalesque qualities, Rainouart will also function in place of the Guillaume whose personality hardly resembles that of the hero from the *petit cycle*. Rainouart can replace Guillaume perfectly: the two resemble one another in their strength, impetuosity, and fierce loyalty. Further linking the two, Rainouart even goes so far as to kill a group of Franks for disrespecting him (something Guillaume is prone to doing):

> Od sun bastun en ad quatre tuez;
>
> Un en consivit al eissir de l'ostel,
>
> Par mi les reins li dona un colp tel
>
> En dous meitez li ad le cors colpé.
>
> Del pié le boute, le quor li ad crevé (*Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 2886-2890)[120]

In one of the first encounters with this giant, the audience is shown Rainouart's

[118] "De la quisine al rei issit un bacheler, / Deschalcez e en langes, n'out point de solders; / Granz out les piez e les trameals crevez, / E desur sun col portant un tinel; / N'est ore nuls hom qui tel peüst porter." (*Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 2648-2652)

[119] Furthermore, during combat, Rainouart will rekindle Guillaume's love of battle, "Sun bon tinel trestut sanglant en fu. / Vit le Willame, unc tant lé ne fu." (*Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 3237-8)

[120] With his staff he killed 4 of them; / One tried to leave the room, / Between the kidnies he

indomitable strength. What is more, Rainouart commits this act with no knightly weapon, using instead his staff to kill the first four and his feet to split the last Frank in half. Continuing the tendency we saw earlier with Gui and Vivien, Rainouart's strength continues even further into hyperbole as his immense strength becomes more and more evident to the audience. Later in battle at Larchamp, he is even more prolific than could be expected. He dispatches foe after foe, and according to the narrator he kills 700 enemies with little issue.[121]

Rainouart's appearance sends the narrative into its resolution as he fights and kills the final Saracen leaders at Larchamp. To combat the fierce Balan, who carries an imposing flail, Rainouart asks for 7 shields. Balan destroys 6 of the shields in one strike, but the final shield holds and Rainouart's counterattack finishes the battle:

> Al tur franceis lores si est turné,
>
> Al haterel detriés li dunad un colp tel
>
> Que andous les oilz li fist del chef voler
>
> Mort le trebuche veant tut le barné (ibid vv. 3269-3272)[122]

Given his forceful punishment of the Franks who offended him, it comes as little surprise that he has the strength to knock an enemy's eyes out of their skull. Nonetheless, it is an impressive feat that distinguishes his brute strength from the skillful swordplay of the other knights. Although Rainouart has not been officially

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gave him a great blow / In two halves he split his body. / With his foot he kicked him, he crushed his chest in."

[121] "Enz en la nef al fort rei Ailré, / Iloec trovad set cent paiens armez; / Tuz les ad morz, ocis e agraventez." (*Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 3023-3025)

[122] "Toward the French tower he turned, / On the nape of the neck he fiercely struck his enemy / Such that he caused both his enemy's eyes to fly out of his head / Dead he struck him before all the barons."

knighted, it is this battle with Balan that shows the audience his potential for knighthood.[123]

In the final decisive single combat, Rainouart draws his sword for the first time. With one blow he splits both his enemy and the latter's horse in half and the sword continues until it gets stuck in the ground.[124] At the sight of Rainouart's ferocity, the enemy becomes so frightened that they run away, but not before Rainouart kills 2000 of them, again increasing the over exaggeration of deaths he is responsible for.[125] He is warrior excess personified: frightening even to the other Saracens who are often depicted as demonic by the Christian narrator.[126]

What is more, Rainouart's lust for violence does not end with the final combat at Larchamp. Before the end of the poem, Guillaume forgets to invite Rainouart to the feast celebrating their victory.[127] Rainouart becomes furious and attacks his comrades-in-arms. He strikes another knight so hard that his eyes fall out of his head – the same fate that befell Balan. Despite this violence against his comrades, he is rewarded for his gestures, much as a younger Guillaume was continuously rewarded in spite of his penchant for killing his fellow Franks. With Rainouart's episode concluding the poem, the beginning and end clearly valorize violence and its effects in war.

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[123] As Jean-Pierre Martin explains, this episode "montre bien le passage de Rainouart au statut de chevalier, d'abord en revêtant un équipement plus que complet, puis en combattant a *lei de chevaler*" ("Le Motif de l'adoubement" 355).

[124] "Traite l'ad de forere, si li vint mult a gré. / Devant lui garde, si vit le rei Foré, / Amunt el le healme li ad un colp presenté; / Tut le purfent jusqu'al nou del baldré, / E le cheval li ad par mi colpé; Desi qu'al helt fiert le brant enz al pré." (*La Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 3323-3328)

[125] Rainouart killing this many troops would of course stretch the bounds of realism. Catherine Hanley explains that numbers when used in reference to troops were "often implausible or contradictory", however, "these are not random exaggerations, but rather numbers which are meant to be read symbolically" (72). She continues to describe how death tolls were used in similarly symbolic ways (74). As such, the size of the number of Saracens that he ostensibly killed serves as a symbolic measure of his strength and ability.

[126] For example, Tabur de Canaloine is described as having skin strong enough to withstand direct blows from Guielin (*Chanson de Guillaume* v. 3183)

[127] A mistake that recalls the error in judgement of Louis during the *Charroi de Nîmes*.

Violence in the *Chanson de Guillaume*: simply a joyous genocide?

Sandwiched between Vivien and Rainouart's incredible displays of military prowess, Guillaume will experience the grief of losing not only Vivien but of losing countless of his fellow knights. In fact, in the verses between Vivien's first death and Rainouart's first appearance, Guillaume's forces are defeated numerous times. His first attempt at fighting at Larchamp ends in his force of "trente mille de chevalers armez" (*Chanson de Guillaume* v. 1099). After several days of combat, but only 27 lines of verse, Guillaume is left with only Girard and Guichard.[128] Soon after the audience is presented with Girard and Guichard's deaths, each taking a mental toll on Guillaume. With this quick resolution of the second battle, the episode centered on Guillaume, it seems, is focusing not only on the combat itself but on the moments of extreme loss experienced by Guillaume.

A prevailing view of the combat of the epic is that it depicts what Jean-Charles Payen has referred to as a "joyous genocide," or in other words, the combatants of the epic engage in bloody combat which evokes pleasure. Payen explored this concept in his highly influential article on the *Chanson de Roland,* but it is something that scholars have used to describe epics of other cycles as well. In fact, in *Carnaval Héroïque*, Philip Bennett refers to the events of the *Chanson de Guillaume* as a "manifestation de ce 'génocide joyeux' *typique des chansons de geste*" (*Carnaval Héroïque* 57-8).[129] While the second half of this chapter will explore how reductive such descriptions can be, it is nonetheless worth stating that one might reasonably

[128] "Des homes Willame ne remist un vif, / Joesdi al vespre, / Fors treis escuz qu'il out al champ tenir." (*Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 1126-8)
[129] Emphasis mine

impose Payen's claims on other epics, especially given the vibrant descriptions of combat in the *Chanson de Guillaume* analyzed above.

Early in his life, Guillaume exemplifies the character type and classification of the hostile *bellator* ("Une Poétique du génocide joyeux" 230): he fights a "pagan" enemy that he "voue à l'extermination" (ibid 227) and he exhibits violent tendencies in most of his actions. In the *chanson de geste*, battles and feats of combat are by design lauded by the narrator and its characters. What is more, the combination of viscera, bloodshed and violence combine together to create a sense of "*la joie* de tuer et *la beauté* de la bataille" (ibid 229).[130] While this blending of joy, beauty, and death is as present in the *Chanson de Guillaume* as in Payen's description of the *Chanson de Roland*, the reception of this violence is much more nuanced than the initial descriptions given by Payen and repeated by Bennett.

There exists in the *Chanson de Guillaume*, as in the *Chanson de Roland*, a dichotomy between the pleasure and pain of war. The ecstasy is evident in the descriptions mentioned in the first half of this chapter; however, negative effects are equally prevalent in the *Chanson de Guillaume* and the *Chanson de Roland*. Guillaume and his companions will of course perpetrate glorified violence, but, like the knights of the *Roland,* they will face the psychological ramifications of grief for the violence perpetrated by and against them.[131] While some scholars would argue that there are aspects of the *Chanson de Guillaume* that make comparison between it and the *Roland* unreasonable,[132] the violent sense of loss in the two is inarguably similar.

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[130] Emphasis his

[131] "Often misleadingly termed "epic," these songs are concerned less to glorify war than to grieve over it." (Kay and Bowie 49)

[132] Patricia E. Black is one such scholar: "The *Chanson de Guillaume* remains a problematic epic when viewed against the influential Oxford *Roland*, not to mention other chansons de geste. Though it is one of the earliest epics extant, it nevertheless fails to conform to the "early epic" criteria." (41)

This occurs most obviously in comparing the tragic plots. The two share a variety of similar events: a contingent being overwhelmed by their enemy forces, a religious conflict, the death of exemplary knights, revenge taken by a maternal uncle against the enemy. It is fitting then, that in this text, the hero Vivien's death is often compared to that of Roland,[133] as Roland's death is a critical moment within the French medieval epic's legend and a larger point of reference in much of the literature of the time. The comparison of these two characters underlines the heavy cost of death on the Frankish psyche.

It should be noted as well that Jean-Charles Payen does not in fact wish to state that the French medieval epic is purely interested in glorifying violence. He is acknowledging the presence of the "pleasure for killing," but he also has an extensive study of the motif of penitence. In this study, he examines the regret that is shown by characters after their violence. He is, therefore, aware of the multi-faceted reception of violence by the characters of the epic. It appears, then, that it is other scholars who do not always acknowledge these nuanced depictions. Payen in his *Le Motif du repentir* directly compares the *Chanson de Roland* and the *Chanson de Guillaume*. He does not simply list the two *chansons'* similarities, rather, he states that Vivien's death is even *more* tragic than Roland's because the former has no assurances that vengeance will come: "Roland sait bien, en sonnant du cor, que Charles va l'entendre et qu'il le vengera; Vivien n'a même pas ce réconfort. *Peu de textes sont aussi tragiques*. Vivien devra boire la coupe jusqu'à la lie, et pourtant il ne désespère jamais" (143).[134] He goes

[133] See Jean Frappier's *Les Chansons de geste du cycle de Guillaume d'Orange* for a representative quote: "La nouvelle constellation épique [la geste de Guillaume] s'est formée à l'imitation du cycle royal: Guillaume est comme un petit Charlemagne, dont le Roland est Vivien, et le Roncevaux la bataille de l'Archamp ou des Aliscans." (11)
[134] Emphasis mine.

on to continue this discussion while continually referring to Vivien's death as a tragedy.

Vivien's and Roland's deaths are easily understood tragic moments, the tone of which the audience is able to glean from the text, and it justifies in many ways the continual comparison of the two poems in many scholarly works. René Girard furthers the connection between tragedy and violence: "Tragedy is the balancing of the scale, not of justice but of violence" (*Violence and the Sacred* 45). If Girard's claim is true, then tragic deaths like Roland's and Vivien's are inevitable (in both a diegetic and extradiegetic sense), because, at some point, the tragedy of a heroic death must occur to balance the scale of violence. With so many epics describing the Saracen death toll by epic heroes as numbering in the thousands, it is only a matter of time before the scale tips the other way and a Christian knight must die in a spectacularly tragic fashion. The presence of these tragic elements acknowledges the existence of a bifurcated reception of war by the narrator, characters, and the audience. If tragedy exists, then war cannot be entirely joyous or pleasurable, there must exist a painful side to war. Moreover, the balancing of the scales allows the audience to emotionally engage in the epic. For example, the narrator describes the state of the Franks on the battlefield in grisly detail: "Tels set cenz homes trovent de lur terre, / Entre lur pez traïnant lur bowele; / Par mi lur buches issent fors lur cerveles" (*Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 529–531).[135] With such a description, it is hard to imagine the audience to be wholly committed to a one-sided reading of combat as unanimously joyous.[136]

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[135] "Seven hundred men were on the ground / Between their feet followed their bowels / From their mouths issued forth their brains."

[136] This tragedy would lead, undoubtedly, to moments of catharsis. The buildup of emotion is unsustainable, and since the chansons are not trying to subvert the eventual release, catharsis is inevitable. While it is true that Aristotle's poetics are not being discussed until the late Middle Ages/early Renaissance, the motions are embedded in the history of the literature as it emulates the Romans. Whether intended this way or not, moments such as Vivien's death and

Emotionality – a way to interpret exteriority

The French medieval epic is often reductively described as having underdeveloped interiority of characters.[137] While violence and bravado are two central qualities of the *chansons de geste* and their characters, the epic is not without its own nuances in regard to character development. Interiority does not exist on the same level that it does in the romance; the epic is dominated by exteriority, with emotions expressed physically (laughter, fainting, etc.) or in dialogue. However, through more recent categories of analysis, specifically that of emotionality, it is possible to read scenes with little to no interiority as having an equal emotional impact on the audience as those scenes in which characters' emotions are revealed through thoughts. While conventionally limited in their interiority compared to their romance counterparts, characters within the epic are in their own manner depicted as emotionally and socially complex as their agency and emotionality separates many of them from typical stock characters.[138]

What is more, in an article on emotion in the epic, Old Norse scholar Sif Rikhardsdottir argues that although the psychological insight of the romance is absent in the epic, there are many ways to judge whether or not the (medieval and present-day) audience would be affected by the pathos of a particular scene. In comparing the epic to the romance, however, she makes one thing very clear: "emotion words alone do not suffice to encapsulate the emotive content of a text. Fictive literature, for

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Guillaume's emotional moment outside the gates would require some sort of emotional purge. As in any tragic text, there must exist an emotional outlet to produce the desired effect upon the audience. An expanded study on the tragic elements of the epic could move forward in this direction.

[137] This occurs most obviously by scholars of the epic: "The medieval poets' need, unlike that of the modern novelist, is not to give universal significance to specific individual incidents and emotions but rather to incarnate the universal archetypes he already possesses into a believable human framework" (Calin 148).

[138] A description furthered by, among others, Calin (145).

instance, does not so much theorize emotion as *depict* it" (77).[139] Although studies most often associate psychological development more with the romance than the epic,[140] it is not an inherent truth that psychological development is absent from the latter. We must consider that although the epic chooses to display rather than describe, this does not make it incapable of *depicting* emotion. A combination of verbal declarations, emotive gestures (such as weeping, clawing at one's face, etc.), and somatic effects (such as fainting) serve to depict emotion and give the reader a way to understand the emotive impact of a scene (Rikhardsdottir 81). Therefore, the abundance of words depicting emotion are not the key to audience reception; rather it is the way in which a scene engages the audience: "the emotive force of a text does not necessarily require emotion words or gestures (noticeably absent in sagas, but abundant in romances), but rather what I would term 'emotional signifiers' or 'signposts,' which rely on scene construction, narrative arrangement, and implicit or explicit narrative signals, with which the reader (or audience) engages and to which he or she responds" (Rikhardsdottir 77). With the misconception of the simple, flat stock character being the only kind of character in the epic disproved, the previous distinction of "complexity" between the romance and the *chanson de geste* is overblown. In fact, the interiority of the romance is in no way an accurate indicator of the emotions being conveyed in any given scene. If this is the case, then psychological expression of one's desires or thoughts, interiority, has no greater value than vocalization or actions depicting the same emotions, exteriority. In other words, the grief that a character feels is the same regardless of how they express it. In this way,

[139] Emphasis hers.
[140] See *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes* for more information on historical reception of interiority (123)

the opinions and views of the characters of the *chansons de geste* are readable and interpretable to the audience even without the use of emotion words.[141]

Given the presence of exteriority, we are rarely given descriptions of the protagonists' inner thoughts. These protagonists tend to voice their thoughts and feelings aloud, or they display their feelings with specific gestures. Nonetheless, this does not impede audience reception of a character's emotions and state of mind. Instead, it creates an easily readable scene in which emotions and their significance are made explicitly clear. Through this exteriority, then, the characters effectively communicate the tone and feeling of the moment.

While Rikhardsdottir's article is part of recent scholarship, it must be noted that the idea of emotions shown through exteriority is not in and of itself new. Jean Frappier notes in regard to the characters of the *Chanson de Guillaume* that "les personnages existent de l'intérieur, ils ne révèlent pourtant leur nature morale que de l'extérieur, par leurs gestes, leurs paroles et leurs actes [...] ils ne discutent pas la loi de leur être, ils la manifestent et la vivent avec une intensité dramatique et affective" (173). According to Frappier, while the characters are developed by gestures, words, and actions, this does not diminish their dramatic or affective intensity. Rikhardsdottir's thoughts on emotionality allow us to continue this train of thought that Frappier highlights and to expand upon scholarship that may inadvertently simplify any given characteristic of the *chanson de geste*.

[141] This reliance on emotion words continues to occur outside of studies on the Middle Ages. There exist, for example, sentiment analysis programs which look at emotion words and qualify them with a positive or negative value. In so doing, they wish to calculate and, among other things, chart the narrative denouement. This approach is, however, flawed because to assign value to words based solely on what they purport to can lead to ignoring a variety of literary devices such as litotes, irony, sarcasm, etc.

Despite the popular point of view that the *chanson de geste* is classified by a violence which evokes pleasure, in using emotionality to analyze scenes depicting grief, it will be apparent that a knight's violence is often depicted as a double-edged sword of pleasure and pain. Even in the first half of the poem, where violence is praised and sought after, characters are still susceptible to the repercussions of war. When Vivien is confronted with his fellow knights dying, he displays his emotions "de l'extérieur" (Frappier 173):

> Viviën garde par mi une champaigne.
>
> Devant ses oils vit la fere cunpaigne,
>
> Del mielz de France pur grant bataille faire.
>
> Mult en vit de els gisir a tere;
>
> Dune tort ses mains, tir sun chef e sa barbe,
>
> Plure de ses oilz, si li moille sa face,
>
> Forment regrette Willame Fierbrace:
>
> 'E, ber marchiz, qui n'est en bataille!
>
> De tun gent cors avun huï suffraite;
>
> Ces gentilz homes en unt grant damage.' (*Chanson de Guillaum*e vv. 473-482)[142]

As Vivien looks out at the battlefield and sees the corpses of his comrades strewn over the ground, the audience is given a perfect example of emotionality. Nowhere in this description are we given specific thoughts; instead, his emotive gestures and cry for

[142] "Vivien looks out at the field. / In front of his eyes he saw his fierce comrades, / He saw many of them laying on the ground; / Thus he wrings his hands, pulls at his hair and his beard, / He cries from his eyes, and he wets his face, / He fiercely misses Guillaume Fierebrace: / 'Oh noble marquis, who is not in battle! / We have suffered because you are not present; / These noble knights suffered great damage for it.'"

Guillaume are the key to audience understanding. When closely analyzed, his feelings are clearly depicted by two specific actions: crying and pulling at his beard in order to express his great sadness. The latter action is a common gesture within the *chansons de geste*, that can show when a character is deeply upset.[143] An even more obvious sign of grief to the modern reader are his tears which flow freely, wetting his face. Vivien in this moment is vulnerable and hurt by the suffering his comrades have undergone. However, it should be noted that Vivien's gestures are not the sole indicators of emotion; the narrator steps in and explains that the knight laments the absence of William. Vivien then proceeds to declare, aloud, this lamentation for himself.

Vivien makes clear the anguish felt as his companions fall one by one. So clear are the depictions of grief that the audience would be forced to engage with the text and with the subsequent developments. Grief, above many other emotions, is a consistent presence in the literatures of medieval France. As Megan Moore puts it, grief is something that wishes to be read in the romances of the Middle Ages: "women's wounds do tell a story – however fleeting – of women's experiences and pain, and as such, are crying out with the "desire" to be read" (115). This is no less true in the *chanson de geste*. While the *chanson de geste* is defined by a lack of interiority, it is clear through studies on emotion and the above example involving Vivien that there has been an underestimation of the capacity for the emotional complexity that the *chanson de geste* can produce.

Returning to Guillaume, an epic character's vocalizations of their thoughts serve the same purpose (for the audience) as the interior monologue present in the

[143] For example, at the end of the *Roland*, Charles has sent some men back to France with the bodies of the fallen soldiers, he prepares for battle against Baligant, but not before reflecting on his losses as he tugs at his beard (*Roland* vv. 2982-3).

romances of the Middle Ages. Introspection and reflection on a knight's life are, in the light of emotionality, common in the *chanson de geste,* Vivien in the example above, is just one of many. Take for example, Guillaume's reaction – which quickly follows an emotional moment in which he and Guibourc shed tears – to the loss of his men at Larchamp:

> Qui k'en peise, mult ai a plurer
>
> Treis cenz anz ad e cinquante passez
>
> que jo fu primes de ma mere nez;
>
> Veil sui e feble, ne puis armes porter :
>
> Ço est failli que Deus m'aveit presté,
>
> La grant juvente que ne poet returner. (vv. 1333-1338)[144]

From this passage, we get a sense of psychological insight that the misconceptions that haunt the *chanson de geste* would have us believe could not exist. We see not only a retrospection upon his previous *gestes*, but we also see a regret for the past, one in which Guillaume believed himself strong enough to avoid the devastating losses suffered during this most recent battle. After the tragic events that unfold in the beginning of the *Chanson de Guillaume,* Guillaume thinks himself too weak to continue the battle, and on the heels of Vivien's tragic death, the audience is presented a knight that is ravaged by his own shortcomings. The effects of failure and the loss of Vivien are clear. Shortly hereafter, Guillaume cries once again and Guibourc will now comfort her husband.[145] Although Guillaume has the reputation "d'un guerrier

[144] "No matter what anyone thinks, I have much to cry about / Three hundred and fifty years have passed / since I was first born of my mother; / Old and weak am I, I can no longer bear arms: / Lacking that which God had granted me, / The great youth that cannot return."
[145] "Plorad Willame, Guiburc l'ad conforté". (*Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 1350)

invincible" (Bennett 40), it is clear that he feels useless, and the audience cannot help but feel for him in this moment of loss.

Once Guillaume returns from battle a second time he will reveal the fate of even more knights to Guibourc: "Par ma fei, dame, vencu les unt paens, / Bouches sanglantes gisent en Larchamps" (*Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 2339-2340).[146] Unable to escape the death of his comrades, he even thinks of their futures and the fact that they will never again feast with one another: "N'i mangerunt les fiz de franches meres, / Qui en Larchamp unt les testes colpees" (*Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 2406-2407).[147] In fact, there are many feasts in this poem, an event which Philip Bennett describes as the moment when "l'on s'amuse du spectacle de la violence guerrière" (42). He refers to these meals as a carnivalesque moment, but, while there exists an excess in the appetite of those partaking in the meals, there is simultaneously a sobering reality. Death hangs around those who have survived, never again, as Guillaume stated will these men eat with their comrades again. Those returning from battle carry with them the pain and experiences they underwent. As René Girard explains, the aftermath of violence in combat attaches itself to those involved in war: "A special sort of impurity clings to the warrior returning to his homeland, still tainted with the slaughter of war" (*Violence and the Sacred* 41). Guillaume and his companions have been marked by this violence, he will not soon forget the "slaughter of war," and, worse, he will be immediately forced to relive it. The elements of the carnivalesque may detract slightly from the reality in which these knights find themselves, yet the presence of the aftermath of violence floats in the scene's periphery.

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[146] "By my faith, lady, the pagans vanquished them, / Bloody mouths lie on the ground at Larchamp"

[147] "The sons of Frankish mothers will not eat there, / They who at Larchamp had their heads cut off."

The Cycle of violence in the *Chanson de Guillaume*

As the death toll rises and named characters continue to perish, a new character arises to take up the mantle of his fallen comrades. At times, a single character seeks to continue the mimetic cycle multiple times. Vivien dies twice, as discussed above, once by himself surrounded by enemies and once again once Guillaume arrives at Larchamp. After each of these episodes, a new cycle of violence is opened by the Frankish forces. Guillaume himself will return to Guibourc twice to regroup and seek reinforcements thereby continue the cycle. After the second battle, Guillaume seeks help from his king, and, after little help from his suzerain, Rainouart joins the fold to help finish the battle once and for all.

Throughout his scholarship, René Girard describes this action as a mimetic cycle of violence, because it is self-propagating and continuous and it leads to a series of incessant reprisals.[148] When one violent act occurs such as the death of a loved one, the opposing party will wish to avenge their fallen comrade. Like the cycle of violence Girard has described, the French epic is predicated upon a series of feuds and retaliations.[149] The theory fits so well that Sarah Kay expresses surprise at this lack of connection from Girard's side: "Although René Girard's Violence and the Sacred draws primarily on examples from Greek tragedy and Shakespeare, much of his account seems tailor-made to the chansons de geste" (*Chansons de Geste in the Age of Romance* 52).[150] The *Chanson de Guillaume* is a representative example of this thanks

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[148] "The mechanism of reciprocal violence can be described as a vicious circle [...] In more general terms, the mimetic character of violence is so intense that once violence is installed in a community, it cannot burn itself out." (*Violence and the Sacred* 81)

[149] The only form of violence that escapes reprisal according to Girard is that of the judicial system (*Violence and the Sacred* 15). While this idea may work in the many examples he cites, it is not inherently true in all societies.

[150] Peter Haidu makes a similar claim about the tendency of great theorists to avoid talking about the Middle Ages: "Some of the greatest minds of "postmodernity" have circumnavigated the Middle Ages, one would almost think intentionally, even when their topic might have

to its episodic structure. Each episode is linked loosely to the next in order to continue the narrative, and within the *Chanson de Guillaume* the episodes are linked by the continual pursuits of vengeance from both Saracens and Christians.

The cycle of violence, therefore, is seemingly incapable of closing, as Philippe Méniel states: “la violence provoque la colère, qui provoque une nouvelle violence” (6). The episodes of the *Chanson de Guillaume* themselves fit perfectly into the cycle of provocation Méniel describes: after Vivien’s defeat, Guillaume takes up the cause, after he defeats the Saracen host, their backup arrives to fight him, finally the ex-Saracen Rainouart finishes the current cycle. Therefore, the violence that exists within the essence of the epic is embedded directly in the plot: “Cette perpétuation de la colère s’exprime par la structure de l’action : au cours d’un combat collectif, un personnage en tue un autre ; un troisième assiste à la scène, s’irrite de voir son compagnon occis et se jette sur l’agresseur.” (Méniel 6)

While, as discussed in Chapter 1, most epics end in a way that reopens the cycle of violence, this it not the case for the *Chanson de Guillaume*. This poem ends with a conversation between Rainouart and Guillaume in which the former learns that he is related to the latter by the marriage between Guibourc and Guillaume. With no clear understanding of how the cycle will continue, the end seems quite abrupt.[151] Although the final line of this poem does not truly hint at the reopening of the cycle of violence in the cycle of Guillaume, for both Rainouart and Guillaume the *geste* will continue in their respective *Moniages*.

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dictated a particular focus upon that period” (5).

[151] François Suard notes in his translation that the sister text *Aliscans* does in fact hint at the next adventure for Rainouart: the birth of Maillefer. (314)

Memory and the audience's reception of violence:

Paula Leverage's groundbreaking *Reception and Memory: A Cognitive Approach to the Chanson de Geste* in which she describes the audiences (medieval and modern) of the *chansons de geste* as well as the role of memory on the reader reception of the chansons, tackles the idea of the importance of audience reception. She describes the effects of repetition as such: "When a passage of text repeats, it recalls to audience memory the original appearance of the passage. This evokes a response of collation and comparison of the parts of the repetition, which emphasizes subtle differences of context and expression, from which emerge complex effects, ranging, for example, from psychological commentary, to depiction of emotion, and character development" (Leverage 245). While Vivien's second death may be the result of an incongruence in the fusing of two different stories into one, it inadvertently has a lasting effect on the reader who will consciously or subconsciously compare the two deaths.

Whereas the first death focused on the pity for Vivien, the second death focuses more on how Guillaume receives and reacts to his nephew's death. The scene itself culminates in a religious-laced moment of grief:

Il curt a l'eve ses blanches mains a laver,

De s'almosnere ad trait le pain segré,

Enz en la boche l'en ad un poi doné.

……………………………………

L'alme s'en vait, le cors i est remés.

Veit le Willame, comence a plurer. (*Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 2048-2053)[152]

Guillaume finds Vivien a mere instant before his death. The last thing he does for his beloved nephew is to give him the sacrament. As with other emotional instances the hero has no hesitation to cry. The audience will become emotionally involved with the story and the characters' emotions because, upon listening or reading section, it is impossible not to become involved with the second telling of Vivien's death.[153] Though the medieval reception of emotion will be different from our own,[154] it is also important to note that, as Paula Leverage concludes in *Reception and Memory*, our 21st century emotional and intellectual experiences of literature are not very different from those of our medieval counterparts.[155] Tears and cries of anguish illicit an emotional response (whether it is the exact one intended is of course another question). As such, it is possible for us to read into the grief felt in the aftermath of violence with confidence that the medieval audience would have received these emotions in similar ways. In this way, as Guillaume "comence a plurer," both medieval and modern audiences are able to navigate the emotional signposting to experience the pity and grief that is intended of the scene.

Vivien's second death may inadvertently bring about in certain audience members' past experiences of death – be they from war or from a different setting. Memory ties the audience's experience of real-world violence into the epic. In fact, the

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[152] "He ran to the water to wash his hands, / from the almsman he took the sacred bread, / He put a bit of it into Vivien's mouth / [...] His soul departed, his body remained. Guillame saw this and began to cry."

[153] "When memory is accompanied by an image, the result is involvement" (Leverage 156)

[154] Sif Rikhardsdottir explains "How medieval people experienced emotions, communicated them, and interpreted them nevertheless differs in degree and form from our own perceptions and articulations" (76).

[155] "while much recent inquiry into medieval literature has tended to emphasize its "otherness," a cognitive science approach highlights commonality between the medieval and modern emotional, intellectual, and aesthetic experience of literature." (Leverage 296)

audience's participation in and perception of events relies on past experiences. Meaning that audiences bring with them, to the narrative world, their real-world memories and perceptions (Leverage 154-155). Even if they have not directly experienced warfare, combat, or violence themselves, they would understand the emotional force of tears and other emotive gestures. The violence may be beyond their comprehension and only serve as a sort of fictional flourish, but the emotions depicted would be recognizable and their real-life experiences would enhance the emotive impact of the characters' grief. Despite this, it seems that in order to ensure the cycle of Guillaume continues, it is necessary to avoid a singularly negative view of combat. While the reader is warned of the carnage, they of course continue the story in order to hear the descriptions. The violence depicted is as pleasing and painful to the reader as it is for the fictional characters.

While the above sections have discussed how medieval people's personal experience with violence or warfare allows them to engage in the literary fiction presented, this does not mean they experienced this scale of violence on a daily basis. In fact, this sort of violence is rather exceptional. Hannah Skoda describes how incidents of street violence stayed with medieval lay people for their whole lives. In describing the memory of witnesses and spectators of violence, Skoda explains that the events would be easily recalled by witnesses much later in life: "violence was not so ubiquitous that it failed to leave an impression on the spectator or fellow inhabitant, an impression so deep that, forty years later, the details of the crime could still be recalled" (84). She further develops this idea when describing the effect of street violence on the collective memory of laypeople in Medieval France: "While these societies were saturated with violence on the street, violence was nevertheless a shocking and memorable occurrence. It played a central role in social relations, and

was contingent upon a number of socio-economic factors, most notably degree of urbanization, but it also made a deep impression on individuals qua individuals and as a part of a collective social memory." (Skoda 86) The impressions of violence on these individuals is of great import, because if the medieval lay people are "saturated" with violence on the street, one might assume they would be inured to violence. It is clear from the recollections found by Skoda that this is not the case. Though the violence of war may be on a different level of the street violence experienced in Northern France as Skoda describes, it is clear that violence was not something easily forgotten nor was it constantly present in the quotidian. As such, it can be extrapolated that even soldiers accustomed to war would not be immune to the effects of violence. The magnitude, of course, differs greatly but the effects remain the same: a lifelong memory of troubling violence.

In the collection, *Trauma in Medieval Society*, Christina Lee and Wendy Turner explain that people think that the medieval world did not experience war and violence in the way that the twentieth and twenty-first century might: "There is a misconception that the medieval world experienced the horrors of life firsthand, toughening each individual, so that s/ he could not be traumatized by catastrophe" (4). The above examples of grief and reactions to violence within this essay should help dissuade the reader of this misconception. Guillaume will be no different, and the sins of his youth will follow him to his old age through both his and the diegetic and extradiegetic audience's memory.

Age and violence

In the Middle Ages, a *jeune* could be anyone in a wide range of ages after they have achieved knighthood, and as Georges Duby explains: "On remarque, d'autre part,

que normalement les chevaliers sont appelés 'jeunes' jusqu'à leur mariage, et même au delà" ("Les jeunes dans la société aristocratique" 835). Given this definition, Guillaume, during the events of the *Chanson de Guillaume,* is no longer in his youth, since he is now married[156] and is a lord. As Georges Duby has defined *jeunesse*, it is clear Guillaume has moved into a different stage of his life. Whereas the life of a *jeune* is defined by adventure, a lord's life is quite different. When confronted with battle, Guillaume is much more hesitant than the way he is depicted in the *petit cycle*. For example. "The *Chanson de Guillaume* paints William as an old man, dependent on his family for advice and support, though his determination to continue the fight against the Saracens and his behavior at Louis's court reveals traces of the courage and impetuousness that his nephews show. In other poems of the cycle, however, William himself appears as the brave young upstart" (Clifton 225).

Guillaume is no stranger to warfare and battle, but the toll of this war is unlike anything that came before. Guillaume is even more wary and weary after his near defeat. Such a defeat was unimaginable in the *petit cycle* where he twice enters enemy cities with small forces.[157] When Guillaume returns home, he is downtrodden and is ready to give up on avenging Vivien. In this way, he brings back the fear and the misery present on the battlefield. This new, unexpected attitude surprises Guibourc and she must reprimand him for forgetting his past self. While it is true that Guillaume is adversely affected by combat, the younger generation of knights, aside from the defunct Vivien, benefit greatly from combat and do not seem to be permanently

[156] With his marriage occurring in the *Prise d'Orange* (vv. 1874, 1885)
[157] In both the *Charroi de Nîmes* and the *Prise d'Orange*, Guillaume enters the respective cities with small forces and comes out victorious, nonetheless. Although, In *Prise* he is aided by reinforcements.

tainted by war, to continue Girard's idea of violent contagion[158] and the impurity of the slaughter of war. He is so affected by the violence, that he will refer to himself as a turncoat[159] to Guibourc. While the war-weary Guillaume has little motivation, and much to lose from the combat, the *jeunes* will be enthusiastic to return and enter the battlefield (Clifton 217).

The other hero-knights of the *Chanson de Guillaume*, who are directly related to the titular hero, are all quite young. Rainouart, Gui, and Girard are referred to by François Suard as "héros d'enfances" (52). While Rainouart is depicted by scholars and the text as childlike and naive, it is important to note that, according to Clifton, his description of the violence he will enact is straightforward and detailed (223). As examined above, some of the most astounding feats of strength are performed not by the titular knight, Guillaume, but by his newfound brother-in-law. For his part, Vivien is a knight, thus no longer in his *enfances,* but his death occurs before marriage and before he gains any true lands, leaving him a *jeune* in Duby's terminology. It is this youth, then, which will define these knights, and which will explain their propensity and adoration for combat when compared to the hesitations shown by their older counterpart. Unlike Guillaume who has, as a successful knight and lord, completed many adventures and been a part of many battles, the young knights hunger for not only victuals, but, more importantly, bloodshed and renown. In this quest for renown, Guillaume's nephews and Rainouart look forward to combat and wish to prove themselves. By participating in warfare, the men hope to grow their renown and add to

[158] In describing the impurity of violence Girard compares it to a contagion that is spread from one person to another via acts of violence. As such, Girard believes "only those are already contaminated [e.g., warriors] would wilfully expose themselves to it." (*Violence and the Sacred* 28)
[159] "Un cuart cunte, un malveis tresturnur," (*Chanson de Guillaume* v. 1308)

the stories of their *geste*. Unfortunately, Rainouart and Vivien are the only ones whose stories are continued in some fashion in other *chansons de geste* of which they are the principal subjects.[160] In the end, a tired and aged Guillaume, According to Ruiz-Domènec "debió sentir la típica oleada de cansancio, y, como otros grandes feudales de su tiempo, prefirió ceder los derechos *a la nueva generacíon*, y de ese modo pudo retirarse tranquilo en medio de sus recuerdos" (506).[161] Guillaume, it seems, must make room for the younger generation in order for his family's *geste* to grow. While this will not prove to be the case once he retires to a monastery in his *moniage*, for now, Guillaume seems ready to allow the new generation to take his place.

Conclusion – a poem of balance

As with the tragic end of the rearguard in the *Chanson de Roland*, Vivien and Guillaume's travails in the *Chanson de Guillaume* are predetermined, and the tragedy of Vivien's passion is unavoidable. So is the fate of the characters of any French epic cycle. According to Luke Sunderland, the characters of the *Geste de Monglane* are tied to their futures, for "The plot has been written, and Guillaume simply has to play his part in it" (*Old French Narrative Cycles* 48). It is through this fatalistic view that violence in the *Chanson de Guillaume* is paradoxically described as pleasure and tragedy. Vivien must, as must any knight, be aware that his legacy will be created by violence, but that violence will most likely be his downfall.[162]

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[160] Though for Vivien, of course, the stories must focus on his past. Rainouart's story is continued in the *Moniage Rainouart*.

[161] "had to feel the typical wave of tiredness, and, like other great vassals of his time, he preferred to cede the rights to the new generation, and in this fashion he was able to retire tranquilly in the middle of his memories." Emphasis mine.

[162] This cycle of violence is elucidated by the seemingly paradoxical quality of violence, which Girard states involves "order as well as disorder, peace as well as war, creation as well as destruction" (*Violence and the Sacred* 258).

As evidenced above, the poem does not interest itself in a moral discussion of violence; the knights act in a way fitting of the situation; this is neither righteous nor is it immoral. However, warfare itself can be and, within the *Chanson de Guillaume*, is presented as both good and bad. The complicated nature of warfare on a personal level competes with nationalistic tendencies of the epic through the glorification of violence depicted in vivid detail. The highs and lows seem to balance one another, and although tragedy has struck with the death of Vivien, it is soon after balanced by the heroic feats of Rainouart and Guillaume. As the poem shows, violence is often beautifully poetic and worthy of praise. However, as the close analysis of the episode centered on Guillaume shows, this violence likewise leads to adverse psychological and emotional effects.

When a cycle of literature is taken as a whole, it is easier to see how war fatigues its participants. The cycle of Guillaume d'Orange is no different. While in the texts depicting his youth Guillaume has little care for the adverse effects of violence on his psyche, in the *Chanson de Guillaume*, Vivien's epic death which resembles the Passion of the Christ (*Le motif du repentir* 144) has a large influence on Guillaume. Confronted with his memories of the horrors of battle and Vivien's death, Guillaume is marked by the events of this battle. So much so, that its memories will follow him until his eventual *moniage* and retreat from the world.

The *Chanson de Guillaume* demonstrates that, contrary to the enthusiasm for all violence that one expects from the characters of the *chansons de geste* per Jean-Charles Payen's description of an "allégresse destructrice et meurtrière" ("Une Poétique Du Génocide Joyeux" 229), the characters in this (and other) *chanson(s) de geste* come face to face with the repercussions of their violence and regret what has come to pass. It is fair to say, then, that these epics have been underestimated in their

ability to portray and depict emotional complexities. Like the diverse depictions of violence, in both positive and negative lights, it is clear that the epic poems of Medieval France address contemporary struggles with violence and war as they force the audience to reckon with the personal, emotional aftermath. This struggle is explicitly stated via physical reactions and verbal exclamations that make it clear how the characters of the poem feel.

While Rainouart's episode strays from the message of regret present in the Guillaume, it must also be noted that his youth and inexperience play a large role in his own personal reception of violence. He has yet to lose countless loved ones or see his men be vanquished by his foes. His episode exists to rebalance the poem so that it does not stray too far into Guillaume's shortcomings. Instead, we see a return to the joyous genocide and the dichotomy of pleasure and pain is once again reestablished.

The characters end the conflict with a victory, but at what cost? The effects of this violence will not suddenly end with the *Chanson de Guillaume*'s explicit. In fact, after the carnage of battle, the two surviving heroes will be left with many regrets and their stories will continue. As Jean-Charles Payen explains, after the events at Larchamp, "Guillaume et Rainouard se retirent du monde parce qu'ils regrettent le sang qu'ils ont versé au cours de leur existence guerrière" (*Le Motif du repentir* 138). While the cycle of violence will continue, its effects are deeply questioned by Guillaume and Rainouart. Soon after, the two heroes will seek penitence and salvation in their respective *Moniages*. In the end, the poem balances both the pleasure and the pain of warfare for the audience and the characters, and in so doing, proves that the epic is a tale of complex emotional depiction which struggles with its glorification of violence.

CHAPTER 4

Moniage Guillaume – The Role of Violence and Sincerity in the Epic Poem

As discussed in the two previous chapters, Guillaume's legend is clearly defined by the renown he has earned in combat: his lands and his reputation are forever linked to the battles from which they came. However, in the *Moniage Guillaume,* Guillaume, now in his old age, has come to resent the actions of his youth as he searches for a way to redeem himself in the eyes of God.[163] In this quest for salvation, Guillaume embraces monkhood as he begins the titlular *moniage* – a narrative plot defined by Jean-Pierre Martin, in *Les Motifs dans les chansons de geste,* as the moment when "un vieillard du lignage des héros se retire dans un monastère pour finir sa vie saintement" (355). Despite the noble intentions of such a quest, there will be a disconnect between this search for finishing one's life in a holy way and the violence that is required of an epic hero such as Guillaume. In this chapter Guillaume's quest for salvation will be examined to determine the ability of a violent knight to truly seek redemption.

This retreat from the world has a two-fold role: to connect both the cycle and the historical reality of Guillaume de Gellone (the person on whom Guillaume is, in part, based). To achieve this goal, Guillaume becomes a monk and later a hermit, all the while being drawn back into the fold of epic combat numerous times. According to

[163] According to Jean-Charles Payen, Guillaume is not the only knight who finds himself penitent in the face of his sins, above all the killing, and this leads to deep regret: "Guillaume et Rainouard [another subject of a *moniage*] se retirent du monde parce qu'ils regrettent le sang qu'ils ont versé au cours de leur existence guerrière" (*Le Motif du repentir* 138).

Nelly Andrieux-Reix, “Le *Moniage Guillaume* est une chanson de geste conçue pour achever aussi bien le cycle des récits attachés au seul Guillaume d’Orange (le ‘petit cycle’) que celui qui y associe les histoires des ancêtres et collatéraux du même héros (le ‘grand cycle’)” (Andrieux-Reix 11). This text thus functions to finish the geste by linking it back to the history from whence it was derived.[164]

Ideally, a *moniage* allows the hero to escape the world,[165] but, in reality, this leads to two somewhat paradoxical focuses, as Catherine Jones explains: “A la fois attirante et précaire, la fuite du monde permet une critique aussi bien qu’une revalorisation de la violence” (245). Violence in the *moniage* will be critiqued, by virtue of Guillaume’s feelings of guilt and regret, and yet it will also be exalted by the adventures he undertakes during the poem. It would be impossible, for example, to have a *chanson de geste* in the cycle of Guillaume without having Guillaume kill someone with his renowned *Fierebrace*. No matter the intentions of a character, the nature of the epic story bends him/her to its will. Violence calls out to all, indifferent to their wishes. In this way, the actualization of the salvation sought from a *moniage* and the escape from the world it entails is quite a tall task.

The beginning of the poem makes clear that Guillaume’s early life is no lesson in sainthood: he must seek forgiveness for battles waged and for the men he has killed. To this end, a *moniage* implies an attempt to distance oneself from the events of one’s youth. For Guillaume this means an attempt to disassociate himself with his youthful

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[164] Catherine Hanley discusses the inextricable relationship between chronicles of history and *chanson de geste* when she explains how the former was influenced by the latter: “The chanson de geste was the only vernacular model available to them [the writers of the chronicles] for the narration of tales of war, so it was inevitable that they borrowed some of its trappings” (56). This is then furthered by Dominique Boutet, who explains that the epic attempts to tell of history: “La chanson de geste relèvait donc de *l’historia*, à côté de l’historiographie, et non de la *fabula*” (9).

[165] The prologue explains that the poem will recount how Guillaume “del siecle departi” (*Moniage Guillaume* v. 34).

excess, as Jean Subrenat states: "Certes Guillaume est un grand pécheur. En particulier dans toute sa vie conventuelle, il ne parvient pas à réfréner deux pulsions violentes de son tempérament : la colère et le besoin de manger et de boire" (Subrenat 653). This *colère* is of course one of Guillaume's most recognizable traits, but, seemingly, for the first time he wishes to repent for these actions.

This newfound sincerity and maturity that Guillaume shows are most evident when he encounters his cousin Gaidon, another knight seeking redemption for a life of sin and killing. The two confide in one another over their mutual uncertainty about their fate in the afterlife. In discussing their lives, Guillaume admits to his cousin that he has perpetrated great wrongs: "Peneanz sui, nel mescreëz vos mie; / Tant ai fet mal - de verté le puis dire" (vv. 2201-2202).[166] This moment of the poem expands upon the regret shown earlier in the prologue. Surprisingly, given the regret shown above, the conversation does not end with Guillaume's confession. After Guillaume recounts his misdeeds, Gaidon will reciprocate by sharing his own contrition:

> Ge ai tant fez de granz pechiez mortables,
>
> Tant home morz et tantes citez arses,
>
> Toutes destruire et creneaus fet abatre
>
> Que li pechié molt durement m'esmaient
>
> Que je n'en voise en enfer parmenable (vv. 2283-2287)[167]

It is clear that both these knights are concerned with the possibility of their actions preventing their salvation. Gaidon is even more fearful of his soul's fate, worrying that

[166] "I am penitent, do not disbelieve it. / I have committed many sins – I can truthfully say this."
[167] "I have committed many great mortal sins, / I killed many men and rased many cities, / I destroyed everything and built battlements / Such that sin has greatly dismayed me / That I will go to eternal hell."

he may end up “en enfer parmenable”. While the audience already knows that Guillaume will be saved, thanks to the prologue, it is telling that the two characters are concerned with general evil and sins. Guillaume’s pseudo-confession is broad, while Gaidon hints at the sober reality of the destruction that comes with knighthood: *home morz* and *citez arses*. This reality is not often spoken about in the early epics; the epics linked directly to the *geste du roi* often laud knights and their general actions.[168]

This sincerity is made more explicit by the definition of Guillaume’s regret; “repentir” in the Middle Ages does not in itself signify the act of redemption, so much as remorse, the exasperated form of despair (*Le Motif du repentir* 9). Guillaume experiences both the act of redemption and remorse, as seen in his own description to Gaidon when he describes his feelings, “peneanz sui.” This remorse is the window into an existential conundrum. The *moniage* leads to a questioning of oneself that can only be solved by looking for forgiveness by God. Guillaume admits as much when he explains why he left behind society: “Or ai por Deu tot mon païs lessié” (*Moniage Guillaume* v. 2327). This creates in Guillaume a disdain for violence, all while he continues to struggle to completely abandon the life of a knight. In line with Guillaume’s ever-increasing disdain for violence and death, Jean-Charles Payen believes that Guillaume’s actions throughout the cycle lead to his bifurcated relationship with the value of life and death: “Guillaume, de tous les héros épiques du Moyen Âge, est à la fois, bien malgré lui, le plus meurtrier et celui qui attache à la vie humaine le plus grand prix” (*Le Motif du repentir* 155).

[168] The kind of shocking actions to which Gaidon alludes appear in greater sinful magnitude in the later Raoul de Cambrai. The titular knight will burn down a monastery and leave a trail of revenge and bodies behind after his eventual death.

One would expect this murderous violence and welcome it in almost every instance, though Jean Frappier notes that within the Guillaume cycle there are exceptions to this expectation. For example, some of the violence that takes place in the *Couronnement de Louis* is described as horrific and then compared by Frappier directly to similar events in the *Moniage Guillaume*: “quelque embellissement ‘horrifique’ analogue à celui du *Moniage* II, où le poing pesant de Fierebrace, d’un seul coup, disloque la nuque du coupable, lui fend le crâne et fait jaillir ses deux yeux hors de leurs orbites” (96). Such violence which permeates the *Moniage Guillaume* is on par with the other horrors present in the texts depicting Guillaume’s youth.

The hero of a *moniage* must therefore search for a way to atone for his life of wrongdoings as a knight. As with all things, Guillaume cannot commit to something half-heartedly. He must seek redemption without hesitation: “Un héros de chanson de geste est un être tout d’une pièce: quand il commet le mal, il s’y donne corps et âme, avec une ivresse effrénée ; quand il se repent, c’est avec une brutalité semblable : sa conversion est soudaine et définitive” (*Le Motif du repentir* 157). Thus, Guillaume will leave behind his life without telling anyone and becomes a monk and eventually a hermit in hopes of achieving his goals.

Even though Guillaume wishes to escape the continuous episodes of violence that so often define the c*hansons de geste* of medieval France, he cannot help but revert back to combat. The narrative is thus at the ready for the reopening of the cycle of violence. Guillaume will be presented with a multitude of opportunities to defend France and his suzerain, Louis. This, according to Patricia Black, is the ultimate change in Guillaume’s personality: “Thus, the hero of the *Chanson* and *Moniage*, William, evolves from a knight closely associated with maintaining Christian and Frankish order in the face of Saracen disorder to a hermit retired from the company of

his peers, careless for the first time whether or not his renown continues; but, he always leaves his options open, in case he has to return to take up arms in defense of France" ("Transformation of the Knight" 134). Throughout the narrative, violence and conflict will prove to be unavoidable; Guillaume must do his best to balance his quest for redemption and the necessary violence required from the hero of a *chanson de geste*.

The end of an epic cycle

The *Moniage Guillaume* is the longest of the *chansons* from the Guillaume cycle, totaling close to 7,000 lines.[169] Thus, a quick summary of its events is necessary before embarking on the analysis. The *Moniage Guillaume* begins with the narrator relating to the audience that Guibourc has died and that Guillaume has left all his lands to his nephew, Maillefer. In the wake of his grief and in old age, Guillaume heads to a monastery to live the last of his life in penitence – he is particularly concerned with the deaths he has caused. He is ill-received by the monks who believe he is a devil. They dislike his presence and plot to rid themselves of him by sending him on a dangerous errand with no weapons. Guillaume, of course, survives this trip and he briefly returns to the monastery before going off to the desert to live as a hermit. Unable to avoid the violence surrounding him, Guillaume is ambushed and captured by a group of Saracens. Once imprisoned, Guillaume is tortured and has his faith tested. Eventually, king Louis hears about Guillaume's predicament and leads a large army to free him. After seven months of fighting, he is free. Guillaume then returns to his hermitage and tries to avoid violence until a new foe emerges threatening Louis's

[169] It is to be noted, that there are two different versions of the poem: a short, unfinished version of 934 lines and the longer version with 6862 lines.

reign. Guillaume then returns to Paris to deal with the foe but leaves before speaking with Louis. Once back in the desert, Guillaume defeats the devil and is taken to heaven.

The *Moniage*, which seeks to show Guillaume's ultimate redemption, must reckon with the fact that Guillaume's *geste* is built upon violence. This poem addresses the dissonance between Guillaume's history and the poem's goal; even as Guillaume's character seeks to escape the cycle of violence, he is drawn back to defend France from the Saracens. In the middle of the poem he will find himself kidnapped by his enemies, "Pris ert Guillelmes et mis en grant tormente" (*Moniage Guillaume* v. 3061),[170] and later he will be dragged back for the final battle in defense of Louis, "Quar Ysorez de Conninbre la large / Le vient requerre a gent et a bataille" (ibid vv. 4934-5).[171] Two separate times in the poem he is brought back to fight battles in defense of Louis.[172] Through the continuous pull back into battle, the poem is comprised of episodes devoted to the continuation of violence. Luke Sunderland explains that this is the same struggle seen in the large-scale construction and continuation of epic cycles: "At the heart of every cycle there are two drives, one for more narrative (for more of the same), and one to reach the end" (*Old French Narrative Cycles* 11).[173] Guillaume's many failed separations, like the reopenings of the epic cycle itself, occur in this competition between closure and reopening. While, ostensibly, the *Moniage* signifies the end of

[170] "They took Guillaume and subjected him to great torment."
[171] "For Ysoré de Conninbre, the great / will search him out with an army and a battle"
[172] Catherine Jones explains that these episodes exist as a way to prove his own renown, "Il émerge de sa retraite pour se mesurer à des adversaires que lui seul est capable d'affronter. Cette absence passagère, ce vide qu'il laisse dans l'univers épique ne fait que rehausser sa valeur chevaleresque" ("La 'Fuite du monde'" 244).
[173] Philip Bennett agrees with Sunderland that the *moniages* lead the cycles to an end: "les deux *Moniages* – *Moniage Guillaume* et *Moniage Rainouart* – marquent le point d'aboutissement de cette trajectoire en assurant la clôture du projet cyclique." (131)

Guillaume's role in battle, he returns time and again to defend his lord and to exact his own vengeance against those who have wronged him.

Despite his desire to escape from society, Guillaume is brought back into the world as the narrator announces: "Or recommencent ses paines a venir" (*Moniage Guillaume* v. 4923).[174] This does not mean that he is happy to return. After one such battle, Guillaume tells Louis that he wishes to return to his hermitage because "Mes granz pechiez vorrai espeneïr" (*Moniage Guillaume* v. 4880).[175] Likewise, while the poem should lead to the end of the cycle, the cycle will in fact work backwards after this point. With the later dated extant manuscripts, such as *Charroi de Nîmes and Prise d'Orange* reopening the cycle and, eventually, a rewriting of the beginning with the *Enfances Guillaume*. The existence of these subsequent texts, especially with the later *Enfances Guillaume,* points to the fact that the drive to continue the narrative can exist long after the cycle has supposedly closed.

The prologue of the *Moniage* foreshadows the poem's end, telegraphing the competition described above. What is more, it does so by invoking the prehistory of the poem, thereby highlighting the past's importance to this current narrative. This will work for the greater *geste* as a way to further validate the end of the cycle. This prologue of course foretells the major themes that will be addressed by the poem. Specifically, the narrator makes multiple mentions of Guillaume's *granz peines, dolor,* and *paines à sofrir*. So great are these pains that "ne fu hom qui atanten soffrist" (*Moniage Guillaume* v. 38) The *Moniage Guillaume* begins with the narrator quickly recapitulating the events of the cycle so far. The audience is quickly reminded of the

[174] A similarly structured phrase occurs toward the end of the poem's prologue: "Huimés commencent ses paines a venir" (*Moniage Guillaume* v. 37).
[175] "My great sins I wish to expiate."

losses at Aliscans and Larchamp: “S’avez oï quel dolor il soffri / En Aleschans, quan il fu desconfiz, / De Vivïen son neveu qu’il perdi” (ibid vv. 16-18).[176] The prologue then recounts the vitally important death of his wife Guibourc,[177] which leads the epic knight Guillaume d’Orange to retreat from the world (ibid v. 32). In so doing, he subsequently leaves his land and power behind to head to “l’abaïe a jeuner” (ibid v. 36) and to become a monk to attempt to to repent for his violence and for the many deaths for which he is responsible.[178]

In many ways, this step toward penitence could be interpreted as functioning only as a simple narrative strategy for the author(s) of the work to entice readers and continue the narrative. While it of course functions in this way, to setup what Jones refers to as the pretext “pour une dernière vague d’exploits mémorables” (“La ‘Fuite du monde’” 247), the *Moniage Guillaume*’s use of this motif is too nuanced to be explained away as a simple frame story. As Bennett and Sunderland have shown, the cycle competes with its own drives on multiple levels to deliver a back-and-forth struggle for closure.

Regret

Before the events of the *Moniage Guillaume,* Guillaume also experienced regret for the death he caused in the *Charroi de Nîmes*. Guillaume confronts Louis after the

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[176] “You have heard the pain he endured / In Aliscans, when he was defeated / about VIvien his nephew whom he lost.”

[177] Bennett, among others, claim that her death is the main impetus for Guillaume’s *moniage*: “Les deux héros font preuve d’une même motivation lorsqu’ils décident de se retirer au monastère: la mort de leur épouse et le sentiment du péché qui pèse sur leur esprit à cause de leur vie de guerrier.” (159)

[178] Guillaume does avoid one pitfall in the cycle of violence – he leaves all his belongings to his only living relative: Maillefer. “Death, like any passage, entails violence. The passage in the beyond by a member of the community may provoke (among other difficulties) quarrels among the survivors, for there is always the problem of how to redistribute the dead man’s belongings” (Violence and the Sacred 312).

latter has forgotten to reward the former for his loyal service, resulting in his desire to conquer new territory. This scene serves as the most obvious evidence for remorse among the other epics of the Guillaume cycle. Guillaume, in trying to illustrate to Louis his fidelity and worth as a vassal, speaks freely about the actions and sins he has committed in service of his liege lord:

> par mes armes t'ai servi comme ber,
> Si t'ai forni maint fort estor champel,
> Dont ge ai morz maint gentil bacheler
> Dont le pechié m'en est el cors entré.
> Qui que il fussent, si les ot Dex formé.
> Dex penst des ames, si le me pardonez! (*Charroi de Nîmes* vv. 67-72)[179]

In order to grow his own renown and to serve his king, Guillaume killed many a noble knight, both Christians and Saracens. Guillaume makes sure to share the burden with Louis by saying that he did this on behalf of Louis, "si t'ai forni." However, he also acknowledges that he is the one who is directly responsible for these deaths once he begins to ask God for forgiveness. Most importantly, it does not matter to which religion the men belong because, "[q]ui que il fussent, si les ot dex formé." Guillaume makes clear that by virtue of being human, they have inherent value and thus he has affronted God in his treatment of them – taking their lives is an action against their Creator. Though these men are most likely Christian, as he speaks about God taking their souls, without a specification of religion or race from the text, they could very well be Saracen, as those knights were also often described as noble as well.[180]

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[179] "By my own weapons I have served you as a warrior, / I have led many a fierce battle, / During which I have killed many noble young men / During which sin entered me, / Whoever they were, God created them. / God take their souls and forgive me!"
[180] "Their [Saracens'] moral and cultural otherness used to justify Christian hegemony and

Guillaume's personal opinion based on the identity of those he has killed does not much matter, he continues to feel a deep regret for simply killing men, asking God to forgive him for sending Him more souls.

Like the above scene in the *Charroi de Nîmes,* the prologue of the *Moniage Guillaume* contains an explicit reference to Guillaume's regret for past sins:

> Huimés devons de Guillelme chanter
>
> Et des granz poines que il pot endurer.
>
> Quant morte fu Guibor o le vis cler
>
> Dont s'apensa Guillelmes au cort nes
>
> Que molt a morz Sarrazins et Esclers,
>
> Maint gentil home a fet a fin aler;
>
> Or se vorra envers Dieu amender
>
> S'a molt perdu de son grant parenté
>
> Ne vorra mes au siecle converser,
>
> Ainz sera moines beneïz et sacrez. (*Moniage Guillaume* vv. 43-52)[181]

As with the other epics of the cycle of Guillaume, and as discussed above, the tone is set immediately within the prologue. This poem will therefore be concerned primarily with death – whether it be the loss of his loved ones or the deaths Guillaume has caused in his time as a knight. Similar to the regret shown in the *Charroi de Nîmes*, here, Guillaume regrets the "gentil home" that he has killed. It is implied, as in the first speech to Louis, that the men could be of any religion, race, or nationality. The

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'holy war' against Islam, does not preclude the presence of chivalric prowess and sentiment." (Jones et al. 12)

[181] "Now we must sing of Guillaume / and of the great pains that he can endure. / When Guibourc of the clear face died / Guillaume of the short nose reflected / on the many Saracens and Slavs that he killed, / Many a noble man did he send to their end; / Now he wants to set himself right with God / and he has lost much of his great family members / He will not want to stay in the world much longer, / Thus he will become a blessed and sacred monk."

prologue for the *Moniage Guillaume*, however, makes more overt that Guillaume's regret has very little to do with the victims' identities. The narrator shows that he is motivated to seek forgiveness from God because of the Saracens and Slavs "que molt a morz" by linking it directly to the phrase "se vorra envers Dieu amender". While the audience would anticipate the deaths of Saracens and Slavs, typical enemies of the French epic hero, it is less obvious what their reaction would be to the death of the "gentil home" alluded to in the *Charroi de Nîmes*.

When Guillaume first meets the abbot at the monastery, he explains his reasoning for becoming a monk: "Por Deu, sires abes, fetes pes si m'oiez / Tant ai fet mal [...] / A Deu me rent" (vv. 193-4, 196).[182] This desire to atone for his sins motivates Guillaume throughout the text and will play a vital role in Guillaume's choices. We see, then, in this text a change between the typically violent relationship between Saracens and Christians that critics feel define the *chanson de geste*: "La vie n'a pas de valeur; surtout celle de l'adversaire, qui ne mérite de survivre que s'il oblitère sa différence" ("Une Poétique du génocide joyeux" 233). In the *Moniage Guillaume*, Guillaume feels a deep regret for killing the enemy regardless of differences. As Catherine Jones explains, this penitence is so widespread that it reaches out of the realms of Christianity and Frankish nationality to the enemy, and it is ultimately the result of the death of his beloved Guibourc: "La perte d'une épouse bien-aimée semble entraîner une prise de conscience, un repentir qui s'étend même à l'extermination de l'ennemi sarrasin" ("La 'Fuite du monde'"246). This newfound awareness causes him, if only occasionally, to reconsider the previous norms of violence toward the enemy.

[182] "For God, sir Abbot, may it calm you if you hear me / I have done much evil [...] / I give myself to God."

Overall, this remorse contrasts sharply with the actions that Guillaume had shown in his past. Nonetheless, it highlights the concern for a balance between knightly duties and Christian duties. Guillaume will undertake his *moniage* in large part to try to reconcile these two seemingly incompatible aspects of his life. As in the analysis of Guillaume's struggle with the commandment against killing in chapter 1, his search for redemption furthers the divide between Christianity and feudalism by highlighting the dissonance between the Church and State. The scholar Jean Flori seems to think they fit perfectly in sync: "Il s'agit donc, dans nos épopées, de préserver le royaume et ses propres territoires, de servir son seigneur en bon vassal, d'obtenir de lui en ce monde des épouses et des terres, de gagner sur l'infidèle domaines et châteaux, d'emporter butin, armes et chevaux tout en recevant de l'Eglise, dans l'autre monde et déjà ici-bas, les récompenses spirituelles méritées par le service armé contre les ennemis de la foi" (Flori 493). However, Flori's claims are difficult to apply to the epic universe of the Cycle of Guillaume in which the Church plays a minor role. In fact, the only explicit reference to the Church in the *Moniage Guillaume* is a seething critique of the life of monks.[183]

The poem is instead filled with various references to God outside of direct teachings from a Church figure. In fact, Guillaume often prays to God for direct intervention in battle. At one point, in a battle with "pagans," he asks for God's help to dispatch his foes. Immediately after this prayer, Guillaume unleashes a violent assualt: "Ront lor les testes, les braz lor a brisiez, / Fent ces escuz si occit cez destriers, / Ces paiens fet huller et abaier" (*Moniage Guillaume* vv. 3203-3205). By virtue of his success after his prayer, God has given Guillaume his blessing to act violently. While

[183] This critique is likewise somewhat satirical, which recalls Guillaume's encounter with the Pope in the *Couronnement de Louis*.

the situation is complicated given the enemy's differing faith, it is still a departure from the Bible-based remorse shown at other points of the poem. Likewise, Guillaume is not promised, at least in this particular epic, any spiritual compensation for his actions in the name of King Louis. Instead, he seeks to assure his spiritual compensation by his own means.

Flori is not the only one to note the juxtaposition of religion and knighthood, Guillaume himself cannot help but compare the two major pillars of his existence either. Early in the poem, the hero lauds the lifestyle of knights: "valt miex l'ordre de chevalier: / Il se conbatent as Turs molt volentiers, / Por l'amor Dieux se lessent martirier / Et sovent sont en lor sanc baptisié" (vv. 494-497).[184] This baptism by blood is questioned by Guillaume who debates the utility of the monkhood. He then immediately disparages the monks who do nothing but "boivre et mengier, / Lire et dormir et chanter et fronchier [...] Et en la finmusent en lor sautier" (vv. 499-500, 502).[185] This marks the beginning of the end of Guillaume's time as a monk; following the episode with the thieves he will return to the monastery to abandon his monastic life. What this comparison relates to the audience, then, is that even while regretting his actions in his time as a knight, Guillaume still believes it is better to fight for God than to read and sing for Him – a point of view that will inform his future actions. Furthermore, this amusing ridicule of the monks' lifestyle offers a rationale for their ultimate moral failures and a rationale for the audience to root against them while still maintaining faith in the everyday societal realities they support.

[184] "The order of knights is more worthy: / They battle the Turks voluntarily, / By the love of God they let themselves be martryed / And often they are baptised in their blood"
[185] "Drink and eat, / Read and sleep and sing and pucker [...] and in the end they gaze at their psalter"

Guillaume's disdain of monks, then, is naturally to be shared by the audience. The narrator further cements this disdain when revealing that the monks profess a surprising desire for a violent end to Guillaume's life: "Quar bien [li moigne] vosissent – ja celer ne vos quier – / Que li larron l'eüssent detranchié / Ou qu'il fust morz ou en la mer noié" (vv. 766-768).[186] In this world of violence, not even the monks, those who purport to follow God's teachings, are free of violent desire. These satirically-described monks are imitating the world around them, one in which violence rules. In a literary world in which Turpin, the warrior monk of the *Chanson de Roland* exists and is exalted by the narrator, it is no real surprise that they embrace the earthly order of desire and wish to see violence befall Guillaume.

The monks hate Guillaume in part due to his larger-than-life personality. His excess does not fit in with their lifestyle, but instead of simply praying for him or working to shape his excesses, they join in and wish "qu'il fust morz". It is not hard to see why Guillaume and the audience would be repulsed by the monks. According to Jean Subrenat, in wishing and eventually plotting his death, these monks "sont bien coupables de l'un des sept péchés capitaux [murder]" (Subrenat 646) Subrenat further details their sins as: "Lâcheté, avarice, envie, hypocrisie, tentative d'homicide, haine, tels sont les caractères dominants de cette communauté monastique." (Subrenat 647) Given their base behavior, it stands to reason that Guillaume would defend his time as a knight and look more favorably upon it than his brief time as a monk.

Despite this diegetic disdain for monkhood, the modern audience should not confuse the depiction of monks for a faithful description of the real-world relationship between the troubadours and the clergy. Paula Leverage makes clear that the *chanson*

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[186] "Because [the monks] truly want – I do not wish to hide it from you – / That the robbers would slaughter him / Or that he die by drowning in the sea."

de geste had a place within the teachings of the clergy: "We find evidence, in sermons which refer to *chansons de geste*, that the clergy had been an audience to the poems, and that the clergy, then used the *chansons de geste* in addressing their own audience of religious lay people" (Leverage 38). Scholars also believe that this is in part a pointed criticism of the real-life abbey of Aniane which was found only a few kilometers from the future abbey of Gellone which the real Guillaume of Gellone founded (Andrieux-Reix 19). In this way, it is clearer that the poem disparages only a certain kind of monk. Yet, the division between the Church and State remains widespread.

Remembrance of things past

While the prologue of the *Moniage Guillaume* and Guillaume's speech in the *Charroi de Nîmes* focus on Guillaume's regret for killing noblemen, it is curious that the majority of the events for which Guillaume expresses regret exist in moments that occur outside of the narratives being recounted. The main texts of his life, particularly the most cited "trilogy" of the *Couronnement de Louis,* the *Charroi de Nîmes* and the *Prise d'Orange*, each show conflict between Guillaume and Saracen forces while hinting at small-scale intra-religious conflict with other Christian knights. While epic poems such as *Garin le Loherain* and its sequels will depict extensive, intra-Christian conflicts, Guillaume tends to fight Saracens.[187]

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[187] It does not appear that intra-Christian conflicts would be too shocking for the contemporary audience of the *Moniage Guillaume*. The epic hero can have flaws and given Guillaume's history it may be hard to support a hero with such obvious ones. Andrea Fassò appears to believe that Guillaume has a great deal of faults when he asks: "Pourquoi le héros guerrier par excellence doit commettre ces faute?" (Fassò 437)? *Raoul de Cambrai* and the Lorraine cycle depict the stories of anti-heroes, and Guillaume has defiled the sanctity of religious spaces (*Couronnement de Louis*) and killed Aymon (*Le Charroi de Nîmes*).

This recalling of events past is commonplace in the *geste* of Guillaume and is not exclusive to the omniscient narrator. In fact, a retelling of Guillaume's past takes place diegetically in the *Moniage Guillaume* when a group of Saracens recalls the events of the other *chansons de geste* in the Guillaume cycle. The king Synagon, surrounded by ".XX.M. Sarrazins" (*Moniage Guillaume* v. 2867), begins to talk about Guillaume "le marchis / Qui tant a morz paiens et Sarrazins" (2887-8). As the biographical summary continues, the Saracens (and thus the audience) are reminded of those Saracens who Guillaume has killed. Specifically, they remember Tiebaut and Desramé (2892), the main antagonists of the *Chanson de Guillaume* and the *Prise d'Orange* respectively.

Narratively, these events occur in the diegetic past of the *Moniage Guillaume*. Regardless of the date of production of the extant manuscripts, Guillaume's role in the death of Christians is recalled later in the 12th century *Charroi de Nîmes*, but never will the events be depicted as they are told in the *Moniage Guillaume*.[188]

Epic faults and apotheosis

Perhaps the presence of these events is better explained by the traditional requirements of the epic hero. According to Andrea Fassò, faults are key to the identity of epic heroes in the Indo-european tradition: "les plus fameux guerriers indo-européens sont non seulement des pécheurs, mais des pécheurs trifonctionnels; c'est-à-dire qu'une place importante dans leur vie et leurs exploits est occupée par une série de trois fautes" (Fassò 426).[189] Guillaume's feelings of guilt related to pre-historical

[188] He of course kills the occasional Christian, such as Aymon le Vieil or Arnéis d'Orléans, but he does not kill them in the context of war as the beginning of the *Charroi* explains.
[189] The three faults are as follows: the killing of Arnéïs in the church, the use of ruse instead of force to take Nîmes, the adulterous nature of his taking of Orange and Guibourc.

events are present throughout the texts of the cycle of Guillaume. When discussing the *petit cycle* and the *Chanson de Guillaume,* Andrea Fassò explores the hidden story of one of Guillaume's greatest faults: the killing of Guibourc's child. This event is alluded to across the cycle of Monglane, and Fassò theorizes that it is part of an older tradition that was lost (425). According to Fassò, the filicide further motivates Guillaume to repent for his actions, and the consequences of his relationship with Guibourc will lead to much suffering later in his life: "La pénitence de Guillaume continue encore. Comme époux de Guibourc il aura à souffrir beaucoup, à essuyer la défaite et la mort de Vivien et de Girard." (435)

Outside of the instance analyzed earlier when Guillaume described committing sins in service of his king, he does not blame others for his own actions as a knight. Therefore, despite Fassò's claims that he suffers by virtue of being Guibourc's spouse, Guillaume himself never validates this line of thought. As discussed above, Guillaume becomes distraught following the death of his wife and decides to seek redemption once she has passed away. He understands that, with or without his marriage, he would still be guilty of the killings of many knights. What is more, Fassò makes clear that Guillaume is guilty of two other great faults, making this particular fault one of many that have little to do with his choice in spouse. While, overall, this theory helps link Guillaume's personality with those of past epic heroes,[190] the penitence that Guillaume experiences in the *Moniage* would be no less impactful were this theory taken away. As such, it equally important to focus on the violence to which Guillaume

[190] This links him, in particular, to Heracles, who is guilty of having murdered his children after being driven mad by Hera. His search for forgiveness then leads to his completing the 12 labors. A similar sin for Guillaume would have helped further this connection with Hercules while tying together his desire for salvation.

refers in his past – a past which according to the manuscript tradition occurs before the petit cycle – and how it centers on the killing of other knights.

The guilt and sin he feels once again shows how Guillaume, as a character in the epic tradition, exhibits a particularly complex relationship with violence – especially once compared to his fellow Franks in the *Roland*. According to Jean-Charles Payen, these latter knights, and Roland in particular, view violence in a righteous and necessary manner: "Le massacre est pour lui [Roland] comme pour ses compagnons une obligation chrétienne, et le fanatisme suicidaire un martyre immédiatement rédempteur (sous réserve d'une confession générale à Dieu même, sous forme de Confiteor)" ("Une poétique du génocide joyeux" 230). This *confiteor,* confession to God, allows the fanatical knights the ability to earn forgiveness by killing the enemy.[191]

However, as seen above, Guillaume does not agree with the devaluing of the enemy's life. It is clear that Guillaume differs from Payen's description of Roland and his companions in two clear ways. First, he never achieves any kind of martyrdom "rédempteur." Instead, he is forced to repent during his time outside of battle and will only ascend to heaven after leaving behind the world to become a monk and then a hermit and taking part in a final battle against the devil. Second, Guillaume's penitence seems to outrightly question the very notion that the existence of war is an "obligation chrétienne." In fact, Guillaume is very concerned with the relationship between his faith and his violence and reflects upon it often throughout the poem.

For all its differences with the Roland, particularly in regard to Guillaume's quest for sainthood, the *Moniage Guillaume* does contain its fair share of violent combat. For many knights, death does in fact resemble the redeeming martyrdom that

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[191] In this line of thought, the act of participating in the crusades, according to Payen, is by itself an act of redemption (*Le Motif du repentir* 228).

the knights of the Roland experienced. They die in defense of Christianity which ends in a gruesome interlacing of their bodies with those of their enemies. During the final battle, a melee erupts which rivals the descriptions of the *Chanson de Guillaume*. Its beauty serves a paradoxical purpose of highlighting violence, thereby praising it, while its shocking details serves to criticize the violence itself: “Tant pié, tant poing, tante teste voler, / Frans et paiens morir et craventer, / L’un mort sus l’autre trebuschier et verser” (vv. 5691-5693).

In the end, the violence of the epics like the *Roland* have the hero reach a saintly status in carrying out (and dying for) violence: “La violence est une triple fête: fête de l'action, couronnée par la mort et l'apothéose des héros; fête de la création, pour le poète qui s'enivre à relater leurs hauts faits; fête de la diffusion, pour les chevaliers qui rêvent d'une gloire égale à celle des comtes palatins” (“Une poétique du génocide joyeux” 231-2). Apotheosis occurs often to the knights of the French epics: from Roland’s famous death to Vivien’s passion, knights experience the ecstasy of death when they have guaranteed their soul’s salvation. As such, in the eyes of the audience and in the eyes of God, the knights who die in combat are taken directly to heaven. However, Guillaume, whose life is based in part on the real-life Guillaume de Gellone, cannot, by virtue of this biography, die in battle. He must exit the world to found the abbey of Gellone in Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert to then die a specific saintly death. Despite not dying a warrior’s death, Guillaume, unlike many of his peers who die in battle such as Roland and Vivien, will be able to finish his life as a true saint. Andrea Fassò explains that his canonization is quite a unique situation for an epic hero: “Guillaume est le seul parmi les grands héros français à conclure sa vie au monastère et à être canonisé” (Fassò 436). Given the historical parallels, the author(s) of the text must find a path outside of the typical heroic death to allow Guillaume his

final salvation. However, his saintly destiny does not preclude Guillaume from seeking out his vices to excess.

A contagious excess

As in the rest of the Guillaume cycle, there exists a critique of excess. The aging Guillaume does not fit in with the other monks because he eats too much, drinks too much, and because he is too physically intimidating (*Moniage Guillaume* vv. 214, 234-235, 236). Moreover, these carnivalesque elements serve, according to Norval Bard, "à renforcer les liens entre les *Moniage* et le corpus des chansons de geste des cycles ou sous-cycles de Guillaume et Rainouart" (249). This can manifest itself in both physical comedy and general excess present throughout the cycle; the former is evident in the *Charroi de Nîmes*, when the narrator describes Guillaume bursting through the soles of his shoes: "Par tel vertu a le planchié passé / Rompent les hueses del cordoan soller; / N'i ot baron qui n'en fust esfraez." (vv. 54-56).[192] By continuing this tradition of comedy and excess, the *Moniage Guillaume* (as well as its counterpart, the *Moniage Rainouart*) is tied back directly to the greater *geste*.

Physical comedy is present from the beginning, when Guillaume's separation from the world is shown unsuccessful from the earliest stage. When he reaches the monastery, the monks at the door are shocked to see him. They have never seen such an imposing man, and across multiple *laisses* they compare him numerous times to a devil: "Vez quex espaules et quel braz et quel bu! / Ge cuit qu'il est del puis d'enfer issu / ou que il est li mestres Belzebu" (*Moniage Guillaume* vv. 109-111).[193] They are so

[192] "With such virtue he crossed the planks / He tore his leggings from the soles of his feet; / There was no baron who was not fearful."
[193] "Look at what shoulders and what arms and what a body! / I think that he has come forth for Hell / or that he is the master of Beelzebub"

offended by his excessive size that they cannot even consider him human, going so far as to call him the "Antecrist" (ibid v. 135). The audience can of course laugh at this moment as they are already aware that Guillaume will rejoin God in heaven once he dies, something the prologue augurs: "s'ame en est la-ssus en paradis" (ibid v. 41).[194]

The comedic and excessive content does not however betray the serious themes of the text. Philip Bennett, in his study on the hero and the carnivalesque, acknowledges that Guillaume's desire to repent is sincere and serious in spite of his comedic tendencies: "Les paroles de Guillaume font partie d'un vrai mouvement de repentir de sa part: il s'adresse à Dieu, doute du bien fondé de sa vocation de chef des armées, soit impériales soit personnelles, et exprime la crainte qu'il soit coupable d'homicides multiples" (161). Thus, one of the greatest themes of the poem – redemption, salvation of one's soul – is not diminished by the typically jovial and ridiculous feats of strength and excess found throughout the cycle.

Excess is not always shown as a comedic concept. It is likewise shown in acts of violence, and in Guillaume's world it can spread quickly, not only due to reprisals, but also due to the infectious nature of the act. René Girard explains the spread of violence thusly: "Two men come to blows; blood is spilt; both men are thus rendered impure. Their impurity is contagious, and anyone who remains in their presence risks becoming a party to their quarrel. The only sure way to avoid contagion is to flee the scene of violence" (*Violence and the Sacred* 29). When confronted with such a contagion, Guillaume is powerless, as are most, against the malady. What is more, due to his knightly honor, he cannot flee a battle without experiencing extreme shame.[195]

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[194] "[Guillaume's] soul is up in Heaven"
[195] Guillaume experiences this feeling of shame and embarrassment when he is forced to leave the battlefield at Larchamp after his entire army is decimated. This episode is further explored in chapter 2.

As a result, he mimics his contemporaries and embraces his violent tendencies – no matter any trepidation he may feel. Not even his *moniage* can stop him from succumbing to the contagious quality of violence.

So instrumental is this idea of a violent contagion that it can be found across multiple epics from the Indo-European tradition. In his article on anger in the epic, Bruno Méniel further strengthens the likening of violence with contagions in saying: "La violence se diffuse de proche en proche : par un phénomène de contamination, le sang du défunt met en effervescence celui du survivant" (7). Here, the idea fits neatly into that of the cycle of reprisals: death causes a reaction in the survivor, and he or she is thus contaminated leading to further series of contaminations that continues the spread of violence. Because of this Méniel believes that "Le poème épique condamne la colère comme une passion nocive, qui témoigne de l'orgueil, de la démesure, et confine à la folie" (Méniel 9). This seems hard to apply to all epics since throughout Guillaume's life he is rewarded for such outbursts. However, the *Moniage* does seem to warn against such rash reactions. Several times throughout the poem Guillaume apologizes for his actions, and it becomes clear that he should not be acting this way – particularly given his desire to be forgiven. In spite of these apologies, anger will often overcome him and lead to the use of excessive force.

Guillaume in search of violence

There are many instances in which violence is acceptable, chiefly warfare and self-defense. Scholar Frederick H. Russell further defines the instances of how Medieval Christians justified the use of violence. He explains that one example, holy war is justifiable because it "is fought for the goals or ideals of the faith" (2) – this includes Crusades. The second example is the just war, fought for "defense of territory,

person and rights" (2). This latter example, however, has many restrictions and limits on how one can conduct oneself during warfare. Guillaume will bend the limits of these accepted forms in order to accomplish his personal goals and desires.

In one of the most crucial scenes of the text, Guillaume, outside of warfare, finds himself face to face with the choice between violence and nonviolence. With the nefarious monks having decided that they would rather Guillaume die than to continue living with him in their monastery, an unarmed and violence-forbidden Guillaume is sent on an errand across dangerous lands filled with brigands. As stated above, the monks secretly wish that Guillaume were dead, and so the abbot gives Guillaume a variety of restrictions for his travel: he tells Guillaume that monks should not carry weapons (*Moniage Guillaume* v. 444), and that should the robbers try to take away the fish he has been instructed to acquire, then he should give it to them voluntarily (ibid. v. 479). While he has a variety of restrictions placed on him to complete his journey, Guillaume ensures that he is allowed to defend himself if the robbers try to take off his pants by asking a series of ridiculous questions to the abbot.[196] While the abbot is justified in his reasoning that Guillaume is not allowed to defend himself with force, for "li sainz ordres le vos deffent et gié" (ibid. v. 489), he has set up a man with a history of great violence with a difficult task.

Guillaume eventually asks him about a comically unlikely scenario: "que ferai ge s'il me tolent mes braies?" (ibid. v. 667). Ultimately, the Abbot, while laughing (ibid. v. 676), acquiesces and gives him a loophole regarding vengeance. If the robbers try to take his *braies* then he can attack them: "S'il les vos tolent, dont seroit ce a ledes; / A

[196] Across several *laisses similaires*, from the end of laisse VIII to laisse XIV, Guillaume asks the abbot about what he should do if the robbers attack him with the abbot giving him similar responses each time.

icest mot se doit l'en bien retrere; / Dont vos poëz conbatre sanz meffere" (ibid. vv. 679-681). His path to combat assured, Guillaume prepares a trap for the robbers: guaranteeing that they will go after his *braies*. To make them desire his pants (as an excuse to fight) he decides to tie a gold belt adorned with many stones and jewels around his waist.[197]

Later, when he is face to face with the robbers, he goads one of them into trying to take off his pants by describing how much the article of clothings is worth (ibid. vv. 1472-81). Once tempted, the brigand approaches and is caught in Guillaume's trap:

> Hauce le poing qu'il n'ot mië legier,
>
> Par maltalent enz el col li asiet.
>
> Fort ot le braz et le corage fier.
>
> Par tel aïr li a .I. cop paié
>
> Que il li a [tot] le chaignon froissié
>
> Ront li les ners, brise le henapier
>
> Et les .II. Eulz li fet voler del chief (ibid. vv. 1503-1509)[198]

In an unsurprising turn of events, Guillaume, who has not lost any of his renowned strength in old age, hits his enemy so forcefully that the robber's eyes fly out the sockets. What is surprising, however, is that Guillaume's motivating factor in this this action appears to be a "tel aïr". Incited by his hatred for the man (or at the very least the man's actions), Guillaume strikes and kills him. He has apparently learned little in

[197] He has the *braier* made and it is described in splendid detail: "La boucle en est du plus fin or d'Arabe, / A bones pierres – jagonces et topaces / Et esmeraudes et rubiz – qui li plaisent, / Li braiers fu de coton et de paile, / A riches oevres brodeës et portretes / E les lasnieres, de soië de Cesaire, / A boutons d'or qui contreval li perent. / Ainz tel braiers ne mist moines en braies. / Plus de .C. livres li a costé a fere" (*Moniage Guillaume* vv. 703-711).

[198] "He raises his fist that is hardly lightweight, / Angrily, he struck him on the neck. / Strong are his arms and his courage fierce. / With great hatred he paid him back with such a blow / that he crumpled his whole collar / Busted his nerves, broke the wafer box / And the made his two eyes fly from his head"

his time as a monk, and relapses to his violent ways. Guillaume's violent action can, more often than not, be defined as evidence of immoderation. Despite his desire to do otherwise, he often gives into the "tragique ivresse de la violence" (*Le Motif du repentir* 155).

In the majority of epics in the Guillaume cycle this kind of attack would play out easily in Guillaume's favor, and he would proceed to rout the rest of the band of robbers. In the *Moniage Guillaume*, however, the older Guillaume is quickly overwhelmed and is subjected to a series of torturous punishments.[199] When all hope seems lost, he proceeds to pray to God and to the Virgin Mary. Although he is repentant for his violence against others, his rationale for deserving divine aid is highlighted by recalling to them that he has "tant mort de cele gent aversse (Des Sarrazins qui Damedeu ne servent)" (*Moniage Guillaume* vv. 1541-2). Throughout the text, Guillaume seeks to repent for his killings (regardless of who it is that died at his hands), but when faced with certain death, he appeals to God by promoting the death toll for which he has accounted.

While the reasoning behind this appeal is dubious, the results are not. Guillaume is given God's favor and will receive a miracle to help save him from an otherwise certain death:

> La li fist Dex une miracle bele;
>
> Onques li quens n'i reçut cop en teste.
>
> ....
>
> Or orroiz ja une merveille aperte

[199] "Parmi le dos li ont granz cox paié / Et si li lancent les granz coteaus d'acier, / La char li rompent s'en font le sanc raier; Tant l'apresserent li glouton pautonnier" (*Moniage Guillaume* vv. 1525-8)

Que li quens fist por desconbrer la presse:

La char li sainne, qu'il avoit tante et perse,

Son somier vet , qui il chemin s'areste,

Li quens le queurt par .I. des piez aerdre

Si li esrache une des cuisse[s], destre;

Et li somiers est cheüz a la terre." (*Moniage Guillaume* vv. 1568-1569, 1572-1578)[200]

The miracle Guillaume receives from God is a disturbingly violent one. After escaping the throng of enemies, he is presented with his horse. No coward, Guillaume does not attempt to escape, but, instead, dismembers the horse to use its thigh as a weapon against the robbers. Once armed, Guillaume quickly turns the tide of battle: "Et li marchis lor est seure coru / Si le ferirent et il les a feru, / Lors en a .V. et morz et confondu" (*Moniage Guillaume* vv. 1587-1589).[201] While the narrator does not go into detail with how effective Guillaume is in battle with the horse's thigh, it is clear that the mace-like weapon gives him all the advantage he needs.[202]

Guillaume frightens them terribly when he allows his rage to overwhelm him.[203] So ferocious is Guillaume's counterattack that the robbers also call out to the Lord in

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[200] "Here God performed a beautfiul miracle for him; / Not one blow to the head to the count receive. / [...] Now you will hear a clear miracle / what the count did to escape the mêlée: / His flesh was bleeding, that was bruised and damaged, / he saw his packhorse, that stopped itself on the path, / The count quartered the hourse by grabbing one of his feet / And he tore off one of the right legs; / And the packhorse fell to the ground."

[201] "And the marquis ran over them / They hit him and he hit them, / At this time he had killed and destroyed five of them."

[202] What is more, the use of the horse's leg instead of a knightlier weapon recalls the excessive strength of other heros in the Indo-European tradition. As Jean Frappier explains, this adds to Guillaume's formidable reputation: "Son aspect herculéen suffit à inspirer l'admiration, le respect prudent, ou l'épouvante" (94)

[203] As Bruno Méniel states, when an epic character is out of their right mind, as the robbers have described Guillaume, the violence that follows is often looked down upon: "La colère épique [...] relève donc de la folie et de la démesure. Elle caractérise celui qui est sorti du bon sens, le desreé." (2) This implied condemnation leads to a critisicm of Guillaume's reaction

desperation: "Par Deu, le roi Jhesu, / Ge cuit cist moines est fors du sens issu […] Voiz comme est granz et forz et malostru !" (*Moniage Guillaume* vv. 1583-4, 1586).[204] These sinners begin to fear for their lives and call out to their Lord in disbelief. The epic hero appears in this moment to these robbers as a misshapen devil, one whose only goal is to kill them. The fear he has engendered in them is unsurprising when taken in the greater context of the *geste*: Guillaume has a propensity for striking fear in the heart of his enemies. However, it is telling that the warrior for Christ *par excellence* causes even evil men to seek out God for mercy.

Of course, their prayers will be left unanswered, and, in the end, Guillaume dispatches the rest of the robbers handily[205] and hangs them from a tree: "Trestoz les out par les gueules penduz / sor le chemin a .I. chesne branchu." (*Moniage Guillaume* vv. 1632-3).[206] From a legal point of view, for their crimes, these robbers deserve the fate that Guillaume has delivered, but if Guillaume is looking to abandon the values of the earthly world and instead align himself with the laws of God, then he should not be willing to search out such conflict. Instead, his methods are so harsh that even these criminals[207] become fearful. Once the wave anger has dissipated, Guillaume returns the horse's leg and prays to God. A second miracle occurs, and Guillaume's horse has its leg reattached and it finds itself "plus sains que en nule seson" (*Moniage Guillaume* v. 1706). Though Guillaume provoked the robbers via his words and his trap, he and

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that does not often occur in the scenes where he commits violence.

[204] "By God, the king Jesus, / I think this monk is out of his mind […] / Look how large, strong, and misshapen he is!"

[205] Saving only one who begged him for mercy, the narrator makes a note to tell the audience of this single robber's fortune for escaping the fate of his companions: "Cil ot grant joie qui eschapez en fu" (*Moniage Guillaume* v. 1634). Later, the lone survivor goes back home and "puis fu preudom" (*Moniage Guillaume* v. 1666).

[206] "He hanged each of them from their throats / on the path on a many-branched oak"

[207] These robbers are a menace to the people in the area and commit a variety of capital crimes. As described earlier in the text: "La gent meutrissent et font et honte et lait" (v. 827) and of some "filles firent lor volentez" (v. 1211).

his horse are rewarded with a miracle from God. It is worth noting that this battle occurs during Lent (ibid v. 315), further enforcing the support from God.

When Guillaume returns to the convent, he continues to fall victim to his own rage as he finds the monks have tried to lock him out: “Sa grant ire li croist” (*Moniage Guillaume* v. 1857). Powered by this ire, he breaks through the door of the convent and kills a porter.[208] Though this seems extreme even given the rejection and betrayal he faces, as Jean Subrenat states, it is the norm for Guillaume and these outbursts are to be expected: “Quant à la violence, Guillaume a fort à faire pour la maîtriser. En actes ou en paroles, il est effrayant. Ses colères sont innombrables” (Subrenat 654).[209] After coming back from his encounter with the robbers, Guillaume confronts the abbot and frightens the other monks, going as far as killing a prior (*Moniage Guillaume* v. 2000).[210] While he asks the abbot to pardon him for this last killing, the attack on the prior, coupled with the “aïr” shown toward the robber, shows a disturbing tendency toward excessive violence on Guillaume’s part. His desire for redemption is visible in parts across the cycle, but Guillaume does not often display true regret following his moments of excess.[211]

To the people of the Middle Ages, Guillaume’s rash reactions would go against societal norms. Claude Guavard explains that while there are many instances in which violence is acceptable, there are specific rules and codes by which one must abide:

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[208] “Tel cop I hurte del fust qui gros estoit / Li gon brisierent et la porte decroist / Et le portier a mis en tel destroit / Desoz la porte – que cravanté l’avoit” (*Moniage Guillaume* vv. 1863-1867)
[209] While Guillaume’s violence is unacceptable, Subrenat thinks it’s the monks’ fault that they push Guillaume to the edge (Subrenat 655).
[210] Giving weight to their initial reactions at the time of his first appearance: "Fox sera cil qui le fera irier: / A .I. seul cop del poing l'avra froissié" (*Moniage Guillaume* vv. 215-216).
[211] Though, the concept of remorse explains why prayers are so commonplace in this poem and in others: “On se repent souvent au Moyen âge : avant une bataille, après un mouvement de démesure, et surtout à l’heure ultime de la mort” (*Le Motif du repentir* 9). Given Guillaume’s constant acts of excess and participation in battle, he must pray often to be able to repent.

"L'agression se trouve rarement condamnée quand elle est le fait d'une cause considérée comme juste et quand elle se déroule selon des règles de la vengeance reconnues par tous. Ce sont bien les excès de la violence qui sont l'objet de condamnations, non la violence elle-même" (Gauvard 12-13). While it is evident that Guillaume is not judged by the narrator,[212] especially given the base opinion of the monks the latter has presented to the audience, his moments of excess are frowned upon by society.

Anger

The expression of anger is a common motif in epic literature across eras.[213] Anger is all-consuming emotion that quickly devolves into a destructive force that is often displaced from the subject onto another. The titular hero of the *Moniage Guillaume* is often faced with situations (and people) which anger him. He often struggles to find the proper reaction to this emotion, and it often leads to the death of someone around him. According to Bruno Méniel, the most common manifestation of this epic anger is harmful not only to the victim but also to the epic hero: "Nous voyons ainsi se dégager un premier type de *colère épique*. Cette colère triste, morbide, délétère serait perçue comme une force agressive dont le sujet serait heurté, avant que, découvrant qu'elle peut le détruire, il ne l'oriente vers autrui" (Méniel 2).[214] Guillaume, an expert at transferring his anger into his violence on others, is often burdened with seeking an outlet for this emotion. By allowing anger to overtake him, he harms not only the victim but also his eternal soul, the fate which he fears the most.

[212] What is more, he describes the monk's actions as treason twice in laisse VI.
[213] In fact, Bruno Méniel claims that this anger has been at the heart of the epic since the Iliad (2).
[214] Emphasis mine.

Although the Guillaume of the *Moniage* harbors an ardent desire to repent for his sins – most explicitly, the taking of many lives – he will often let his anger get the best of him. Never clearer is his ire than when Guillaume is imprisoned and tortured by Saracens: the pagans ask him if he will renounce God, but he refuses and, as a result, the torture will continue. The narrator then explains that this imprisonment lasts for 7 years (*Moniage Guillaume* v. 3397). If, as Bruno Méniel states, "Tout personnage épique est un coléreux en puissance" (Méniel 1), then it stands to reason that Guillaume is simply an instant away from his anger getting the best of him. As such, when subjected to this torture, he is incapable of resisting a return to his earlier tendencies. He cannot help but return to his nature at this time and so he promises to annihilate his Saracen captors:

> Se Dex ce done que ge puisse eschaper,
> Ge vous ferai toz les menbres coper
> Et Synagon ocirre et desmenbrer,
> Ceste cité ardoir et cravanter (vv. 3414-3417)[215]

Once drawn back into the fray, Guillaume allows anger to lead him to a reaction which he vehemently wishes to avoid. What is more, his initial comments clash with his supposed reform. He claims that he will do all these terrible deeds only if "Dex" allows him to escape. While not overtly claiming that God expects this of him, his comments seem to imply that any violent action he takes upon them will be allowed by God. The narrative again struggles with the balance between the critique and the valorization of violence during Guillaume's *moniage*. The evident paradox of a *moniage* once again rears its head: "entré dans les ordres en pénitence de toutes les morts chrétiennes ou

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[215] "If God allows me to escape / I will cut off all of your limbs / I will kill Synagon and dismember him / I will burn down this city and knock it to the ground."

païennes dont il se sent responsable, il [Guillaume,] se trouve à plusieurs reprises amené à tuer de nouveau" (Subrenat 662). This will not be the last time Guillaume will struggle with his newfound penitence and his earlier nature.

The Ultimate Apotheosis

By the end of the poem, the *Moniage Guillaume* aims to complete two goals in the bigger picture of the cycle of Guillaume: 1) to bring an end to Guillaume's adventures and 2) to end the cycle of violence that has both benefited and injured (spiritually and physically) Guillaume to allow for his final salvation. It is this first goal that Neilly Andrieux-Reix claims is the clearest: "Conçu pour clore l'écriture d'un cycle littéraire, le *Moniage Guillaume* se donne aussi comme un texte de fondation […] l'affrontement avec le diable a engendré l'appelation du Pont du Diable et que le nom de Guillaume suffit à justifier celui de Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert, adopté par l'abbaye établie à cet endroit." (18) To successfully close the cycle, Guillaume must follow in his real-life counterpart's footsteps. Ending the cycle of violence, however, will be the true goal of this epic adventure. As analyzed above, Guillaume seeks eternal salvation by repenting for the killing which he has engendered.

Guillaume's history of violence has resulted in his inability to escape a cycle of violence. This cycle of violence is not unique to the epic. In fact, René Girard explains it as a cycle of reprisals which is difficult to stop: "Only violence can put an end to violence, and that is why violence is self-propagating. Everyone wants to strike the last blow, and reprisal can thus follow reprisal without any true conclusion ever being reached" (*Violence and the Sacred* 26). In this way, Guillaume's violence cannot be stopped with more violence. This is something the *Moniage* addresses directly in its critique of violence and its search for salvation. The structure of this poem, like those

of other epics in this epic cycle, relies upon episodic violence.[216] This violence leads to further opportunities for Guillaume to abandon his immediate quest for salvation for the sake of entertaining the audience. As such, it seems impossible for Guillaume to stop when he has narratively contradictory forces pushing him back to violence: the episodic nature of the epic and the desire to reopen the narrative cycle.

While the cycle of reprisal and violence seems unending, Girard, in both *Violence and the Sacred* and *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, posits two possible solutions to prevent any further reopenings. The first is the role of sacrifice as the ultimate peacekeeper – though this is only a temporary fix.[217] Likewise, he posits that the legal process could also function to curb the desire for vengeance:

> The judicial authority is beholden to no one. It is thus at the disposal of everyone, and it is universally respected. The judicial system never hesitates to confront violence head on, because it possesses a monopoly on the means of revenge. Thanks to this monopoly, the system generally succeeds in stifling the impulse to vengeance rather than spreading or aggravating it, as a similar intervention on the part of the aggrieved party would invariably do. (*Violence and the Sacred* 23)

While in the *Chanson de Roland*, for example, the role of the judicial process is foregrounded by the narrative during Ganelon's trial,[218] within the cycle of Guillaume

[216] As shown above during the episode of the monks and the robbers, Guillaume is trapped in a cycle of retributions that lead to more violence.
[217] What he calls the *bouc émissaire*, or scapegoat, which creates a "false unanimity that puts only a temporary end to collective violence" (*I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* 2).
[218] Though even this trial is incapable of truly preventing reprisals given the vengeful machinations of Charlemagne and the narrator: "In the trial scene of the *Chanson de Roland*, almost none of the characteristics of our judicial codes can be found. Here, the guilt of the accused is pronounced at the beginning of the proceedings" (Haidu 152). This is further agreed on by Mary Jane Schenck who claims: "It would be more accurate to call the trial, 'the punishment of Ganelon' because the question of judging him pales in comparison to the apparent need to see the traitor harshly punished." (591)

the court rarely intercedes. As discussed in the first chapter, Guillaume decides the guilt of his transgressors and he does not experience judgment from the narrator. In this way, he is often judge, jury, and executioner – though he will occasionally allow a stay of execution or a complete pardon – with the right to decide who does or does not deserve punishment. As such his actions produce backlash from, at the very least, the relatives of his Saracen foes, and Guillaume himself, without a true legal system to work on his own behalf, will likewise act out when presented with something he views as unjust. Without a true legal system settling disputes and exerting its own judgment, violence must, then, seek another outlet.

Unsurprisingly, without an independent body to help curb the need for vengeance and reprisals, Guillaume, along with so many other epic characters, often gives into his base desire for vengeance. As demonstrated above, throughout his *geste,* and more specifically in this poem, rage and fury have gotten the best of Guillaume. In this way, he edges closer to the ideals of Satan, who according to Girard, "presents himself as a model for our desires, and he is certainly easier to imitate than Christ, for he counsels to abandon ourselves to our inclinations in defiance of morality and its prohibitions" (*I See Satan Fall like Lightning* 32). However, Guillaume does not completely defy God's teachings; he places a high value on the lives of others even when struggling to avoid violence or vengeance.

In his later scholarship, Girard revises his view on how to end the cycle of violence. In *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, Girard explains a unique type of mimesis created by Christianity, one in which Jesus invites his followers to copy his example – one He is imitating based on God's example (*I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* 12-13). In imitating Jesus, whose actions take place in an earthly contexts Christians can more easily comprehend and imitate, followers would be able to attain salvation. Whereas

Girard's early views on mimesis centered around competition and desire, this one focuses on non-violence and salvation. Despite the nonviolent example from Christ, Guillaume's cycle ends much as it began: with a battle to avenge a wrong done to him. Guillaume's only path to heaven consists of returning to his violent ways in order to fight the devil – thereby tying the *geste* into the real-life myth of Guillaume de Gellone.

After Guillaume has defeated the Saracen enemies who threatened his liege lord, he retires to the future Saint-Guilhem-le-désert. Once there, he will come face to face with the devil. Guillaume, in his hermitage, builds a bridge to cross a large chasm, but he is thwarted, time and again, by the devil who continuously destroys the bridge after Guillaume constructs it. Though he is supposedly finished with violence, Guillaume takes matters into his own hands and fights the devil:

> Li quans le prant a .I. poig par le braz.
>
> 'Gloz', dist li quans, 'certes, mar I entras!
>
> Mout m'as grevé, mes tu le comparras'.
>
> .III. tors le torne, au quart le rue aval
>
> Si l'a gité en l'eve trestot plat;
>
> Au chöoir jus a fet .I. si grant flat
>
> Et sembla bien c'une tor craventast.' (*Moniage Guillaume* vv. 6833-9)[219]

In the end, he prays to God to keep the devil from returning "et Damedieu sa priere oïe a: / ainz le deable puis ne se remua; / toz jorz gist la et toz tens i sera" (*Moniage Guillaume* vv. 6844-6).[220] While it may seem that Guillaume's final fight with the devil

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[219] "The count grabs him with one fist by the arm. / 'Evil-doer', says the count, 'certainly, to your misfortune you enter here! / Much have you grieved me, but you will pay for it'. / Three turns he spun him, on the fourth he threw him down / And he threw him into the water completely flattened; / During the fall to the ground he collapsed so greatly / And it seemed as though a tower was knocked over."

[220] "And the Lord God heard his prayer: / Never again could the devil move; / Always he lies there and forever will he be there"

would create a paradoxical acceptance of violence in his rejection of Satan's temptations, it functions as validation of his choice to leave behind feudal society and to devote himself to founding a monastery.

His choice has led him to the ultimate battle, one that has its very own parallel in the Bible. In the Book of Revelations, it is explained that Jesus will come back to Earth and defeat Satan. In this way, Guillaume follows the Bible's example even more to the letter than if he followed Christ's examples of non-violence. While it would seem that this battle would lead to, at the least, a reopening of the cycle of violence, it in fact ends the cycle. Unlike Girard's claims that violence only begets violence, for once, Guillaume's violence has led to his own everlasting peace. There will be no reopening of the epic cycle after this narrative moment.[221]

Guillaume's ultimate escape from the cycle of violence does have a Biblical precedent. In relating the story of Joseph, Girard explains another way in which the cycle of violence can end, it requires "a reflection on violence whose radicalism is revealed at the point where pardon replaces the obligatory vengeance. It is only this pardon, this forgiveness, that is capable of stopping once and for all the spiral of reprisals" (111). Unlike Joseph, Guillaume will not be the one to forgive and end the cycle, Jesus will. It appears Guillaume has been rewarded for this violence – just as he was/will be rewarded throughout other epics. However, the reward does not stem directly from his own violence, instead it is given to him by Jesus. The forgiveness comes in spite Guillaume's many shortcomings.

[221] Future texts will recount the adventures of Guillaume's youth. Even the last written text of the cycle, *Enfances Guillaume*, will be forced to go back to Guillaume's beginning and rewrite parts of his biography in order to create new content.

The narrator reveals to us Guillaume's fate after this fight with the devil: "Or prion Dieu qu'i[l] nos face pardon / Si coume il fist Guillaume le baron" (*Moniage Guillaume* vv. 6861-2).[222] It is clear from this citation that God Himself forgives Guillaume. While this intercession on God's part differs from what happens in Joseph's story, Girard is correct in pointing out that forgiveness is the way to end reprisal. The truth in this is underlined in the other cycles of the medieval French *chansons de geste*. There is never a true step toward forgiveness in the Lorraine cycle, for example. Either because of the narrative desire to continue the cycle, or because of the nature of man depicted in the narrative, characters take matters into their own hands and avenge each fallen comrade.[223] This tendency further enforces why it was necessary for Guillaume to leave his life behind in order to attain God's forgiveness. Of all the great Frankish heroes, Guillaume's story is the only one that ends in such a peaceful way.

Nonetheless, it is unclear from the text whether Guillaume was ever truly required to do anything to repent. As Peter Haidu explains, the Church preaches forgiveness and, as such, followers of the Church should find salvation regardless of Guillaume's actions in his *moniage*: "The gesture of violence is foregrounded by a framework of human law that is mere illusion, and a divine law that always allows repentance after transgression" (2). Guillaume's search for salvation may, as a result, seem hollow or seem to be a formality. However, Guillaume is earnest in his attempts; this is not a superficial attempt at penitence. The once brash and violence-prone knight tries at multiple points to bring himself closer to God. Nonetheless, Guillaume

[222] "Now let us pray to God that he may pardon us / As he did Guillaume the noble"
[223] This is due to the ability for violence to spread: "La violence se diffuse de proche en proche : par un phénomène de contamination, le sang du défunt met en effervescence celui du survivant" (Méniel 7)

hardly succeeds in separating himself from mortal sin, and the fight with the devil is evidence of the complicated nature of forgiveness which the *Moniage Guillaume* attempts to resolve. Guillaume is predestined for forgiveness and sainthood, because of his real-life parallel, because of his earnest attempt at becoming a better Christian, and because of God's forgiving nature.

Conclusion

This chapter delineated the drive to close the cycle that connects the *Moniage Guillaume* to the rest of the cycle of Guillaume, while analyzing the role of excess and comedy. The closing of the cycle, however, is disrupted by the episodic continuations of violence that have Guillaume take back up the mantle of the epic knight. In so doing, his quest for redemption is delayed until a final decisive confrontation with the devil. Of course, given the nature of the epic, Guillaume does not resolve this conflict peacefully. He engages in a physical battle to finally end his cycle of violence. Although he is unable to resolve the cycle without violence, it is justified in that this final act of violence mimics Jesus's attempts to free humanity from sin. God magnanimously forgives Guillaume his sins and welcomes him to Heaven.

While Guillaume's search for redemption follows a particularly privileged path – he leaves behind, after all, land and fame for the life of a monk – it is clear that the large steps of his journey mirror the general stages of human life. In this way, it appears he could exemplify for the medieval audience how priorities should change throughout one's life. What is more, Jean-Charles Payen imagines that the people of the Middle Ages have a particular view of the chivalric world, and as such have specific expectations for how the cycle should play out: "il est bon que le héros connaisse une jeunesse active, qu'il goûte à tous les périls et tous les plaisirs, puis que, l'âge venant, et

avec lui le déclin des grandes passions, il se retire dans la solitude et se réconcilie avec le ciel" (*Le Motif du repentir* 151). Guillaume follows this expected life cycle of the heroic knight, and the events of the *Moniage Guillaume* help validate his place in heaven.

Given that the text actively criticizes and praises violent acts, it is important to consider how this addresses societal norms. According to Peter Haidu, repeated uses of violence are telling for scholars: "Violence, in this cultural world, is not transgression [...] Its multiple repetitions in a literary text [...] are merely another documentary instance available to the social historian of the particularized forms of social and military violence" (Haidu 199). While Haidu is discussing the *Chanson de Roland* in particular here, it is clear that this view can be applied to the analysis of any number of *chansons de geste*. Scholars can glean much from the repetitive violence found in any of the epics, which are themselves often a repetition of the violence found in the other epics. What is more, as Haidu explains, the plentiful episodes of social and military violence are scarcely criticized.

Another issue complicating Guillaume's views on violence may be how Guillaume values the role of the state. Luke Sunderland explains that "The sovereign incarnates and defends the oneness of social order, retaining a monopoly on the licit use of violence" (*Rebel Barons* 22). As such, all acts of violence committed in service of the king are licit. Given the social acceptance of feudal violence, Guillaume is pressured (by his own honor and by society) to continually help Louis. He cannot, then, escape the cycle of reprisals in which Saracens wish to avenge their fallen brethren. The power of the sovereign competes with God's will to have no killings, as per the commandments. Ultimately, Guillaume's struggles with feudal fidelity and religious observance will end, as he chooses to finally leave society. However, this is

only after multiple episodes which require him to return in defense of Louis and France.

While Guillaume's *moniage* will ultimately help lead him on the path to salvation it will not be thanks to his monkhood, but rather his ultimate escape from the world and the forgiveness of God. Girard, in retelling the story of Jesus protecting a woman from stoning, introduces the idea of a nonviolent contagion, one in which it becomes more difficult to react violently when others are nonviolent (*I See Satan Fall like Lightning* 57). No one performs this way in Guillaume's world. There does not exist a nonviolent contagion in this epic cycle. Even the monks act in a fashion that leads to violent contagion amongst themselves. As such, it is impossible to expect anything but violence from the characters of the Cycle of Guillaume.

Audience expectations notwithstanding, Guillaume has done his best to end his life in a way that will allow him to be worthy of salvation – even after killing Saracens and Christians alike. As Jean Subrenat explains, this is a unique situation among the epic heroes: "Ainsi une chanson dans le prolongement et le ton de l'ensemble de la geste de Guillaume donne-t-elle au héros non seulement un fin épique digne de lui, mais encore une fin religieuse qui le grandit parce qu'elle n'est pas un vernis traditionnel et auquel le genre se prête, mais un approfondissement spirituel sérieux, volontaire et sincère" (664). Guillaume's sincerity is what will elevate this story from the apparent frame-story that functions as an excuse for more adventures into a true reflection on the long-term effects of violence and the guilt it creates. This poem, from the second earliest extant manuscript of the cycle, shows how complex the views on violence are within the *chansons de geste*. The *chansons de geste* of medieval France provide a rich and varied analysis of violence and its role in society, but it is not uniform. The *Roland*, for example shows a reality in which violence is expected to

appease God: “La victoire est un jugement de Dieu [....] il est le Dominus Sabbaoth, le Dieu des Armées de l'Ancien Testament” (“Une poétique du génocide joyeux”227). This is not entirely true of the *Moniage*. To be sure, Guillaume is aided by God in his combats (his horse is after all healed after being dismembered), but he is also forgiven by God for all his past sins, the “mal” he has “fet,” after a sincere, yet flawed, attempt to become a better person.

CHAPTER 5

The *Enfances Guillaume* as a Murderous Continuation: Reimagining an Epic Beginning

Following the composition of most of the Guillaume cycle's *chansons,*[224] a new addition appears: the *Enfances Guillaume*. It focuses on a narrative exploring Guillaume's adolescence, his introduction to Orable (later Guibourc), and his eventual knighting by Charlemagne. These three overarching threads serve to connect his youth and his later knightly deeds. The *Moniage Guillaume*, composed in the twelfth century, seemingly closes the narrative of the Guillaume cycle, and the earliest extant manuscript of the *Prise d'Orange*, from the thirteenth century, ties a bow on the romance plot between Guillaume and Guibourc, but the *Enfances Guillaume* returns to the hero's beginnings to reopen the narrative and to redefine the relationship between Guillaume and his future wife. Its genesis seems to arise from a combination of the popularity of similar texts and the creation of cyclical manuscripts.[225] Due to its sudden appearance and lack of earlier references, it seems then that the *Enfances Guillaume* has no precedent in the oral tradition, and its inclusion in cyclical manuscripts stems from the medieval authors' constant desire to create

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[224] What Philip Bennett describes as the first "proto-cycle" of the Guillaume cycle, comprised of the *Couronnement, Charroi, Prise, Chanson de Guillaume,* and *Moniage,* is "déjà constitué dans les années 1170" (12-13)

[225] The *Enfances Guillaume*'s origins in the 13th century coincides with the beginning of cyclisation. As Philip Bennett explains, "c'est au XIIIe siècle que la cyclisation a pris pleinement son essor" (11).

continuations.[226] If this is the case, then, the role of the physical text, whether read aloud or read to oneself,[227] will begin to impinge on the place of the oral tradition as the main source of dissemination of the epics.

Earlier epics in the Guillaume Cycle, specifically, the *Chanson de Guillaume*, depict, when closely analyzed, a nuanced view of violence.[228] Among the nuances present in these epics is Guillaume's disdain for killing and his regret for the sins he has committed during his lifetime. The *Enfances Guillaume*, despite the many allusions connecting it to the other poems of the main cycle, will be shown to be largely devoid of the regret and humanity present in the earlier texts of the Guillaume cycle. While the young Guillaume will undoubtedly prefigure his future violent ways in two particular episodes that allude to his renowned feats, he will not show the depth of regret and indecision present in other texts.

This change in his reception of violence begs the question: does the separation in time – twelfth versus thirteenth centuries – explain why these same nuanced views on violence have been overlooked or misunderstood in the events of the *Enfances Guillaume*? According to Patrice Henry, the editor of one of two modern editions, this *chanson* reproduces the excesses of a bygone time: "Les *Enfances Guillaume* sont donc une œuvre de la décadence épique ayant conservé des souvenirs et des traits heureux" (*Enfances Guillaume* XLII). Given the lack of connection between the texts of the it seems clear that the "souvenirs" and "traits heureux" to which Henry refers also evidence a changing interest in the relationship with violence and regret.

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[226] As explained by Luke Sunderland, this is a common occurrence: "The *geste* is always sprouting more offshoots, more texts, leading to the production of material extraneous to the cycle" (*Old French Narrative Cycles* 62).
[227] Keith Busby explains that there are many modes of reading manuscripts to oneself, either aloud or silently (139). However, he goes on to explain that most Old French verse narrative manuscripts were meant to be read aloud (140)
[228] See chapter 2 of this study for a more detailed analysis.

One thing that links the *chansons* composed during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are events such as the crusades and conflicts between different kingdoms. Catherine Hanley explains the historical context of these two centuries thusly: “Wars were frequent events in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, whether they were large-scale international conflicts, such as the crusades or the campaigns between the French and English monarchies, or national struggles such as Philip Augustus’s attempts to subdue his rebellious vassals or the baronial revolt during the minority of Louis IX, or local feuds between rival landowners” (1). This is likewise the reality of several of the earliest texts in the cycle: Guillaume must contend with an impotent Louis, barons seeking to circumvent the feudal order, and the neighboring Saracen forces that he perceives as a threat to his own way of life. These three conflicts are likewise present in the *Enfances Guillaume* to varying degrees of importance and fidelity. Though Louis is not yet king, Guillaume will be tied to his service at the behest of Charlemagne. Guillaume will combat both Saracens and a seditious Breton who wishes to attack the emperor. In this way, the *Enfances Guillaume* will link itself to the reality of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

This chapter thus interests itself not in the emotional reception of violence, as violence appears to be relegated to a role of entertainment, but instead on the changes made across time as the French epic diversifies its interests. As the role of women continues to expand in the Guillaume cycle, we see a blooming of themes and narratives, and the original questioning of violence disappears in the face of other societal inquiries. What is most telling of the *Enfances Guillaume*’s innovations of epic tropes is that women play a larger role than in the past. This compared to early epics makes more clear, according to Sarah Kay, that women have always played a specific role in the epic even with their absence or diminished presence: “though women are

relegated to very minor roles in early epics, such as the *Chanson de Roland*, female characters – mothers, sisters, wives, objects of desire – intervene in most *chansons de geste* to cement relationships between males or to circumvent and disrupt them" (*The Chanson de Geste in the Age of the Romance* 22). However, as hinted at above with Patrice Henry's quote, some scholars such as Gérard Genette believe that the epic is destined for a degeneration, the end result of which is an unavoidable prosification of the epic and thus a turn toward romance (179). The expanded interest in the role of Orable will be used to point to the exclusion of the text as a true *chanson de geste*. While this will be proven to be unsubstantiated, it is clear that the *Enfances Guillaume* is searching to address the realities of the Middle Ages beyond the purview of knights, warfare, and combat. Using a Genettian theoretical frame to discuss narrative imitation, the following chapter will search to examine the role of the *Enfances Guillaume* in the Monglane cycle by analyzing first the portrayal of violence, the Genettian theory of continuations and the increased role of women.

A Question of Legacy: Violence and Regret

Before going on to an analysis of the text and its themes, it will be beneficial to give a quick recapitulation of the events of the text in question. The *Enfances Guillaume* begins with the future knight and his brothers being invited to Paris to serve under Charlemagne before being knighted in a few years' time. In the secondary story line, once the brothers and their father Aymeri de Narbonne leave, the Saracen king Thibaut attacks the city which is protected by Guillaume's mother Ermenjart. This begins what will be a continuous narrative across the story: the Saracens trying to take over Narbonne while Guillaume is away. Guillaume and his brothers, in the meantime, come across another group of Saracens, and Guillaume exhibits his prowess in combat

while using a stake since he has yet to be given real arms. At this time, Guillaume learns of Orable and vows to conquer Orange and take her from Thibaut. In Orange, Orable will likewise fall immediately in love when she hears of Guillaume and, throughout the story, she fights off Thibaut's advances in order to stay chaste for her future husband. Eventually Guillaume and his brothers reach Paris and after a series of altercations are knighted by the Emperor Charlemagne. Guillaume then returns to Narbonne to rescue his mother from Thibaut's ongoing siege. After Guillaume's arrival, the Franks combat the Saracens and push back the encroaching host, rescuing Narbonne. The family is reunited, and the audience anticipates the events of the *Couronnement de Louis*.

Based on the above description, the *Enfances Guillaume* resembles the other episodic adventures of Guillaume as discussed in previous chapters. What is not clear is that this text coincides more with Jean-Charles Payen's description of the epic as a "joyous genocide" than it does the reflective regret and redemption analyzed in the *Moniage Guillaume*. Guillaume as an adolescent has no qualms about killing Saracens and Christians alike. This is evident from the earliest point in the text. As is the case with the other epics analyzed in this study, the *Enfances Guillaume* makes a point to stress, and exaggerate, the impressive number of deaths attributed to knights at various moments of the story.[229] In the prologue, the narrator expresses to the audience the renown of Guillaume's father, Aymeri de Narbonne, in a similar manner. Aymeri's status as a prolific knight is proven by pointing to the fact that he is known for having fought and killed numerous Saracens:

C'est uns des fiz Ainmeri le chasteinne,

[229] As noted in chapter 2, Catherine Hanley explains that number of deaths responsible for are purely symbolic ways to justify the renown or strength of a knight (74).

Qui tant jors tint Nerbonne an son demoinne,

Qui tant ocist de la gent mecreande,

Per vint foieies quatre miliers ansanble. (*Enfances Guillaume* vv. 6-9)[230]

The narrator's laudatory description clearly moves away from the regret expressed in the *Moniage Guillaume* wherein both the titular knight and his cousin admit to their past wrongdoings. While boasting is not uncommon in the prologue,[231] it is does not usually entail a tally of a knight's victims. The *Enfance Guillaume*'s prologue, thus, shows the willingness to place itself into the cycle while forging a new path based on a more black and white interpretation of violence – violence against the enemy requires little to no regret. It removes, then, a layer to a cycle that repeatedly expresses regret while simultaneously exalting violence and its byproducts.

One thing is made clear, however: Guillaume is as of yet uninterested in the consequences of this violence. He will embark upon these acts with glee as a young man on a quest to realize his dream. In this way the *Enfances* will adhere to commonplace views on youth. Working as a narrative counterweight to the remorse of the *Moniage Guillaume*, this text's view of Guillaume presents a man who is unready to, or incapable of, imagining the toll that this violence will one day have. Regardless, the story functions within its limited scope to balance Guillaume's ultimate development within the epic cycle and, purposefully or not, fits perfectly into the cycle's depiction of a knight who across his life will become more reflective on his past (mis)deeds.

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[230] "[Guillaume] is one of Aymeri the castellan's sons, / [Aymeri] who held Narbonne in his dominion for so long / Who killed so many of the unchristian people, / Around eighty thousand of them all together."

[231] The other prologues of Guillaume's main cycle focus on his knightly exploits, his marriage to Guibourc, and his conquests.

Jeunesse and knighthood

In representing the earliest moments of Guillaume's exploits, there exists an uneasy reality in the *Enfances Guillaume*: one of a soon-to-be knight who by virtue of his well-documented narrative future will command a respect he has yet to earn. Anna Carney furthers this idea by relating the narrative paradox: "The grown William of the earlier stories has been put in the incongruous role of child, but everyone – most of the characters as well as the audience – knows that he is really the most powerful man in the country" (Carney 243). The text thereby straddles the line between depicting a young inexperienced adolescent with the need to present the birth of an epic cycle. Questions of youth and renown arise as Guillaume embarks on his quest for knighthood.

At the beginning of the text, Guillaume, on the cusp of manhood, is invited by Charlemagne to the royal court, but he learns that he shall not be knighted immediately upon arrival to Paris: "Quant il avront dous ans ou trois servit / Il les ferait chivelier devenir" (*Enfances Guillaume* vv. 66-7).[232] Charlemagne, to the chagrin of Guillaume, expects young squires to serve two or three years before earning knighthood. Though his brothers are content with the process, the young Guillaume is impatient and will not be pleased with the news that he cannot yet become a knight. Following this disappointment, Guillaume interjects with a curse and a clear statement on what he should be doing with his life:

Fiz a putains, mauvais garsons frarins,

La vostre anfance durait elle toz dis ?

[232] "When they will have served two or three years / He [Charlemagne] will have them become knights"

Or deüsiés chivelier devenir

Et garoier paieins et Sarasins (*Enfances Guillaume* vv. 77-80)[233]

Guillaume is impatient and ready for adventure: he does not wish to wait to be knighted by Charlemagne. He believes that he and his brothers are unduly extending their childhood by going to stay with the king instead of waging war and fighting their Saracen foes – this attitude hints at the conquering and battling for which he shall be known. As examined in previous chapters, Guillaume's youth is spent conquering lands and defending his lord. As Sarah Sturm-Maddox explains, Guillaume carries out two distinct roles: "Adjuvant (defender of the crown, defender of the Christian Empire) and Conquerer (of Nîmes, of Orange, and of other Saracen territory)" (492). Both these roles center primarily around his ability to combat enemies of Christendom. It is clear that he is impatient and wishes to undertake his knightly duties posthaste.

His desire to fight the Saracens is easily understood. For the aspiring knight of the medieval epic, the fight against the enemy is the ultimate proving ground for his valor and might. According to Jean-Pierre Martin this is no less true for Guillaume: "Dans le cycle de Guillaume, le héros ne saurait montrer ses aptitudes guerriers que dans le combat contre les païens" ("Le Motif de l'adoubement" 347). This means that they must fight against what Martin goes on to refer to as the "menace incessante" (ibid 347). It is through combating this threat that a young knight can prove his worth, thus earning great renown.

As seen in the above citation, Guillaume, even in his youth, wishes to "garoier paieins et Sarasins" (*Enfances Guillaume* v. 80). The narrative sets the stage for him

[233] "Son of a whore, bad brothers, / Will your childhood last forever? / You should become knights now / And wage war on pagans and Saracens"

to combat the Saracens. So brilliant are his skills that in an early battle scene a Saracen enemy marvels at Guillaume's youth while praising the young fighter's strength:

N'ait point de barbe ne grenon raeis,

Onkes ancor chevaliers ne devint;

Mais un pel porte gros et lonc et traitis.

An tel esfroi ait mis nos Sarrasins,

N'i ait celui cui il an atainsist

Per Mahonmet ke n'estuere morir (*Enfances Guillaume* vv. 927-32)[234]

Despite his youth, a lack of beard, true weapon, or real experience, Guillaume has "an tel efroi [...] mis [the] Sarrasins". The narrator purposefully reminds the audience that Guillaume has yet to be knighted, further cementing his youth and inexperience. This inexperience, he later explains, justifies carrying a stake, *pel*, into battle: "Damoisiaus suix, meschins et bacheleirs; / Onkes ancores ne fui jou adoubiez, / Espié ne lance ne hauberc n'ai porté" (vv. 1552-4).[235] Even before becoming a knight and before wielding any chivalric weapons, the young Guillaume mirrors the future knight who will strike fear into the hearts of his enemies while arousing awe and respect. Thus, the text quickly reaffirms his reputation in order to regain the same status with which the audience would be accustomed.

Of course, not everyone will be impressed with him. Thibaut is shocked that his vassals would warn him about a young boy who has yet to be knighted:

Voz parleiz folemant,

[234] "He has no beard nor mustache, / he has yet to become a knight; / But he carries a long, fat, and well-formed stake. / He made our Saracens very fearful, / There is no one that he has reached / By Muhammad that could escape death"
[235] "A young man am I, a youth, a knight bachelor, / I have yet to be knighted, / I have worn neither sword, nor lance. nor hauberk"

Ke d'un garçon m'aleiz antraiatant

Ke nen ot onkes de terre plain un gan,

Ne ne fuit sires d'une espee tranchant (*Enfances Guillaume* vv. 1682-5)[236]

Unlike the reader who is aware of Guillaume's future – either through the prologue or through previous knowledge – Thibaut is focused on the lack of land or sword. His vassals rightly counter by asking what Guillaume will be capable of in the future if he is able to kill so many at such a young age with nothing but a stake (v. 1695). Given his eventual defeat by Guillaume, Thibaut's inability to value his enemy's skill will serve as a counter to Guillaume's inevitable march towards renown.

This desire to depict the young hero as a precursor to his future self is made clear in the *Enfances Guillaume*. In fact, when discussing the narrative approach to the youthful subjects of *Enfances*-like texts, Anna Carney explains that they are not treated differently for their age: "Just because they are young does not mean that the heroic ideal changes for them: every one of them separates himself in some way from the unremarkable masses with his amazing feats of strength and courage. The only difference is that they are young and inexperienced. Through their stories the poets explore the question of how a hero gets his start" (Carney 239). The text further evidences the inevitability of their heroism, because, although he is a youth, Guillaume is often referred to as "Guillaumes li berz" (v. 2323), or Guillaume the man. As such, youth is no obstacle in this story. Guillaume will prove himself time and again, with no obstacle too great. This is not a story of failure and eventual triumph. Guillaume is fated to succeed and therefore the stakes are low. Guillaume will be able to act however he wishes with little concern for his actions.

[236] "You speak madly, / That I might go fight a boy / Who has never had land, / Nor has he been the lord of a cutting blade."

Strength and excess

Toward the end of the text, Guillaume finds himself in the middle of a scandal in church – a parallel to the events of the *Couronnement de Louis*.[237] At Saint-Denis, Guillaume attends Charlemagne's coronation, and in his typical fashion, the hero kills one of his liege lord's vassals who he deems has disrespected him.[238] Guillaume demands that the vassal, Drués, give him Charlemagne's sword.[239] Drués does not recognize the "anfant" (*Enfances Guillaume* v. 2290), which will prove to be a fatal mistake. In this shocking episode Guillaume announces his impressive strength with his (in)famous hands:

> "A poig senestre l'ait per le brais coubré;
> Pluis de trois tors l'ait entor lui torné.
> Kant vint a quart si le laissat aler ;
> Le haterel li fiert a un piller ;
> A poc li oil ne sont andui voleit.
> De Devant Karle est une fois pameiz ;
> Per mi la bouche corut li sans cleirz."(*Enfances* vv. 2298-2304)[240]

Without context this act may seem ordinary and routine for Guillaume given his proclivities for violence, but, in reality, this a violence without precedent – within the text and, due to the timeline of the narrative, within the story of his life. In the moments that came before, violence came at the expense of the marginal outsiders, the

[237] As explored in Chapter 1, Guillaume commits a similar act of blasphemy in the *Couronnement de Louis* in defense of his liege lord.
[238] This moment recalls both the death of Aymon le Vieil and Arnéïs d'Orléans.
[239] "'Vassaux, laissiez ester ! / Laissiez l'espee, mar I adesereiz / Car je la doi devant Charle porter: / Ceu est mes drois si le clain d'areté.'" (*Enfances Guillaume* vv. 2284-7)
[240] "With his right fist he had grabbed him by the arm; / More than 3 turns he had spun him around. / With the fourth he let him go; / His neck he struck against a pillar; / Both his eyes almost went flying out. / Once In front of Charles, he fainted; / From his mouth [the vassal's] the clear blood flowed."

Saracens. In this moment, he attacks a fellow Frank, whose only mistake was to exist in Guillaume's world. In the assault, Guillaume nearly sends the victim's eyes flying out of his sockets. The scene ends with blood pouring out of the victim's mouth in front of a horrified Charlemagne.

What is perhaps most surprising is that the violence catches Charlemagne (witness to countless battles and the routing of his Rear Guard in Roncevaux) by great surprise. In fact, the emperor finds it so shocking that he can only imagine that this level of violence must have been perpetrated by a non-Christian: "De kel diable est cist hons eschapeiz ? / Je ne croiroie por rien c'on seust nommer / Que il fust mies de la crestianté." (*Enfances Guillaume* v. 2316).[241][242] The emperor's reaction makes Guillaume believe that his lord wishes to put him to death for his actions: "Vos me mandaistes, ne l'osai refuser / [...] / Or me roveis ocire et demambrer" (*Enfances Guillaume* vv. 2319,2321).[243] Guillaume's first encounter with the emperor is tainted with extreme violence. However, this will eventually endear him to the aging Charlemagne as he searches for a worthy knight to one day protect his son. As expected, Guillaume is never faulted and eventually he will earn a place as a trusted knight to both Charlemagne and his heir, Louis.

Unlike that of Charlemagne, none of the descriptions of *Enfances Guillaume* would be particularly shocking to the audience given Guillaume's hypotextual[244] past. In fact, the attitude Guillaume displays throughout the time before his knighting would be well in line with the historical views about young men during the Middle Ages. As

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[241] "From what devil did this man escape? I could not believe for anything that on knows to name / That he could ever be a part of Christianity."

[242] Despite the previously mentioned lack of reference to the *Moniage Guillaume*, this reaction recalls the monks who believe Guillaume to be the Antichrist due to his size and appearance (*Moniage Guillaume* v. 134).

[243] "You called for me, I didn't dare refuse / [...] / Now you wish to kill and dismember me?"

[244] The hypotext is any earlier text to which the text is in dialogue or indebted. (Génette 5)

Georges Duby explains: “La ‘jeunesse’ apparaît en effet [...] comme le temps de l’impatience, de la turbulence et de l’instabilité.” (836) This turbulent nature is evident in the scene above. Guillaume is so impatient that he is willing to kill another subject of his liege lord in order to take his predestined place in the ceremony. While his actions are eventually forgiven by Charlemagne, they nonetheless, point to a youthful arrogance. This instability and impatience will be at the center of most all Guillaume’s questionable actions throughout this text, as wells as the rest of his epic cycle.

In fact, Guillaume will continue his violent and turbulent displays when a Breton challenges Charlemagne’s champions to combat with one ultimate goal: defeating the French.[245] As in the scene involving the ceremony, this episode parallels the episode of Corsolt in the *Couronnement de Louis*.[246] As the Breton takes down the Frankish champions in quick succession, Guillaume eventually steps up to take his turn and predicts a victory in four strikes: “a cel Burton m’en aile un poc juer / Si m’apanrait quatre colz a geter” (*Enfances Guillaume* vv. 2445-6).[247] With his confidence in an easy victory, Guillaume unsurprisingly defeats the challenger.

However, his victory is not a formality. Despite the future he is destined to realize, at this moment Guillaume has comparatively little renown as a warrior. He must dispatch a heretofore undefeated foe with nothing more than a club. Despite this seed of doubt, Guillaume defeats his challenger with great ferocity. One unforgettable description of his violence revolves around the destruction of the Breton’s gums: “Des jansives li saiche le braon” (*Enfances Guillaume* v. 2497).[248] Once the battle is over,

[245] “Sai suix venus pour vos Français mater.” (*Enfances Guillaume* v. 2412)
[246] Both episodes contain a large, domineering challenger who wishes to embarrass and supplant a Christian leader: here, Charlemagne and in the *Couronnement*, the pope.
[247] “With this Breton I will play a bit / And it will take me four blows to dispatch him.”
[248] “He tore the muscles from the gums.”

Guillaume leaves the challenger dead in front of Charlemagne after smashing his head with the club.[249] Immediately after the combat, Guillaume is described by the narrator as a knight who is: "herdis et courajouz / Et prous et jones et fiers comme lieon" (Ibid vv. 2514-5).[250] In this way, Guillaume proves his worth and strength, traits directly linked by the narrator to the fact that he is young.

It is clear from these two episodes, Guillaume's brief interactions with Charlemagne focus on his excessive strength. However, in no way does this harm the hero's image. As explains Anna Carney, Guillaume is free of any guilt, while still being celebrated: "These two scenes [the sword-bearer and Breton] celebrate the wild and brutal recklessness of William that has been hinted at throughout the poem, but which is by no means supposed to cast him in a negative light" (Carney 248). As the narrator is wont throughout the cycle, he positions Guillaume as a righteous warrior no matter the ferocity of his actions.

While it seems easy to critique his violence – even Charlemagne does so before knowing his identity – it is impossible for the characters of the epic to be disappointed in such a worthy knight. Though he will quickly outgrow his youth, the end of the *Enfances Guillaume* does not signify an end to Guillaume's violent tendencies. By the end of this epic, Guillaume has been knighted, his *enfances* thereby ends, and the stage will be (re)set for the next step in the traditional legend: the crowning of King Louis. The epilogue ends with the narrator announcing the events of the next song of the cycle: "Or voz dirai de Guillaume au cors gent, / Com coronna Loëy hauteman" (vv.

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[249] "An la cervelle li respant le baston, / Mort l'abati a piez le roi Charlon." (ibid. vv. 2518-9)
[250] "Hardy, courageous / Noble and young and proud like a lion."

3424-5).[251] With the announcement of the next stage of the cycle, the audience is teased with further adventures and violence.

Given the overwhelming depiction of violence as positive, it comes as a bit of a shock that there will in fact be a nod to the complicated nature of battle that the text has avoided to this point – albeit by way of the narrator and not Guillaume himself. When the final combat is at hand, a great melee occurs in which the Franks battle the Saracens. It is at this time that the narrator tellingly describes the paradoxical nature of the upcoming violence:

> La bataille est et mervillouse et speme.[252]
>
> François I fierent de lor lances novelles
>
> Et Sarrasin de lor espees beles ;
>
> D'ambedous pars i fut ruste la perde (*Enfances Guillaume* vv. 2932-5)[253]

The paradox is evident in the equal distribution of descriptions, two phrases for describing the marvelous nature and two dedicated to the loss. The narrator begins by explaining how beautiful and devastating the battle was before describing the beauty of the weaponry and finishing with the loss of life. Notably, the lamentation of this last point is not unique to the French side, instead focusing on *ambedous pars*. The dreadful nature of the battle does not however diminish the beauty.

The *Enfances Guillaume* is thus split between an adherence to the important themes of violence while also ignoring Guillaume's regard for life. The epic hero is capable, as in each of the other epics from the cycle, of moments of anger and excess.

[251] "Now I will tell you about the noble Guillaume / And how he crowned Louis"
[252] Whereas Patrice Henry has written this out as speme, a word with no clear translation, Jean-Louis Perrier writes instead the word pesme here, meaning "dreadful."
[253] "The battle is both marvelous and dreadful. / The French struck with their new lances / And the Saracens with their beautiful swords; / On both sides the destruction was enormous."

When he kills this vassal of Charlemagne's and he fights the Breton giant, the text sets the tone for the rest of the cycle. The decision to forgo the regret for violence found in other texts form the cycle attribute to its consideration by one of its modern editors, Jean-Louis Perrier, as one of the more violent, primitive epics in the cycle (iii), the *Enfances Guillaume* follows closely in the footsteps of the texts it seeks to imitate but ignores the nuance of regret present in the other texts. By exalting violence without carrying the regret of later epics, the *Enfances Guillaume*, improperly attempts to take up the legacy of the later texts, and so it instead rewrites them. In *Infancy and History*, Giorgio Agamben explains that in the Christian frame of though, time is expressed linearly (100). By placing its narrative at the front of a cyclical manuscript and the cycle itself, by creating a story about the hero's infancy, the *Enfances Guillaume* exerts its power on the linearity of the cycle. This has the ability to influence the development of the cycle's narrative once the stories have been taken out of their context of production and placed into the cyclical manuscript.

A problematic continuation

This particular continuation does not lead to the typical prolongation of the Girardian cycle of violence so much as it seeks to forcibly create the perfect beginning of one – a cyclical beginning that would be worthy of a knight of Guillaume's renown. It does so by rewriting the beginning of the epic cycle. This text can thus be referred to as an *analeptic* work, defined by Gérard Genette as a "backward continuation (i.e., what came before), meant to work its way upstream, from cause to cause, to a more radical or at least a more satisfactory starting point" (Genette 177). The *Enfances Guillaume* fits perfectly into this definition due to its radical separation from any epic episode referenced in the earliest texts – those written in the 12th century. Anna

Carney explains the rationale behind the popularity of the *Enfances* genre during the Middle Ages:

> Were they [the heroes of the *chansons de geste*] ever weakly dependent on their families like normal children? Or did they show their heroic, independent spark right from the beginning? The poets seem to have wondered this too, since more than one has undertaken to explore these questions. Indeed, the hero as a child is an image that would seem sympathetic to just about any audience. (239)

While she does not build upon any historical evidence, it is evident given the periods in Guillaume's life that the main cycle covers – his time as a young knight, his time as a lord, and his eventual ascension to sainthood – the *Enfances* must return backwards to a time about which little has been written. In creating and thereby re-imagining the epic cycle's beginning, the author(s) have given Guillaume a perfect, heroic genesis that helps to prove his worth in becoming a great knight. Along with this heretofore unexplored portion of Guillaume's life, it is clear, from the variety of other texts which explore the youth of other epic knights, that the medieval audience would be interested in this topic.[254]

Aside from the audience's interest in the idea of Guillaume as a young man, the *Enfances Guillaume* contains a multitude of allusions to the other texts of the cycle – particularly in the combat scenes as analyzed above – linking itself to the hypotexts in a way that assuredly ensures interest.[255] Its narrative motions are recognizable, and

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[254] *Chanson d'Aspremont*, *Enfances Guillaume, Chanson de Guillaume*, *Enfances Renier* and *Enfances Vivien* among others are texts that follow the adolescent adventures of future knights.

[255] In fact, aside from the obvious conflict with parts of the *Prise d'Orange*, the *Enfances Guillaume,* according to Martinez-Moras, bases itself on the geste of the *Narbonnais* but it forgoes great descriptions of combat and the role of Saracens in order to focus on the relationship with Orable (322). While these scholars point to the connection of plot elements to the *Narbonnais* as a way to describe the general plot as lacking originality, Madeleine Tyssens is not in agreement with this idea because the *Enfances Guillaume* displays a desire to

the youthful Guillaume is as braggadocious as ever. However, the *Enfances* complicates the narrative cohesion by rewriting and subverting the order of events initially presented in *Couronnement de Louis*, *Charroi de Nîmes*, and *Prise d'Orange*. This, along with its inability to properly tie in events that occur outside the above-mentioned trilogy, complicates its role as a heroic genesis. For example, there does not exist any direct reference to the *Moniage Guillaume*, the terminal text of the narrative cycle. According to Philip Bennett this misstep is quite remarkable: "Ce qui étonne aussi [in the *Enfances Guillaume*'s prologue], c'est l'absence d'une allusion explicite au *Moniage Guillaume*" (133). The lack of references, whether it be the result of purposeful or accidental decision, will lead to a reinterpretation of the cycle from the audience. Since certain elements of the narrative future have been excluded or occluded, it is easy to start anew.

The *Moniage Guillaume* is not the only text scarcely acknowledged by the *Enfances Guillaume*; the *Prise d'Orange* will be, more or less, replaced by the new narrative involving Guillaume and Orable. By refusing to fit neatly into the already-established narrative present of these two texts, the *Enfances Guillaume* struggles to establish its status as true continuation to the cycle. Gérard Genette explains that continuations must abide by what came before in order to properly fit into the literary universe within which they desire to exist: "Continuation is not like other imitations, since it must abide by a certain number of additional constraints: first, naturally – given that any satirical caricature is prohibited – imitation here must be absolutely faithful and serious, which rarely happens in pastiche. But above all, the hypertext must constantly remain continuous with its hypotext, which it must merely bring to its

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connect itself to the cycle at large (49).

prescribed or appropriate conclusion while observing the congruity of places, chronological sequence, character consistency, etc" (Genette 162). The hypotext of the other texts has, as evidenced above, been ignored in the creation of this epic reimagining. However, this is deliberate, for the *Enfances Guillaume* is attempting to establish itself as what Genette identifies as a "murderous or parricidal continuation" (ibid. 200). This kind of continuation seeks to replace the previous events of the epic, in this case the *Prise d'Orange*, in order to (re)shape the rest of the cycle. This becomes even clearer when analyzing the beginning of the poem. The narrator declares to the audience: "Per moi oreis con il conkist Oranges / Et con il prist lai dame Orable a fanme" (*Enfances Guillaume* vv. 10-11).[256] This despite neither of these events coming to fruition in the story the narrator will tell.

At first glance, this continuation appears to be a simple attempt at restarting the epic, but, as Genette's other term, parricidal continuation, points out, the *Enfances Guillaume* is in effect attempting to rid itself of its "relative" in the *Prise d'Orange*. Furthermore, Luke Sunderland points out that the first text in cyclical manuscripts set the stage for the cycle, thereby making a text like the *Enfances Guillaume,* "less an innocent introduction than an attempt to set the agenda for how the entire cycle is read" (*Old French Narrative Cycles* 55). What is more, the *Enfances Guillaume* heads the order of texts in three separate cyclical manuscripts, each of which still contain the *Prise d'Orange* (Busby 385). There is, then, a violent nature not only to the events of the story, but also to its very existence. The creation of this text effectively destroys the continuity of its predecessors.

[256] "From me you will hear how [Guillaume] conquered Orange / And how he took the lady Orable as wife."

Perhaps this murderous quality is the reason why there exists a judgment of continuations in literary history. Gérard Genette is not immune from this tendency; he believes epics are ill-fated to suffer from poor continuations: "Great epics seem universally fated to such *malignant* strings of continuations and *doomed* to be relentlessly totalized by similar "cycles". A counterpart can be found, for example, in the various cycles composed as early as the middle of the twelfth century around a few epics: "the cycle of Charlemagne around the *Song of Roland* [and] the cycle of Guillaume around the *Song of Guillaume*" (178).[257] Unnecessary judgment of entire forms of literature aside, it is worth noting that the length of a cycle leads to a complicated relation between predecessors and successors.

The *Enfances Guillaume*'s inclusion in cyclical manuscripts, those in which the totality (or a specific set) of the songs that make up Guillaume's cycle would be included, would allow readers to hear about his life and adventures in chronological order. This text, along with the other *Enfances* and *Moniages*, is referred to by Philip Bennett as the first series of extensions to the "sous-cycles" of the geste de Monglane (131). The inclusion of the *sous-cycle* thus causes a series of discrepancies in the narrative reality of the *geste* – as evidenced by Philip Bennett when he discusses the order of the two *Moniages* in cyclical manuscripts: "pour le lecteur-auditeur qui recevait les chanson d'après l'un des manuscrits cycliques, les dernières aventures de Rainouart auraient précédé celles de son beau-frère, de sorte qu'il n'aurait pu s'apercevoir de la parodie qu'après coup"(156-7). As is the case that Bennett points to with the *Moniages*, the medieval reader of a cyclical manuscript containing the

[257] Emphasis mine.

Enfances might not be able to discern any problems inherent in the rewriting of "future" diegetic events.

The evidence of rewriting would only become apparent after the fact, making it perhaps difficult to point to the true order of events. This approach takes a lot from Keith Busby's ideas on imagining how a medieval user would interpret a manuscript: "grounded in the examination of sequences of texts rather than of individual texts themselves. In a sequence of several texts, the first may state a theme; later parts of the sequence may also cast retrospective light on earlier ones" (367). As such, in reading the *Enfances Guillaume* one must consider the manuscript order in determining possible effects of the manuscript order.

Adding to the importance of this approach, Bennett in his interpretation of the role of the *cyclisation* of the epic concerns himself with the role of the hypotexts:

> La lecture de toute chanson cyclique par son destinataire ultime [...] est donc un exercice d'intertextualité où l'interprétation du nouveau texte dépend du jeu d'écarts et de ressemblances qui relie l'hypertexte de la chanson ou de l'épisode qui est l'objet de la lecture actuelle à toute une constellation d'hypotextes, constituée et des unités du cycles lus antérieurement et des versions pré- ou non-cycliques dont le lecteur n'a pas pu manquer d'avoir connaissance. (Bennett 14)

In essence, each text in a cyclical manuscript evokes in the reader the memory of the past texts. This means that when the texts do not align in their events or in their messages, the audience will be able to detect this discrepancy. As with the inability to understand parodic aspects of a text, as seen in the above example of Rainouart and Guillaume, it would be impossible for the audience to understand any discrepancies until after having read a text which directly contradicts what came before. In this case,

the *Enfances Guillaume* functions perfectly as the murderous continuation of the *Prise d'Orange* by subverting several episodes and created a new beginning for the reader of the cyclical manuscripts.

Innovation or imitation?

The return to Guillaume's childhood, well after the completion of his core cycle, creates the impression that the *Enfances Guillaume* is searching to imitate the other epics of the cycle. However, this imitation does not often adhere to the overall tradition. To evidence this lack of cohesion, Sunderland states that the *Enfances* genre of texts are "late additions that seek to bring coherence through *retroaction* but which sometimes end up stranded outside cyclical manuscripts" (*Old French Narrative Cycles* 27).[258] It is this term "retroaction" that is key. The texts have little to no grounding in historical traditions, instead they create a new series of events that in principle fit in with the future personages who are most likely recognizable to the vast medieval public.

We are presented with an uber-violent text that seeks to imitate the earliest texts while simultaneously rewriting the history of Guillaume's life. When this imitation is performed, the author attempts to highlight violence faithfully, but ultimately this will prove difficult. It seems to paint a picture of misunderstanding of the lessons learned, a fanfiction[259] by someone who understands the form and structure but who does not include the nuances of the message of violence carefully crafted in the earlier cycle's iterations. According to Patrice Henry, while the text itself

[258] Emphasis mine.
[259] This description of the epics as medieval fanfiction comes from a personal conversation with scholar Ana Grinberg.

has little basis in history, it demonstrates the author's plethora of knowledge about *chansons de geste* and other works of the time: "c'est l'oeuvre purement imaginaire d'un auteur qui connaissait des chansons de geste de son temps ainsi qu'un certain nombre de thèmes généraux, thèmes d'enchantement par exemple, qui se retrouvent ailleurs" (XLII).[260] Henry's quote points to an author well-versed in the tradition of the epic in spite of its supposed romance tendencies.

Certain scholars do not share this confidence in the knowledge of the creator(s) of this epic. For example, Dominique Boutet believes the passage of time has caused historical inaccuracies that have lead to a deterioration of the *chanson de geste*: "Cependant ces éléments carolingiens parviennent le plus souvent d'une maniere *déformée*, déformation qui a longtemps été attribuée au temps écoulé (depuis l'époque carolingienne jusqu'au XIIe siècle, date des premières attestations manuscrites) et au mode de transmission (l'oralité)." (Boutet 11)[261] To avoid scholarly error of critiquing the very value of literature, it is important to remember that this "deformation" is simply the result of time and interests reinventing, or here reinvigorating, the *chanson de geste* for each new audience.[262] Rather than imagine an inevitable deformation – à la Genette's argument for the inevitable drift to romance – scholarship must instead focus on the novelty brought about by the visitation of these subjects especially given the passage of time.[263]

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[260] Furthering Henry's claim that this text has little historical precedent, Bennett argues that the *Prise d'Orange* makes no reference to the events of *Enfances Guillaume*, further evidencing it as a late creation to revisit the cycle (135).
[261] Emphasis mine.
[262] For his part, Jean-Pierre Martin furthers this argument by referring to the depiction of the historical events as a re-formation rather than a deformation ("Histoire ou mythes" 11). Cited by way of Boutet (11).
[263] For example, the literature of 17th century France is held in high regard despite a large influence from Classical and Medieval sources. See Jean Racine's *Phèdre* and *Andromaque* or Pierre Corneille's *Horace* and *Le Cid*.

Regardless, the revisiting of the material from a previous century shows a blending of new themes and ideas with the typical construction of the *chanson de geste*, serving as a bridge between the many different texts of the cycle. Accordingly, derisive terms should be cast away for a more accepting vision of a 13th century *chanson de geste* which blends the tradition with later medieval innovation. The result: a fusion of two bifurcated paths of the *Prise d'Orange* with the more traditional texts of the cycle. The *Enfances* combines the love story from *Prise d'Orange* with a Guillaume who never hesitates to enter into combat. This murderous continuation is therefore seeking to bring together two forms of the epic into one.

Blending innovation and imitation

The height of manuscript production for the written tradition of the *chansons de geste* can be considered the 13th century. Yet, even during that time the epic is undergoing a multitude of changes. This is in part due to the reciprocal relationship with the romance. As seen above, the *Enfances Guillaume* has all the violent trappings to which the audience has become accustomed: one on one combat, sieges, and melees. This violence has proven to be rather superficial and lacking in regret. However, the *Enfances Guillaume* does expand upon the rarely explored themes of the rest of the cycle, with one in particular standing out: it builds upon a budding tradition of the inclusion and development of the female protagonist. Whereas some early versions of these songs hardly develop the female protagonists and characters (or even mention one by name), later epics begin to create episodes devoted to protagonists such as Guibourc/Orable. The culmination in the Guillaume cycle of this trope exists in the *Enfances Guillaume*. Building upon the oft-maligned "romance" qualities of the *Prise*

d'Orange, the *Enfances Guillaume* extends the narrative legacy to include two women: Orable and Ermenjart.

While the episodes involving the Breton, discussed above, show that the combat closely resembles moments found in previous epics, this does not mean that the *Enfances Guillaume*'s interest are stagnant. Combat will no longer exclusively show the conflict between the chivalric code and the religious institutions, nor will it show the regret and remorse for violence that defines the *Moniage Guillaume*.[264] In the *Enfances Guillaume*, the role of women changes the main function of violence. Now, combat can serve to link the precocious Guillaume to his narrative future and to fulfill his romantic destiny. Martinez-Moras explains that the role of combat will take a backseat to love: "La guerra parece tomarse como excusa para el desarrollo de episodios corteses" (316).[265] His burgeoning relationship with Orable will thus affect the entire plot.

This is not the first text in which love plays an important role: in describing his love for Orable, Guillaume explains how he is unable to think of anything else in the *Prise d'Orange*:

> La seue amor m'a si fort jostisié
>
> Ne puis dormir par nuit ne someillier
>
> Ne si ne puis ne boivre ne mengier
>
> Ne porter armes ne monter sor destrier
>
> N'aler a messe ne entrer en mortier. (vv. 370-374)[266]

This obsession brought about by his unseen love is astounding. He can complete

[264] These two subjects can be seen respectively in Chapters 1 and 3 of this project.
[265] "War seems to view itself as an excuse for the development of courtly episodes."
[266] "Her love has so greatly pleased me / I cannot sleep at night nor dream / I cannot drink nor eat / I cannot bear arms nor mount my destrier / I cannot go to mass or even enter a Church."

neither the functions necessary for his very physical survival nor the activities necessary for his soul's salvation. Perhaps most shocking, the violence-driven knight feels incapable of picking up his weapons and mounting his steed. Love has caused such a disruption to his life that he can think of nothing else. The *Enfances Guillaume* depicts a similarly quick transition on Guillaume's part of hearing about Orable to falling in love with her. Upon their first encounter, Aquilant describes Orable in a set of laisses similaires as "Orable, la plu belle pucele / Ki soit en Pulle ne an juc'a Salerne" and again later as "Orable, la belle au cor ligier" (*Enfances Guillaume* vv. 516-17, 540) to the young Guillaume. Immediately following the second description, Guillaume responds to Aquilant by foretelling the events of the *Prise d'Orange*.[267] He then decides to send a gift to her and becomes happy when he is told that Aquilant will relay his message.[268]

Strikingly, in the name of love, Guillaume goes against many of his instincts when, several times during the course of the epic, he is presented with the option to spare enemies. Instead of killing them as a knight is wont to do, he sends them back to Orange in order to spread word of his skill to his beloved. He does so with little hesitation trying to impress Orable. These courtly motifs are possibly due to what Martinez-Moras describes as the new role for the surviving Saracens: "intermediarios". These intermediaries' sole goal seems to be to relate messages to the two lovers who do not see each other throughout the song (Martinez-Moras 314). In this way, even the enemy's role has become more complex, with their roles changing to accommodate the

[267] "Dites Orables qui bien me consisiés ; / Ne li poit mie se j'an moig son destrier, / Se je vi tant ke soie chivelier, / Desor Orange m'an vairait tornoier, / Le bon Basant et poendre et elasier. Se ju I trus rois Thiebaut lo guerier, Teil li donrai de m'epeie d'acier / [...] / Puis la ferai leveir et batisier / [...] / Dedans Orange me vodrai herbegier ; / Crestianteit I ferai asasier." (*Enfances Guillaume* vv. 558-64, 567, 570-1)
[268] "Quant l'ot Guillaumes, ne fut si liés" (*Enfances Guillaume* v. 577)

romantic intrigue. No longer is their primary function to act as the antagonistic combatants for the epic hero.[269]

One unlikely event that has greater repercussions across the *geste* is a gift intercepted by Guillaume from Orable to Thibaut: the legendary horse, Baucent. Though the giving of the gift is not intentional, it further reveals how important Orable is to Guillaume's image as a knight. Much like the lands she will offer in *Prise d'Orange* are pivotal in for Guillaume's reputation,[270] in receiving the spectacular horse,[271] Guillaume will be one step closer to becoming a true knight – all thanks to Orable. The horse-knight dyad is an inseparable element of the image of a knight in the Middle Ages. According to J. Allan Mitchell, this was evidenced materially in the childhood toys of the Middle Ages, in which the toy of the horse and knight were fused together as one: "Notwithstanding the knight's status as an idealized image of the Western European male (with the aspirations toward wholeness and rationality mentioned earlier in the discussion of the knight's body), he depends on his horse and a queer admixture of inanimate forces, animal energies, and technological prostheses" (Mitchell 89-90). In fact, so close is their bond that the narrator must acknowledge that Guillaume and Baucent are best friends: "Onkes n'oïstes de dous amins parler, / Ne ne veïstez si grant joe mener, / Comme Guillaumes ai Bauçant l'abrivé" (*Enfances*

[269] No longer, then, is it a foregone conclusion that: "La violence épique est au service d'une idéologie sommaire qui procède par xénophobie." ("Une Poétique du génocide joyeux" 227). Though this does not mean the relation between the Saracens and Christians will be conflict-free.
[270] In the epic, the Saracen princesses' "conversion brings vast estates under Christian control." (*Chansons de geste in the Age of Romance* 33).
[271] From the first encounter with Baucent, the narrator reveals how beautiful the horse appears and that, more importantly, Orable took special care of it for seven years (*Enfances Guillaume* v. 458).

Guillaume vv. 1417-9).[272] Not only, then, does Baucent represent his quest for Orable, but it likewise represents his quest for chivalric plenitude.

Accordingly, Alain Labbé explains that Baucent's appearance is a key factor in Guillaume's coming of age: "Baucent inaugure sa carrière épique en établissant un premier lien entre ceux qui sont destinés l'un à l'autre et en annonçant métaphoriquement la définitive infortune du païen" (Labbé 277). The Saracen's misfortune is evidenced soon after the future knight and horse are brought together when the narrator describes the ferocity with which Baucent shakes the ground and the reaction it brings about: "Desous ces piés tranble toute la terre. / Paiens s'an fue, la pute jans averce" (*Enfances Guillaume* vv. 502-3).[273] In Baucent, Guillaume has an earth-shattering companion worthy of his heroic excess. In searching to become his future self, Guillaume must earn his well-known steed, must conquer Orange to be with his future wife, and he must become a knight. His future is thus the result of the two complementary drives: first to gain renown and second to conquer love.

Chanson d'aventure vs. *chanson de geste*

There exists in medieval scholarship a genre-based battle in regard to the qualities of the earliest epics versus the later ones, particularly those from the 13th century, that carries on, in part, to this day. The *Roland* and the *Chanson de Guillaume* exemplify the "traditional" qualities of the *chanson de geste* as it is conceived by the mostly-male scholars of the 20th century.[274] These texts are defined

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[272] "You have never heard of two friends spoken, / Nor such joy brought about, / Like how Guillaume had sheltered Baucent."

[273] "Under his feet the entire Earth trembles. / Pagans flee, the vile, wicked people"

[274] This divide on the qualities of the earlier and later epics, is well noted in William Calin's *The Old French Epic of Revolt* (1962) in which he explains how character types change across time. According to Calin, by the time we start seeing continuations to later poems, "We are still dealing with clearly defined personalities within a symbolic framework, but these personalities

by their focus on homosocial relationships and by the fact that they contain few examples of women.[275] Consequently, certain texts of the thirteenth century which begin focusing on women, are dismissively referred to as *romans d'aventures*, or adventure romances, by some scholars. Joseph Bédier categorizes, for example, the thirteenth century *Prise d'Orange*, that concerns itself with the burgeoning relationship between Guillaume and Orable, as a "Roman d'aventure plutôt qu'épopée" (79). He further goes on to refer to it as "ce roman" in a later sentence, cementing his classification of its romantic tendencies as a disqualification of its belonging to the other epics.[276] The later term, *chanson d'aventure,* finds itself as a less exclusive claim that instead acknowledges its status as a "hybrid genre" between romance and epic (*Christian, Saracen, and Genre* 50).[277]

While these two terms appear to describe the development of a trend of the epic becoming a form of the romance over time, this is not the case. In fact, the two genres had been developing and continued to develop simultaneously, because, as Sarah Kay states, "The overwhelming majority of chansons de geste are thus contemporary with romances" (*Chansons de Geste in the Age of Romance* 5).[278] The themes and subjects

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now encompass tragic, romantic, and heroic literary modes at will and, in their own way, tend in the direction of the modern novel" (179). This implies that the character development in the French epic across time leads it farther from its roots and closer to the modern novel.

[275] In the case of the *Roland*, the episode involving Aude is much shorter in its most cited version, the Oxford manuscript, than in other manuscripts, like the Venice 7 manuscript (Serrano 113).

[276] His early scholarship is not indicative of the current view on the *Prise*, which is included in a recent English translation of three cycle of Guillaume epics, *Couronnement de Louis, Charroi de Nîmes,* and *Prise d'Orange,* in *An Old French Trilogy: Texts from the William of Orange Cycle* by Jones, Kibler and Whalen.

[277] Earlier established during William Kibler's conference paper, "La chanson d'aventures" from the 9th meeting of the Société Rencesvals.

[278] Busby supports Kay's claim that the two genres were popular at the same time based on manuscript production. Which he claims shows that the epic is not simply an "early but vigorous genre that must have been enjoyed by an audience consisting largely of pugnacious males" (370-1)

present in one text heavily influence the others. This, along with the difficulty of applying concepts of genre to any literature, let alone those of the Middle Ages where genres blended together,[279] makes it clear that the inclusion of new themes does not in and of itself disqualify a text from classification as an epic.

Sharon Kinoshita, in examining certain lacunae in the scholarship on the epic, agrees with Sarah Kay's argument that a strict bifurcation of romance and epic does not in fact behoove literary studies: "As long as this binary opposition between the masculine world of the *chanson de geste* and the feminine world of the romance remained unexamined, women's roles in epic – and in the historical and ideological contexts which produced – it were bound to remain invisible" (35). By creating a dichotomy between the two forms, the possible analyses are left untouched. For example, there is something to be said about the violence present in the *Enfances Guillaume*, even if it does not conform directly to the norms of the earlier texts. The "romance" elements of the text do not take away from the lessons that can be gleaned from the change in interest across time – be it violence, love, travel, etc.[280]

Although there is doubt among scholars as whether to define any late French epic as a *chanson de geste* or the blended *chanson d'aventure,* the *Enfances*

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[279] As Catherine Jones explains, this is further complicated by the existence of different versions of the same text: "The legend of Ami et Amile, for example, survives in a number of versions, including hagiographic texts, romances, and a miracle play, as well as a chanson de geste" (*An Introduction to the Chansons de Geste* 24).

[280] In a scathing assessment of the scholarship of the time, Sarah Kay explains the rationale behind going away from this partition of epic versus romance: "À partir de l'observation qu'il y a une thématique du désir et de la féminité dans les textes courtois, on a souvent émis l'hypothèse que la présence de ces éléments dans les chansons de geste résulterait de l'influence romanesque. Cette explication me paraît erronée. A mon sens, il serait plus valable d'affirmer que la présence des femmes dans le roman dérive de l'influence épique. De nombreuses chansons de geste constataient la plaie qui s'ouvre dans le corps social quand un homme désire une femme. Les romans transfèrent cette plaie dans le corps de la femme, en font un corps défectueux, et permettent ainsi aux hommes de se regrouper dans un nouvel ordre social, une communauté courtoise, où leur désir, qui a détruit la communauté épique, redevient respectable" ("La représentation de la féminité").

Guillaume itself does not invite the same confusion. The narrator declares from the first line, as the audience is invited into the *seance épique,* nature of the text: "*Chanson de geste* plaroit vos à entendre?" (*Enfances Guillaume* v. 1).[281] The narrator makes clear the classification of this story and thus its intention to take up the mantle of the other texts of the Guillaume cycle. Nonetheless, expanding upon the differences of the *Prise d'Orange*, the *Enfances Guillaume* does not satisfy itself with a single-minded focus on Guillaume's point of view. It instead expands upon the actions of its two female protagonists: Orable and Ermenjart.

In this way, it perhaps further approaches the romance qualities that scholars such as Bédier bemoan.[282] However, instead of critiquing the *rapprochement* of the two literatures, it is worth analyzing how this reality changes the relationships of the characters. The focus thus deviates from one concerned with homosocial bonds between groups of men, to one that expands its lens to the amorous relationship between a knight and lady. Of course, it must be said that Orable is not defined solely by her feminity; she is likewise inescapably racialized. This racialization comes regardless of her previously testified light in the *Prise d'Orange*: "Blanche la char comme la fleur en l'ente" (v. 205).[283] Orable is therefore evidence of one of the innovations within the epic: "The newest element of the French imaginings of the Saracen is the appearance of the female Saracen" (Ramey, *Christian, Saracen, and Genre* 35). So, along with the inclusion of women, the later epics begin exploring the

[281] "Would it please you to hear a chanson de geste*?"* Emphasis mine.
[282] This grievance is not unique to medieval scholarship, Gérard Genette, for example, gives a thorough lashing to a continuation of the Iliad in which Genette believes that the continuation's new author demonstrates the "epic's drift toward romance" (179). Drift implies a distancing from the classic *Iliad*, which must be seen as inferior to those with more traditional views.
[283] "Her skin is as white as a flower on a fruit tree."

nature of the shared European space between Christians and Muslims, through their fictional, Saracen counterparts.[284]

In its attention to the relationship between Orable and Guillaume, the text must revisit Orable's previous marriage so that the Christian audience be reassured that she did not lose her virginity. The *geste* must, then, come back to this problem and expand upon the earliest mention of Orable in the *Prise d'Orange* in order to keep Guillaume's reputation as a Christian: "To buttress her suitability as wife of Guillaume, the story of Orable and Thibaut is told [in the *Enfances Guillaume*], as if to counter objections that Guillaume had married a woman who was no longer pucele" (*Christian, Saracen, and Genre* 42). Consequently, the *Enfances Guillaume* is heavily centered around the relationship between Orable and Guillaume. So much so that Bernard Guidot states that some recurring motifs, such as travel, function primarily to elucidate the importance of their love: "le voyage permet aussi la naissance et l'épanouissement d'un amour délicat entre Guillaume et Oracle. Dans les *Enfances Guillaume* les sentiments amoureux ne sont pas négligeables [...] Le voyage est un trait d'union entre eux" (374). As described earlier with war, the text functions on multiple levels to unite the two protagonists.

The text's emphasis on love does not mean that women will be immobile and helpless in their actions. In fact, Ermenjart, Guillaume's mother, plays a pivotal role in a number of key episodes. She will, for one, take over the defense of Narbonne while her husband and children are away, something from which Thibaut hopes to benefit:

> Ay assise Nerbone la citey,
>
> Car Aynmeris en est an France aleyz

[284] "After 1150, there is a veritable explosion of texts which treat the Saracen and Christian relationship in a different context." (*Christian, Saracen, and Genre* 38)

A Karlemainne ses anfans presanter.

Ainz k'il revigne serait desariteiz. (*Enfances Guillaume* vv. 2208-2211)[285]

Earlier, Thibaut decides to attack Narbonne in retaliation for Guillaume having defeated his army.[286] Now, he believes with Aymeri gone to Paris, that Narbonne will be left defenseless. However, in a moment that recalls Guibourc's role in the *Chanson de Guillaume,* Ermenjart will defend the city. She will thwart the Saracen insurgence, even notching a win for Christianity as a statue of Mahomet falls while the Saracens attempt to erect it in front of the city walls. The role of a matriarch defending the city is not unheard of in the Middle Ages: women, along with other citizens (non-soldiers) would help build defenses, would help operate siege machines, etc. (Hanley 86). They did not stand idly by as their lives were endangered: "A defence of one's home seems to be a legitimate activity for civilians of either sex" (Hanley 86). In this way, the role Ermenjart plays in the siege has a real-life grounding.

When the Saracens lay siege to Narbonne the second time, Ermenjart is faced with siege tactics. She will then pray for succor:

Dame Ermanjars si en plore et sospire:

"Secourez moi, dame Sainte Marie!

Jai m' ait Thiebaus, li riches rois, assise;

Or nen ai tant antre pain et farine." (*Enfances Guillaume* vv. 295-8)[287]

This is not the first time that she prays for Mary to save her.[288] While Anna Carney

[285] "I laid seige to Narbonne the city, / Because Aymeri has gone to France / To present his children to Charlemagne. / Before he returns [the city] will be thrown into disarray."
[286] "Mahomet jure, ke fut toz tans et iert, / Mar le panserent li glouton losangier, / Jai en Nerbone ne metront mais les piez." (*Enfances Guillaume* vv. 1472-74)
[287] "Lady Ermenjart cries and sighs: / "Save me, lady Mary! / Already Thibaut, the rich king, sieged me; / I do not have enough bread nor flour"
[288] "Dame Ermanjars sospire fort et larme: 'Saint Marie, soiez moi secourable !'" (*Enfances Guillaume* vv. 1518-9)

characterizes Ermenjart as a damsel in distress, something this episode seems to suggest, it is important to note that she functions in an autonomous, historically grounded fashion by defending the city – even if she eventually requires her sons' and husband's aid to break the siege. Furthermore, it is predetermined by the nature of the *Enfances* genre that Guillaume must ultimately save her – for it serves as another opportunity to prove his worth as a hero. So, while Ermenjart may appear as a damsel in distress, the narrative, through her eventual rescue, insists on Guillaume's greatness, nonetheless acknowledges the responsibilities facing women during wartime. Though historical precedent exists for Ermenjart's actions, it is nonetheless a rather rare occurrence in the cycle of Guillaume to see a woman, let alone two women, act with agency. The only other texts, apart from the *Enfances Guillaume* and *Prise d'Orange*, from the Guillaume cycle in which even a single woman plays a central role would be the pair of the *Chanson de Guillaume* and *Aliscans* – two texts which depict extremely similar stories. It is clear, then, that the role of women continues to expand and to permeate even the hyper-masculine cycle surrounding Guillaume d'Orange.

While this text will not focus on the violence brought about by or brought upon women, this does not mean that women are incapable of participating in combat. Instead of using weapons to fight other women or men, women in the epic may combat societal norms or the social order: "Her words are her arms; what she cannot do she enunciates" (Evans 324). In these moments of the text, Guillaume continues his violence in his quest for love while Orable and his mother must navigate warfare and confrontation without resorting to violence. Consequently, the epic's increasing interest in its female protagonists addresses the ways in which women might encounter and handle violence.

As explored above, Ermenjart experiences quite a few episodes of her own, but the true focus on a female protagonist in this epic lies with Orable. Orable will have great agency in her actions through the aforementioned intermediaries: choosing to send messages and choosing to accept a magical solution to Thibaut's unwelcome presence in the marriage bed. Orable will have a series of adventures in which she plots to retain her virginity by use of a magic:

> Et de Thiebaut fist un pomel d'or fin ;
>
> Desor un paile a son chavais l'ait mis.
>
> Trec'al demain ke li selouz revint
>
> Ke dame Orable l'enchantement defist. (*Enfances Guillaume* vv. 1979-82)[289]

In an episode recalling the enchantment placed upon Marc in *Tristan et Iseult*, Thibaut is turned into a golden ornament at night. Although he has no recollection of the spell, Orable explains to him that he has taken her virginity and thereby defeated Guillaume: "Au pucelaige ait Guillames falli, / Maintes foieiez l'aveiz anuit requis" (ibid. vv. 1990-1). Orable therefore, does more than protect her sexual purity, she even takes control of it in lying to Thibaut about their honeymoon. This false revelation embarrasses the Saracen king because he does not remember any of the events of the past night.[290] In the end, he leaves her alone without any argument. While her magic is impressive, her words are her mightiest weapons, and she will use them in whatever manner she must to attain her goals. In this refocused interest in episodes centered around women, the epic's relationship with violence must without question change.

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[289] "And she made Thibaut into a fine golden sphere; / Under a fine cloth at her headboard she placed him. / It was until morning when the sun came back / that lady Orable undid the enchantment."

[290] "Thiebaus l'oï, a grant honte li vint, / Ke il cuioit k'elle voir li deïst. / Isnelemant c'est chauciez et vestiz. / Si en montait el palais signori." (ibid. vv. 1192-5)

This alteration thus moves the narrative away from a hands-on, hero-focused recounting of warfare and combat, and instead hints at a female-driven management of violence and domestic roles which addresses medieval European realities.

Guillaume and Orable

With this bolder Orable, it is unsurprising that her relationship with Guillaume differs a bit from their initial encounters in the *Prise d'Orange*. According to Kinoshita, Guillaume was unable to retain the confidence he displays in battle when face to face with Orable: "Far from remaining the passive object of Guillaume's desire, Orable actively initiates the amorous exchange when the bold Frankish count suddenly turns shy and awkward in her presence" (Kinoshita 55). This further rewrites Guillaume's future adventures. Here he functions as the perfect warrior and perfect lover, instead of the bumbling, love-sick mess that appears in the *Prise d'Orange*. By rewriting this version of Guillaume, the *Enfances* is likewise ridding itself of an important moment of hesitation to violence which Guillaume exhibits in the *Prise d'Orange*.[291]

In this way, the "murderous continuation" will create further confusion for the readers of the cyclical manuscripts in which the *Enfances Guillaume* plays an introductory role. One such diversion occurs when Orable announces to her brother that she is already on her way to Christianity thanks to her love for Guillaume: "A poc Guillaumes ne m'ait ja convertie, / Et destorné de la loi paienime, / Si croirai Deu, le fil Sainte Marie" (*Enfances Guillaume* vv. 1745-7).[292] As in the *Prise d'Orange*, she is

[291] This love-focused personality of Guillaume's is explored in greater detail in chapter 1.
[292] "Guillaume has almost converted me already, / And turned me away from pagan law, / And I will believe in God, the son of Mary."

ready to embrace Christianity in order to be with her beloved, but this occurs many years before the canonical events of *Prise d'Orange.*

In her expanded role, Orable influences two separate men and subverts their desires. Both the Saracen she marries and Guillaume are put under her spell: a literal one for Thibaut and a figurative one because of the enrapturing *amor de lonc* for Guillaume. According to Sarah Kay, this is to be expected from a character like Orable: "The Saracen princess, then, does not merely ventriloquize a controlling masculine fantasy: she helps to shape it, and thereby disrupts assumed hierarchies. Her desire for the partner of her choice challenges the authority of the male characters, whether Saracen or Frankish" (*Chansons de Geste in the Age of Romance* 46-7). In shaping the masculine fantasy, she has carved out a more developed role than seen in many of the earlier epics from the cycle of Guillaume.

With the emphasis placed on Orable and Ermenjart, the text sets itself up as an exploration of women's expanding role in the epic. Though this has a common thread from the *Prise d'Orange* and the *Chanson de Guillaume* where women play a larger role, it is a further expansion of the interest in female protagonists. It clearly delineates Orable's role in Guillaume's success. He earns not only his lands from Orable; she has also imparted (albeit unintentionally) to him his renowned steed. Without these things, Guillaume would be a lesser knight and his violence would be less impressive – the stakes are inherently raised by a knight's status. The *Enfances Guillaume,* therefore, develops the role of Orable in Guillaume's success and gives her greater credit for the influence and power she brings to this epic couple.

Conclusion

The *Enfances Guillaume* is a clear-cut murderous continuation – a text written after the original that looks to rewrite the earlier events of the earlier written text – its creation causes a narrative rift. However, this does not preclude it from belonging to the cycle proper. In fact, its existence and narrative point to a concerted attempt at integration. The author(s) went to great lengths to satisfy the themes most important to the old guard of the earliest texts – violence and feudalism – and to the new guard of the epics dating from the thirteenth century and later.

This *Enfances Guillaume* is the final addition to the main Guillaume cycle. Surprisingly, this new narrative does not function to reopen the cycle of violence;[293] it instead serves as an attempt to innovate the older epics. The lack of subsequent original narratives means that the cycle (of the narrative and of violence) will not reopen. Though, later there will be prose reimaginings of these stories, the verse narratives dealing directly with Guillaume d'Orange will effectively close with the *explicit* of the *Enfances Guillaume*.

Despite its interests in knightly excess and warfare, the Guillaume cycle is not single-mindedly focused on joyously genocidal violence and knightly deeds. The *Enfances Guillaume* delves deeply into the romantic narrative of its two principal protagonists Orable and Guillaume. Orable's importance on the *geste* as a whole is often understated by scholarly focus on the *Couronnement de Louis* and the *Charroi de Nîmes* along with the disinterest in the *Prise d'Orange* as a *roman d'aventure*, à la Bédier. However, as the interest in the character of Orable persists into the later epics, it becomes obvious that this Saracen princess has a fundamental role within the *geste*:

[293] This girardian view of violence is discussed in the first three chapters of this work. It begins with the "trilogy" and ends with the *Moniage*.

she is the catalyst for the series' diversification of race, gender, and its complex reception of violence. Furthermore, her presence subverts the typical plots of knights fighting for glory and land.

Though future (past) events will change, the main structure of the cycle remains unchanged. Guillaume is destined for a life of violence, one that he will examine more closely as he ages. No matter his evolving relationship with Orable or his one-off interaction with his rarely mentioned mother, by virtue of his superhuman strength and violent tendencies, he is and always will be the once and future Guillaume. What the *Enfances Guillaume* expounds upon, however, is the role of Orable in Guillaume's renown and *geste*.

This shows, in fact, how well the text has been able to translate certain aspects of the legacy of the epic while navigating a burgeoning interest in the role of women. The complex view of violence may ultimately be gone, but there still exists a deep understanding of the tradition of violence and warfare. As Gérard Genette explains, "in order to imitate a text, it is inevitably necessary to acquire at least a partial mastery of it, a mastery of that specific quality which one has chosen to imitate." (Genette 6) In being capable of depicting the violence (even without the regret behind it) and the relationship between Orable and Guillaume, the *Enfances Guillaume* proves that it is more than an imitation of the original cycle. Though there exist certain lacunae in its approach to violence, the *Enfances Guillaume* makes up for this an innovation to the older template of the epic. Despite its failure to reopen the epic cycle and catalyze a reimagining of each of the other texts, this epic has earned its place alongside the other more oft studied texts.

The *Enfances Guillaume* cannot teach us about reflections on violence in the epic in the same way as the *Chanson de Guillaume* or the *Moniage Guillaume*, but it

does allow for a glimpse at the way that the epic was reexamined as the 13th century wore on. It has little to offer in the domain of regret when compared to the other texts of the cycle. Nonetheless, it develops the role of the Saracen character and of women. In this chapter, the role of violence and women has been analyzed in order to determine whether the *Enfances Guillaume* is a simplified imitation or whether it is something more. Throughout the text, moments of allusion abound; these episodes are obvious and rather heavy-handed attempts to unite the text to its hypotexts. The themes are unique in their approach, even if they are not unique in their content. As such, violence is present throughout the text, in Guillaume's actions, in the descriptions of war, and, notably, in the very existence of the text as a "murderous" continuation.

In its attempt to replace events from the cycle and in its attempt to connect this new beginning to Guillaume's future, the text shows violence as a means to an end – a way to attain one's goals. Whether this be to become a great knight or to function as an elongated *incipit* to a cyclical manuscript, the surefire way to accomplish anything is via violence. This is not a simple imitation: the text, instead of developing the regret and remorse for violence shown in later texts, expands upon the reality of women. This new focus allows an innovation of the epic while still holding on to the legacy of the earlier texts.

On the one hand, *Prise d'Orange* finalizes the progression of a young and brash knight to a more wary and hesitant lord. On the other hand, *Enfances Guillaume*'s status as a murderous continuation disrupts and endangers the cycle's progression – and its ultimate conclusion. As seen above, the text classifies itself as a *chanson de geste* and works hard to align itself with many of the other texts in the cycle, but in its attempt to usurp the story and character development seen in *Prise d'Orange* it makes

a poor companion piece for Guillaume's history. Nonetheless, its focus on women is unique in the main part of the cycle and brings innovation to a cycle of written texts dating across two centuries and of oral stories dating back even further. Ultimately, the passing of time blurs the connection between the earlier *chansons de geste* and the *Prise d'Orange* and *Enfances Guillaume*, but it is evident that many topics and subjects resound in both groupings. Lamenting any sort of degeneration is rather pointless, as literature is not a static process, the medieval French epic is constantly in dialogue with other texts, and it is therefore in a constant state of flux. Soon after, the verse *chanson de geste* will give way to the prose epics, and the cycles will open anew to the delight of a later audience.

CHAPTER 6

Epilogue

As seen in the chapters of this study, Guillaume's relationship with violence is not cut and dry. He benefits in each text from violence, yet it is clear that something is amiss. Each text creates a new cycle of violence which in turn brings about issues of morality and justice. Violence is not depicted in the Guillaume cycle, therefore, as a panacea capable of solving all of life's complexities. Given that these texts recount the course of Guillaume's life from youth to old age, it becomes easier to view the relation to violence across texts. This is possible due to the carefully crafted *chansons* which fit well together into the greater cycle of his life – with only a few missteps regarding intertextual references and narrative accuracy.

There has been much scholarship indicating that the French medieval epic is incapable of certain things – primarily depicting women and depicting emotion. Even when scholarship does acknowledge the presence of these depictions, they tend to oversimplify the nature of their literary roles: see Payen who discuss both violence and regret but does not seem to combine the two. However, in analyzing the literature across the cycle it becomes clear that the author(s) of these manuscripts can see what the modern reader at times seems unwilling to accept: these texts are complex and show the struggle of violence, gender, race, and religion. This is most clear in intertextual allusions to the hypotexts of each given work wherein the authors grapple with what came before and develop a logical suite to Guillaume's emotional responses.

Why is this so clear for the contemporary medieval authors but less clear for the modern reader? Distance in time has much to do with it. Consider the *Enfances Guillaume* for example: less than 100 years separates this text from some of its predecessors and yet it seems quite detached from the other texts due to its treatment of violence and its increasing interest in the role of women. This epic eschews the primarily homosocial bonds of other texts in order to focus on a budding, amorous relationship between Orable and Guillaume, while simultaneously simplifying the reception of violence by characters that developed across the earlier texts. This brings the *Enfances Guillaume* more in harmony with the joyous genocide of the *Roland*, despite its "romance" tendencies.

This discounting of the nuanced role of violence is present not only in the scholarly reception of the *chanson de geste*, but it also likewise exists in some modern societies. As René Girard explains, contemporary Western society tends to "persist in disregarding the power of violence in human societies" (*Violence and the Sacred* 262) as it pertains to our present time. Modern societies seem to imagine violence as a barbaric thing of the past that was the result of a less enlightened time. In this judgment, a certain nuance is lost. The obvious results of violence in the *chanson de geste* is victory over the (often "pagan") enemy, the acquisition of land, the exaltation of one's faith, and the increase in one's reputation. What is missing from these rather obvious findings is the fact that, by analyzing violence on the psyche of medieval characters, we can see the inherent debate on violence present in the Middle Ages. While it is easy to think that violence was wholeheartedly accepted and encouraged in every instance, violence in medieval France as depicted in the *chansons de geste* hints at a dialectic between religious, state, and psychological influences. Much as in our own time, violence is a problematic component of society.

Thankfully, these views are being revisited and revised. Recent analysis has, at last, begun to notice the evidence of a negative perception of violence, and Christina Lee and Wendy J. Turner, in their collection *Trauma in Medieval Society*, posit that "The 'wounds' of trauma are no longer only physical, but also mental and emotional. These wounds can be life-threatening when individual or communal responses to violence – be that rape, war, natural disaster or attacks – result in psychological or physical damage (and sometimes both). [...] The damages to body, mind, and soul, but also to ravaged landscapes and communities leave long-lasting marks that are experienced and dealt with over and over" (Lee and Turner 3). Though the present study does not discuss the role of trauma in violence, the reception of violence within the Guillaume cycle can perhaps lead the way toward other approaches in future studies on the *chanson de geste*.

A Fleeting Peace

It is clear in this study's discussions of the cycle of violence within the epics of the Guillaume cycle, that there exists a scant number of depictions of peace time. Part of this comes from the boredom facing the main characters and the audience when presented with moments of inaction.[294] This opposition to peace is prevalent outside the dialogue as well; it simultaneously occurs within the structure of the epic poems, which lends itself to continuous warfare or battle from scene to scene and across poems. This is most evident in the structure of the Lorraine cycle, where 7 years of peace are covered in one instant so that battles follow one another ad infinitum.[295] The

[294] See chapter 1 for an analysis of the boredom Guillaume feels before the narrative intrigue truly begins as described across multiple *laisses* in the *Prise d'Orange*.
[295] This motif continues even to the end of the poem in which another cycle of violence closes and then reopens "la pes dura .vii. anz et un demi" (*Garin le Loherenc* vv. 9548).

seemingly unending nature of violence as it is found in these three epics can be explained by Girard's claim that "Only violence can put an end to violence" (*Violence and the Sacred* 26). This paradoxical statement at once demonstrates the insidious nature of violence; wars beget wars, and it sheds further light upon the narrative structure of the texts as previously examined.

Guillaume's long life, then, is what separates his story from the heroes of other epics. While it is evident through scholarship and through the structure of the poem that the *Roland* and the *Chanson de Guillaume* are quite similar, it is in the tragedy and its remembrance that the latter epic differs from the former. The *Chanson de Guillaume* is not a tale about a huge army moving on without its rearguard, it is a tale of the decimation of countless soldiers to a seemingly unstoppable force. Unlike the death of Roland and Vivien, if Guillaume were to die, then nothing would be left in his *geste* (Clifton 230). As such, he must grapple with both what came before and what is to come. While audiences see these characters fated to tragic ends, in more than one text, these knights are nonetheless shown to die in apotheosis – forever immortalized by their violence regardless of the sadness that may follow their deaths. In this way, Guillaume's cycle allows for a privileged view into the lifelong effects of violence not as readily present in other characters' lives.

Avenues forward

Part of the reason that it is necessary to expand the scope of this study in future research is because much violence theory is centered around men and uses a primarily European lens. This Eurocentrism is either due to using Christianity or European law and tradition as foundational moments of violence, thereby making their application impossible in circumstances involving other cultures and other religions – a constant

presence in the *chansons de geste*. Girard's theories on violence, for example, are somewhat colonialist and often Eurocentric. In *Violence and the Sacred* he is focused on the anthropological studies of violence within non-European cultures while comparing them constantly to European literary examples. In *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*, he champions the teachings of Christ above all other forms of religion. His views, while perfectly suited to analyze the typical character and action in the *chansons de geste* make it difficult, sometimes impossible, to analyze other non-European cultures or women, a true drawback.

While women and Saracens are not as present in the Guillaume cycle as in other epic cycles, it is important to note that these characters are not underdeveloped and that they are given stories and agency that rival Guillaume himself. For one, though both Rainouart and Guibourc are Saracen converts, they each play pivotal roles in establishing and reinforcing Guillaume's renown – with Rainouart becoming the subject of his own branch of the larger *geste* of *Garin de Monglane*.[296] Moreover, Guibourc is in her own right an essential character for emotional development[297] and a linchpin for narrative continuity within this epic cycle.[298]

In this way, a path forward from this study would be to note the ways in which women and Saracens are shown to deal with violence and grief in order to gain a better understanding of all subjects of the *chansons de geste*.[299] Although Girard has done

[296] As Sharon Kinoshita explains, "in later chansons de geste it is not unusual for praiseworthy pagans to convert" (27) In fact, this conversion mission is a key part of the Guillaume cycle in ways it may not be present in other epic cycles. Rainouart and Guibourc play large roles in the epic cycle, with Rainouart being the subject of his own mini-cycle within the Guillaume cycle.
[297] For more on emotions in the epic, refer to chapter 2 of the present study.
[298] This is illustrated in the moment after Guillaume hears about Vivien's peril. Guillaume goes straight into Guibourc's welcoming arms and as Ruiz-Domènec states, "Viéndolos juntos se comprende que es la esposa quien orienta sus pasos." (497)
[299] Such a path is laid out by Sarah Kay when describing how looking at characters outside the warrior class can help scholars understand the social realities of the time: "The hero's allies, stemming from outside the social order, provide a vantage-point from which to discern

little to examine the role of women in the cycle of violence, there has been much work done to raise awareness of the varied roles of women within the epic, particularly by Sarah Kay, Sharon Kinoshita, and Lynn Ramey whose works have heavily influenced the chapters of this study.

The Saracens of the *chansons de geste* exist as a persistent enemy, but it must be remembered that they are not representative of the Muslims of the time.[300] As discussed in chapter 2, they are often depicted as monstrous in comparison to their Christian counterparts. In spite of their constant role as enemy, they are often lauded for their military prowess and chivalry, and they exist as comrades and friends to the heroes of the epic. This acknowledgment of their value serves as an insight into the complicated relationship between the two religious groups inhabiting a shared space (within Europe and the Mediterranean) during the Middle Ages.

When speaking on the seemingly paradoxical interconnectedness and difference between Saracens and Christians, Sharon Kinoshita explains that there existed, "shared values that on the one hand make the Saracens likely prospects for conversion on the other raise the spectre of a crisis of differentiation" (Kinoshita 16). Ultimately, then, the desire to convert these Saracens leads to a nationalist view of other cultures, one in which the Christians conquer the "pagan" enemy to the point that all of Europe is saved from the dangers of another culture. Despite the problematic nature of conversion, the author is presented an excuse to explore the Saracen characters. In so doing, the Christian audience will be shown that little separates from this seemingly

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shortcomings within it." (*Chansons de Geste in the Age of Romance* 177)

[300] As Peter Haidu succinctly explains: "The 'Saracens' of the *Roland*, who are also called 'pagans' are not textual figures bearing any 'real' relationship to their presumed referents: they do not 'refer' to the concrete, historical societies that occupied either Spain or the Near East" (36).

distinct group. These similarities are presented in the constant parallelism of the two parties at the beginning of the text: both sides hold council in the same way by listening to their vassals and both kings sit in the shade when speaking (*Chanson de Roland* vv. 10-14, vv. 104-109, v. 114). Kinoshita furthers this parallelism by saying: "Similar in language and custom, the two sides arguably differ in religion and nothing more" (Kinoshita 26).

After the events of *Prise d'Orange*, Guillaume's epic will include much about the relationship between him and his wife (as well as other homosocial bonds). Comparing Guibourc directly to the romance heroines gives the audience a sense of the potential within the study of the Saracen Princess trope. Guibourc, unlike many of her Christian counterparts, who have been relegated to behind-the-scenes roles, is the initiator of many actions. In the *Chanson de Guillaume*, she will play an important role as the protector of Guillaume's lands when he hears about Vivien's predicament and when he leaves with all his men to aide his nephew.[301] What is more, when he returns without any surviving allies, she will be the reason that his forces are replenished. Guibourc will save the day when she lies to the barons at Barcelona by telling them that Guillaume killed Deramé, and that all that is left to do is finish off the thousand soldiers who are pillaging the bounty leftover from the battle (*La Chanson de Guillaume* Laisse 101). Later faced with the possibility that her husband will die in battle, Guibourc is prepared to defend the castle with the rest of the women, armed and ready with javelins if necessary (*Chanson de Guillaume* Laisse 150). This

[301] When Girard arrives at Barcelona, she serves as host, "Guiburc meïsmes servi Girard de l'eve" (*La Chanson de Guillaume* v. 1042), later she takes command of the castle while Guillaume is gone (Laisse 96).

willingness to defend the castle shows that she is not a damsel in distress, and the author(s) of this text show the various roles available to women in the Middle Ages.

Guibourc has a role in protecting not only Guillaume, but all the citizens of her lands. Before Guillaume's knights leave the sight of the castle, little Guiot decides he must accompany the forces into battle. Guibourc tries to keep him from battle:

> Trop par es enfes e de petit eé,
>
> Si ne purreies ne travailler ne pener,
>
> La nuit veiller ne le jur juner,
>
> La grant bataille suffrir n'endurer (vv. 1526-1529)[302]

In this moment, Guibourc displays an easily understood fear that is brought about at the prospect of war: the loss of life, especially when that life belongs to a young person. She worries not only for his still immature physical appearance but also for his youth. Guiot cannot, in her estimation, be prepared for the hardships that await him: the sleeplessness, the fasting and the suffering. Consequently, she speaks to the heart of any mother (surrogate, adoptive, or biological) who may fear the fate of their young sons. In this way, Guibourc speaks to multiple female experiences when faced with violence. While it may be an indirect relationship with violence, it is telling for the modern audience to see how members of other classes outside of the warrior class experience warfare and violence.

What is further revealing about the role of women in the Guillaume cycle is that the episodes involving Guibourc are not the sole moments involving women in this text: the audience likewise encounters Guillaume's sister Blancheflor, the wife of king

[302] "You are too young, and you are too small, / And you could neither work nor suffer, / You could not stay up all night nor could you fast all day, / You could not endure the suffering in the great battle"

Louis. Unlike Guibourc who is beloved by the narrator, the queen is harshly critiqued, existing as a foil that hints at the reality that not all women are the same.[303] Louis's queen, Guillaume's sister, insists that Guibourc will poison him, and that Guillaume will then become king (Laisse 157). The subsequent laisse sees a repetition of Guillaume insulting her and almost killing her for calumny. The lack of real action on Guillaume's part is key here. Instead of a youthful tendency to kill a slanderer, we see here that he decides against it, perhaps for the sake of finally receiving reinforcements. Had similar events happened with a man in *Charroi de Nîmes* or *Couronnement de Louis*, he would have dispatched the slanderer with one swift blow of his fist. Instead, the queen is given a sort of stay of execution when Guillaume decides not to retaliate.

The lack of retribution during this episode is not the result of a literature that refuses to punish women. In the *Chanson des Saxons*, a group of women attempt to subvert the absent patriarchy after their husbands head off to war in an attempt to seek freedom and agency. They are swiftly dealt with, and Charlemagne punishes them. Perhaps this has to do with their resistance of the societal hierarchy, as Hannah Skoda explains: "The rare cases of women who carried out violence on their husbands were punished unambivalently; here there was no doubt that a fundamental hierarchy had been unforgivably transgressed" (227). Given her status, Blancheflor must be immune from all punishment in any act that does not involve the king (her societal superior). While upending the social order has never stopped Guillaume before, it seems that he does not wish to do so once he has gained land and renown.

[303] For this reason, scholars such as Patricia Black find the *Chanson de Guillaume* to be an important text for addressing gender in the Middle Ages: "The clash between these two incarnations of medieval women ends by revealing fundamental attitudes toward women in an epic context and makes the *Chanson de Guillaume* an important work in specifically tracing attitudes toward gender in the medieval period." (Black 42)

As explained by Sarah Kay, the French epic is not an inclusive literature for members outside of the warrior-class: "Having dispersed authority to unexpected quarters [women, Saracens, children, the *jongleur*, etc.], the *chansons de geste* show scant concern to integrate these marginal figures into aristocratic society" (*Chansons de Geste in the Age of Romance* 176). While this seemingly discourages this research, in fact, it is clear from the episodes described above that these marginal characters are important players in the texts. In this way, Guibourc's role in the *Chanson de Guillaume* exists as an argument against the denaturing of the epic after the 12th century. The *Chanson de Guillaume* exists in the cycle's earliest extant manuscripts, and yet, contrary to scholarly critique, Guibourc contributes in multiple ways to the development and themes of the text. For this reason, it is important to study even the oft-maligned romance-epics, because they show agency in the hands of a Saracen woman.[304]

Saracens' emotions

Given the nationalistic tendencies of the epic, the relative lack of interest in the Saracens is unsurprising. It is surprising then to note the anguish depicted in a Saracen when faced with the loss of his trustworthy horse in the *Chanson de Guillaume*. In an early battle, Guillaume kills his own horse to ensure that it will not fall into enemy hands:

> 'Ohi, Balçan, a quel tort t'ai ocis!
>
> Si Deu m'aït, unc nel forfesis

[304] Sharon Kinoshita explains that this results in "[r]eversing the binarism of later colonial discourse, it is the foreign woman who displays a new feminine agency while the Frankish woman is consigned to passivity and silence" (41).

En nule guise, ne par nuit ne par di.

Mais pur ço l'ai fait que n'i munte Sarazin,

Franc chevaler par vus ne seit honi.' (*Chanson de Guillaume* vv. 2164-2168)

He is clearly upset at the prospect of his horse falling into the wrong hands. The fear of his horse falling into the enemy's hands and playing a role in the dishonoring of Frankish knights was too great. This dilemna will be seen again in a short moment describing Guillaume finding a new horse.

After Guillaume laments his horse's death, we experience an even more touching lamentation from his enemy, Alderufe:

'Ohi, Florecele, bon destrer honured,

Mieldre de vus ne poei unques trover!

Ja fustes vus al fort rei Deramé;

Jo te menai en Larchamp sur mer

Pur gent colp ferir, e pur mun cors aloser;

Willame t'ameine, si ad mun quer vergundé,

Ahi, Willame quel cheval en menez!

……………………………………………

Rend le mei, sire, par la tue bunté! (vv. 2180-2187, 2191)[305]

This moment exists as a rare example of emotionality as seen from the enemy in the cycle of Guillaume d' Orange. His actions mirror Guillaume's and would seemingly show that he too is a good knight. In fact, he seems just as upset about losing his horse

[305] "Oh Florecel, good, honorable destrier, / Better than you I could never find! / You were already the strong king Deramé's; / I was taking you to Larchamp on the Sea / To strike many blows on people, and to honor my body; / Guillaume is taking you, he has disgraced my heart, Ah, Guillaume what a horse you are leading! […] / Give him back to me, sir, by your goodness!"

as Guillaume was when faced with Baucent's death. He even goes so far as to plead for Guillaume to pity him and return the horse. It is at this point that the Saracen has disgraced himself in the eyes of the knight. This elicits a laugh from the great knight, "Quant l'ot Willame, rit s'en suz sun nasel" (*Chanson de Guillaume* v. 2194). The laughter is derisive – in the face of his enemy's despair Guillaume is aware that he has defeated the Saracen a second time. It is probable, then, that this moment is serves to discount the strength and prowess of the Saracen, he cannot protect his valued horse. Yet, it is a moment of deep emotion which mirrors Guillaume's relationship with his own horse from a few lines before.

What does such an episode reveal? It, if nothing else, reveals a human side to the Saracen enemy – in much the way the occasional reference to their chivalric excellence does. What is more, the man does so by expressing his complex emotions out loud: he is both dishonored and sad. In a cycle in which Saracen's final moments are often quickly passed over, this focus on the desperate yearning of one Saracen stands out clearly. Within the *Chanson de Guillaume*, this is not the only complex moment faced by a Saracen. Facing death, the Christian convert Guischard, Guibourc's nephew, renounces God on the battlefield before dying (*La Chanson de Guillaume* Laisse XCIV).

As with the two contrary depictions of Guibourc and Blancheflor, these two episodes depict the *chanson de geste* as a nuanced literature full of complex characters and themes. Consequently, it stands to reason that these are areas into which scholarship should delve deeper in order to analyze the difference in Saracen representations of emotions – and thereby humanity – across the different *chansons de geste*.

Film and Medievalisms

Aside from expanding possible research into areas in medieval studies, there is one other avenue forward from this study: medievalism. In the same way that the so-called *chanson d'aventure* modernized (for the 13th century) the *chanson de geste*,[306] film attempts a similar process to bring medieval texts to our time. Certain things are lost to time and others are expanded to interest a new audience. There are a scarce number of films which recount the stories of medieval France. Among those, one in particular stands out as a point of comparison with the *chanson de geste*: *Lancelot du lac* by Robert Bresson.[307] This film exemplifies the action of the epic, its parataxis, and the nuanced messages of violence.

Lancelot du lac begins with a sequence of violent shots (starting at the nineteen second mark and ending at the one-minute mark) in which unnamed knights are brutally killed and decapitated. After these scenes of violence which include skeletons hanging from trees and knights desecrating churches, an explanatory text appears on the screen describing the state of the Knights of the Round Table and Arthur's court. The next scene shows Lancelot, having lost his way, asking for directions from a peasant woman near a town called Escalot. Lancelot arrives back at King Arthur's court. As the film continues, we see that Lancelot and Guenièvre are having an affair, however we learn that Lancelot has doubts about the morality of their actions. After this meeting, Arthur announces that he will be giving up the search for the Holy Grail

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[306] The change in content between the two is discussed in-depth in chapter 4.
[307] William Paden has defined three explicit categories for films depicting medieval subjects: first, "a movie that appears to project images taken during the Middle Ages," second, "one that films a medieval work, such as John Boorman's Excalibur […] or the hilarious spoof, Monty Python and the Holy Grail," and finally, "films that do not appear to have been shot in the Middle Ages and do not retell medieval stories, but that can be compared to medieval work" (79). Bresson's film fall into the second category as it reimagines a literary story from the Middle Ages.

because so many of his knights have been killed during their quest. Guenièvre once again attempts to persuade Lancelot to stay with her, but Lancelot continues to struggle with their relationship – later, it is revealed that Mordred, Arthur's nephew, is aware of the affair. Lancelot later competes anonymously in a tournament held by King Arthur and defeats all challengers; however, he becomes injured in the process and retreats to the woods, going back to the peasant woman from earlier in the film. Lancelot returns from his injuries to find that Guenièvre has been taken away from the court by King Arthur as punishment for her infidelity. Lancelot kills many of his fellow knights to reach Guenièvre, including his friend, Gauvain. Later, to atone for his crimes against his fellow knights and his king, Lancelot takes Guenièvre back to Arthur. There he learns that Mordred is rebelling against the king, and he decides to support Arthur in the fight against Mordred's forces. *Lancelot du lac* ends with a scene of death and devastation – mirroring the opening of the film in which the former Knights of the Round Table are all shown to be dead, heaped upon one another in a large pile of corpses.

Before continuing to an analysis of the ways in which the film resembles a *chanson de geste*,[308] an introduction of the functions of repetition in the *chanson de geste* is necessary. Repetition within the epic occurs most prevalently in two different ways, in *laisses similaires* and *laisses parallèles*, these two forms of *laisses* have similar qualities but are functionally different. The *laisse similaire* repeats one single

[308] Despite its obvious connection to the medieval romances of Arthur, Bresson's film connects readily with the *chansons de gestes* because of his use of parataxis, which, though present in the romance, is more explicitly a marker of the epic. This fact is related by both Luke Sunderland, "[a]s so often in the chansons de geste, events succeed one another inevitably, but with haphazard jumps from one tragedy to the next through paratactic links of 'puis' and 'et'. No reasoning links the acts of violence; in the system of strike and counterstrike, they just lead automatically to other acts of violence" (*Rebel Barons* 88) and more directly with the romance by Keith Busby, "[p]arataxis, long recognized as fundamental to epic (as opposed to romance) style" (Busby 148).

action by the same knight/character in order to, according to Mildred K. Pope, “[heighten] the crisis, [and] emphasiz[e] the emotional significance of the scene” (359). The *laisse parallèle*, however, repeats different actions (killing, boasting, riding on horseback) performed by several knights. This second type of *laisse* serves to chain the actions of one knight to his fellow knights or to show one knight’s actions in quick succession. The *laisse parallèle* can be used to explain things that are happening at the same time or one after the other, expanding “l’espace-temps” (“*La Chanson de Roland*”). These actions in the film follow one another rapidly, cut after cut, just as the actions of the knights in any Guillaume cycle text would follow one another stanza after stanza.

Violence in the *chansons de geste* is constant and graphic, in the *Chanson de Roland* the most studied *chanson*, heads are chopped off, skulls crushed in and cracked, eyes are thrown out of sockets, blood gushes out of wounds, and “On the green grass, the clear blood flows in waves” (*Chanson de Roland* v. 1614). Even scenes that could exist nonviolently are explained in visceral detail, like Roland’s sounding of the Oliphant, the sounding of which caused blood to spill from his mouth and which caused his temples to burst (vv. 1763-4). Robert Bresson’s *Lancelot du lac’s* opening scene mirrors these descriptions, with blood gushing out of one knight’s decapitated body, and another knight’s helm and skull having been crushed by a blow from an enemy’s sword. The film likewise ends with a scene of death and devastation in which the former Knights of the Round Table are all shown to be dead, heaped upon one another in a large pile of corpses – a parallelism reminiscent of the episodic battle scenes from any of the *chansons de geste*.

Bresson uses this style in his cinematography to mimic “the parataxis of the sources of Lancelot’s legends, where actions are introduced with ‘and’ and ‘then’”

(Hanlon 159) in the jousting tournament. The knights' bodies are fragmented by the camera, often obscuring the shields, helms, and markings that could help us in identifying which knights we are being shown. In each round of jousting, the knights are fragmented by the camera, one only sees the knights' feet and the horses' legs. The bodies are reinserted into the frame after one of the knights falls to the ground, but they are again fragmented when the knights prepare for their next joust, with only their torsos and heads visible. Much like the knights of the *Roland*, Lancelot's actions are repeated as he continues to defeat successive challengers. Each round of the tournament is introduced in a similar manner, the two knights joust, then the challenger falls, then the next knight arrives and falls like his predecessors. In the aforementioned *laisses parallèles*, each knight is introduced with the word "et" and the *laisse* often ends with "puis" to introduce the next knight and to continually link their actions to one another. Within the film, quick cuts of challengers falling from their horses and new challengers arising mimic the literary succession of conjunctions that introduce these formulaic actions.

Just as the similarities between the parataxis of the epic and film link the two mediums, so to does their approach to violence. In the *chansons de geste*, every critique of violence as terrible or haunting is subsequently undermined by lengthy and detailed descriptions of combat and bloodshed. This is carried into film in much the same way, *Lancelot du lac* critiques violence, it is shown as immoral, it tears apart groups and leads to hardship, yet it simultaneously glorifies violence by their very depiction of it.[309] This is true of the war scenes of the epic as well. As seen in this study,

[309] This would therefore be the case for any modern action film as well. Take the film series *John Wick* for example, the hero is a former hitman brought back to his old life after a chance encounter that ends with the death of his dog. The first film shows the cost of violence and the protagonist's hesitancy to return. However, like in the *Moniage Guillaume*, the message of

poems such as the *Moniage Guillaume* and *Chanson de Guillaume* are full of regret and sorrow, showing an anti-violence message. Nonetheless, the combat is elevated as art and worthy of praise both due to its beautiful descriptions and due to its role in asserting renown.

It is difficult to glean a true anti-war message from such works. Perhaps, then, we can learn something about our own 21st century society in the creation of films such as these.[310] *Lancelot du lac* is a combination of the styles of the *chanson de geste* and cinema. Bresson manipulates the paratactic structure of the *chanson de geste* and he fragments his knights. The characteristics of the *chanson de geste* are present within many different levels of the film in its repetition, paratactic transitions, fragmentation of bodies, and violence. The epic doesn't describe peace time – for example, in the *Moniage Guillaume*, the narrator says "I don't know how to describe this to you" when talking about Guillaume traveling.[311] The repetitive refrain shows a tendency to skip over inaction or idleness. Film often does the same thing, presenting scenes with few moments of inaction. While film movements such as Italian Neorealism and French New Wave may depict several minutes of relatively mundane action,[312] they also contain moments of quick cuts back and forth across points of view, tying actions together.[313] The result of quick cuts and changes in point of view in medieval films cause a viewer to desire more action and more information. As Kaja

anti-violence is coupled with the glorification of violence. Moreover, the series has already had two sequels with a third in development. Even in film, the cycle of violence is difficult to close.

[310] This is an approach espoused by William Paden: “By seeking to understand medieval movies we can gain insight into what the past means for us” (93).

[311] “De lor jornees ne vos sai conte dire.” (*Moniage Guillaume* v. 4995)

[312] Succinctly expressed in Kogonada’s film essay for *Sight and Sound*, “What is Neorealism?” In which he demonstrates, using clips from Vittorio DeSica’s *The Bicycle Thieves*, the lingering camera-style of Italian Neorealism.

[313] Take for example, *Roma, città aperta*, when Pina chases after Giorgio before being shot by the Nazi soldiers, the camera cuts back and forth quickly between the two characters’ point of view several times before focusing on Pina’s corpse.

Silverman posits, the audience yearns for the obscured or fragmented objects, it makes us desire more, because “This sense of lack inspires in that subject the desire for ‘something else,’ a desire to see more” (204). In this way, perhaps film, through its own version of grammatical parataxis, is our closest link to the violence and action of the *chanson de geste*. It appears that the grammar of film is a worthy successor to the grammar of the *chanson de geste*.

This paradox creates a desire to see more violence even when repudiating its existence. This is difficult to navigate in film as in literature: “There’s no such thing as an anti-war film,” is an apocryphal quote often attributed to the late French filmmaker François Truffaut” (“Anti-War Film”). Whether the famous director ever said this or not is irrelevant, the point is clear: by showing war, there is a glorification of it. The anti-violence message, then, shows, inadvertently, how little our society has changed from the Middle Ages in regard to the interest in violence. Violence, even when it is decried still has a fantastical hold on us. However, like the audience of the Middle Ages, we are entranced by the prospect of leaving behind the cycle of violence, even when it inevitably reopens.

Conclusion

If the cycles of the *chanson de geste* themselves are constantly being rewritten, reimagined, and revisited by the medieval audience and authors,[314] so to must current scholarship revisit the ways in which we approach and understand these epics. Ultimately, this study has examined and refuted several claims that detail the *chanson*

[314] The very existence of these stories in manuscript form requires this constant revisiting. As Philip Bennett explains, “La cyclisation représente ainsi un projet non seulement d’écriture mais avant tout de ré-écriture permanente” (13).

de geste as a simplistic, singularly-focused literature, and it opens the door to several new paths of analysis. In so doing, modern audiences will be able to gain a greater appreciation for the nuance and complexities of pre-modern French literature – a time with which our own still has much in common.

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