

## **Social Functions of the Medieval Epic in the Romance Literatures**

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### I

Studies on the medieval epic in France and Spain have in recent years been devoted largely to individual works or to internal aspects of the texts, rather than to the ways in which contemporaries perceived and used it. This is, I think, partially because the study of medieval literature is largely carried out in the academy, and is thus correlated with teaching: as a result one tends to encounter again and again a handful of texts that are frequently assigned for classroom treatment, and to read even those few through a microscopic lens rather than in a broader context. Treatments taking in the medieval epic in the Romance languages as a whole are rare and outdated; thus it is that, in this field, interest in the social function of epic, such as might have been aroused by synthetic works informed by reader-oriented literary theory—perhaps one should modify that to “listener-oriented” for our purposes—or by the sociology of literature, has not really developed.

I will attempt to delineate in these lectures the functions of the medieval epic composed in French, Provençal, and Spanish from the point of view of the philologist, that is to say of one who is interested in texts and everything that might illuminate them. This includes, among other specialized pursuits, literary theory, textual criticism, evaluative criticism, and sociological criticism. What good does it do to evaluate or to theorize if one does not control the problematics of the text? Of what use is the text once it is established, on the other hand, if one is not prepared to judge

it in relation to other texts? How does one deal with the nature of the text if one is without a theory of texts and how they function in society? I subscribe, then, to Albert Henry's observation that, for medieval literature, textual criticism and literary criticism are one and the same, and I would take that principle a step further: the methods of each pursuit are informed by the findings of the other. A theory of texts should underlie the entire enterprise. Orality is an aspect of that theory of texts.

At the same time awareness of the social situation in which the text was generated and propagated—and by “text” I mean here and in what follows both oral and written manifestations—and of the ways in which the public of listeners, scribes, and readers perceived it, is necessary for its proper establishment, elucidation, and appreciation. Evidence for these topics will be drawn from poets' statements as found in the texts themselves, from the remarks and pronouncements of medieval authors writing both in Latin and in the vernacular, and from observations about the corpus of surviving manuscripts. Both what the poets say and the manner in which they choose to say it are, in my opinion, intimately bound up with situations of performance, readership, and audience response. A theory of the epic text would be incomplete if it were to neglect taking those situations into account.

What is said in these lectures does not necessarily apply to narrative genres other than the epic, or to works composed in prose. Obviously much more evidence is available from north of the Pyrenees than from the Iberian peninsula. Elsewhere I posit that Spanish epic does not derive its distinctive qualities from the French or the Provençal, and that the two bodies of poetry descend from common stock<sup>1</sup>; the validity of those propositions is assumed here, although others will no doubt wish to contest them. I will not argue here either for the primary orality of medieval epic (see Duggan 1973, 1980-81a and b, 1985), but rather will take it as a given to be corroborated, and will try to redirect a little of the energy that is so quickly dissipated in attempting to convince the seemingly unconvinceable, toward considering the varieties of social function one encounters in the genre.

The corpus of texts, well over a million lines, is distributed unevenly. Although the issue of determining just where a given poem begins or ends, and whether the various versions of certain heroic legends constitute autonomous works, is at times problematic, one can take it for purposes of discussion that there

are about 132 works in the genre extant in their poetic form. Of these, three are in Spanish, nine are in Provençal, and the remaining 120 are in French or in Franco-Italian (Duggan 1984a). They range in length from under 900 lines, *Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne*, to over 34,000, *Lion de Bourges*.

The medieval epic is a multifunctional genre. The distance between our mental horizons and those of the jongleurs, scribes, and authors is enormous, and as a result some of the functions they intended undoubtedly never occur to us. Others, however, are well attested. I will concentrate on what I consider to be the most important, namely entertainment, information, sanction of conduct, preserving awareness of the past, and providing models for imitation. I will take them up in that order, adding a few remarks on economic motivations for the performance of epic.

The medieval epic is the work of jongleurs, that is to say, itinerant entertainers—usually male but occasionally female—who, in addition to singing epics and poems belonging to other genres, staged mimes, played instrumental music, danced, juggled, peddled medicines, exhibited trained animals, and performed magic tricks and acrobatics. Often dressed in distinctive clothing (Salmen 1960:55-61; Lejeune 1966), they typically traveled about the countryside carrying their instruments, of which the most popular was the *vielle*, a proto-violin which was the most frequent accompaniment to the epic. They supplied entertainment on festive occasions such as at weddings, baptisms, courts, tournaments, and other celebrations, and at fairs, for which they received in recompense robes, furs, boots, and other articles of clothing, horses, trinkets, and money. As wanderers in a society in which stasis was the norm, they occupied a very low social status.

Writers of ecclesiastical texts often fulminate against jongleurs, thus providing us with indirect evidence for the activities of these vagabonds, whom they call *joculatores*, *histriones*, or *mimi*. These testimonies must be treated with circumspection, however, since the hostile intentions of their authors are manifest. The lapidary judgment of Honorius of Autun, writing his *Elucidarium* in the early twelfth century, is emblematic of the attitude of churchmen: “Habent spem jocularos? Nullam.” [Do jongleurs have any hope (of salvation)? None.] An anonymous thirteenth-century author writing in Latin draws a comparison that shows how at least one cleric conceived of the danger: “Item, sicut auceps possit in laqueo vel rethe aviculam unam doctam quae volitando alas quasi libera

extendat et cantet: sic Dyabolus aliquam jocularicem quae sciat cantiones ad choreas adducit, ut alias secum trahat” [Likewise, just as the hunter of birds places in his snare or net a tamed bird which, flitting about, may extend its wings and sing as if it were free, so the devil entices to dances some female jongleur who knows songs, so that she might bring others with her] (Paris, Bibl. nat. fonds latin 16515, cited in Faral 1910:291). According to Casagrande and Vecchio (1979:914-15), whose article on clerics and jongleurs in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is extremely important, jongleurs were considered so objectionable that they simply fell outside the medieval classifications of social statuses. In that regard they appear to have been treated as worse than prostitutes. I will close these lectures with a thesis to account for the clergy’s seemingly unjustified loathing of jongleurs.

Condemnatory sermons were addressed not to the *joculatores* themselves, but to their audiences, those who patronized them. Caught between the court, their surest source of recompense, and the church, which sought to impose its guidance on the nobles, the jongleur represents—both in the sense of presenting in his works and in the sense of symbolizing—a world threatening to the clerics. The early thirteenth-century *Poème moral* complains that jongleurs enter the church as soon as the service has ended, even before the congregation has had time to rise from its seats, singing, playing *vielles*, and promising to perform songs about Roland, Charlemagne, Ogier, Fernagu, and Aiol (Herzog 1908:60). Obviously this competition must have led to frustration among preachers who had a sterner message to communicate than that conveyed by the jongleurs.

Casagrande and Vecchio (1979:917-23) situate the change toward a more positive view of the jongleur in the works of Bernard of Clairvaux, who compares himself to a jongleur, a transformation that is consolidated by the mendicant orders, and especially the Franciscans, whose founder is styled the *joculator Dei*. The Franciscans’ vagabondage, sense of spectacle, and dependence on contributions from the public emulate the jongleur’s habits. Thomas Aquinas was the earliest theologian to construct a theory by which the jongleur could be rehabilitated through any expedient other than giving up his craft (Casagrande and Vecchio 1979:923): he admits that the jongleur’s profession is work, and that the profit he gains is thus in some way legitimate. For Thomas, the jongleur serves people by bringing them a necessary

*delectatio*, allowing them to turn from their labors to recreation, a respite that will permit them to perform better afterwards.

This *delectatio* is precisely the most obvious function of the *chansons de geste* in medieval society. Jongleurs apparently did not wait for special occasions on which to perform them: poems show the jongleurs, for example, taking dinner in castles, after which they would entertain those present. In his *Roman de la Violette*, dated to the period 1227-1229, Gerbert de Montreuil has the hero, Gérard de Nevers, disguise himself in old clothes as a jongleur; carrying a *vielle*, he comes to a castle, where he waits at the door in the rain until a knight calls him inside, asking him to play his instrument. Soaked to the skin, Gérard asks to put his playing off until after dinner, but the unsympathetic knight, who turns out to be a traitor, reacts angrily. After regretting that he has to do what he has not been trained for, namely to play and sing at the same time, Gérard breaks into song with a passage from the *chanson de geste Aliscans*. "To solace and entertain" those present, he sings four strophes, of which the text only gives one (22 lines).<sup>2</sup> The idea for this scene may have come from the Provençal epic *Daurel et Beton*, in which the jongleur Daurel sings while his lord Guy eats dinner (Kimmel 1971:11. 1940-47); the topic of Daurel's song does not improve Guy's appetite, however, since it concerns Guy's murder of the jongleur's former master, a case in which the hoped-for entertainment turned out to be an aggravation. Jongleurs also performed in public squares and along streets, apparently in any place where a contributing public could gather around them. In *La Prise d'Orange* (Régnier 1966, *AB* text:11. 138-40), the great epic hero Guillaume d'Orange and his knights are lounging under a pine while a jongleur sings to them a "vielle chanson de grant antiquité" [old song of great antiquity]. In the long redaction of *Le Moniage Guillaume* (Cloetta 1906-11:98), Guillaume asks his servant to sing a song about a good story ("d'un bone estoire") to entertain them both while they are traveling through a dangerous forest. The servant complies, and when robbers who are about to attack the pair hear him, they guess that he is "a jongleur coming from a town or city or fortress, where he has sung in the public square." In the shorter redaction the servant sings five lines of the *Prise d'Orange* (Cloetta 1906-11:18).

French epics were popular too in Italy, where their performance gave rise to a curious bastardized language known as

Franco-Italian, basically French larded with Italian forms, that was never a true dialect but was rather a *Mischsprache* usually employed only to present literary works of French provenience to a northern Italian public. An Italian jurist, Odofredo, reports toward the middle of the thirteenth century that blind men sang about Roland and Oliver in the public square in Bologna; that they were blind confirms that the poems were being performed without benefit of writing. Other documents tell us that French singers, whose presence was apparently disruptive in some way, were forbidden from performing in Bologna in 1288.

The awe with which modern scholarship treats medieval epics sometimes makes us forget that their primary ostensible purpose *was* entertainment. Many jongleurs were marvelous storytellers whose narratives have retained a great deal of their attraction. A small number of humorous texts have also survived, such as *Le Pélerinage de Charlemagne à Jérusalem et à Constantinople*, *Jehan de Lanson*, and *Le Moniage Guillaume*, not parodies but rather poems in which the singer plays against the expectations of the genre, producing an effect of light-hearted humor. In one outright parody, the popular *Chanson d'Audigier*, the main hero's adventures are carried out in a scenario of scatological character.

A talented storyteller has a hold over his audience that is extremely powerful. As entertaining singers of tales, the jongleurs might well have aroused jealousy in their clerical contemporaries, especially those whose sermons were perhaps not as spell-binding as *La Prise d'Orange* or *Daurel et Beton*, and it would not be surprising if the Franciscans' practice of preaching in the public byways represented at least in part a decision to emulate their rivals rather than simply condemn them.

A second function of the *chanson de geste* is to provide information about contemporary events, what the great Spanish medievalist Ramón Menéndez Pidal called a *canto noticiario*, an informational song keeping people abreast of current news. Obviously only occurrences of great magnitude would become the subject of song, and since epics are usually about military deeds, Menéndez Pidal had in mind primarily the great battles that are the main subject of heroic poetry. A thirteenth-century treatise, *De septem sacramentis*, makes an exception in its condemnation of jongleurs "si cantant cum instrumentis et de gestis, ad recreationem et forte ad informationem" [if they sing with instruments and concerning deeds, for recreation and perhaps for information]

(quoted in Menéndez Pidal 1957:243).

Menéndez Pidal's concept of the *canto noticiero* was an ambitious one in that he believed that all the epics with historical content began as informational poems (1957:244). Some scholars have doubted the existence of the *canto noticiero*, not so much because of the quality of the information presumed to have been conveyed as because of what they have seen as a lack of evidence external to the epic testifying that it was in fact a vehicle for news.

An anecdote that the chronicler Lambert of Ardes, writing around 1194, tells about Arnold of Guines, a participant in the First Crusade who died around 1140, is relevant to the point at issue (Godefroy Menilglaise 1855:311):

Et tamen antiochenae commendator cantilenae, avaritiae zelo ductus, et magis cupidus temporalis lucri retributionis quam Arnoldus laudis humanae (o gartionum et ministrarium, immo adulatorum injuriosa laudatio! o inertium principum indigna et inanis exultatio!) quia

Virtute et probitate per omnia nobilis heros,  
 Arnoldus eidem scurrae, qui nullo nomine dignus habetur, duas caligas denegavit scarlatinas, de eo digne promeritae laudis praeconium et gloriam subticuit; et de eo in cantilena sua, in qua ficta veris admiscens, multa multorum nichilominus laudandorum gesta sub silentio intacta reliquit, mentionem non fecit. Sed o laudanda et ubique terrarum praedicanda Arnoldi militia! o in omnibus saeculis memoranda probitatis ejus strenuitas et gloria! o humilitatis ejus non despicibilis, sed inenarrabilis in virtutum operibus constantia! qui humanam nullatenus quaerens gloriam, scurrae maluit quantumcumque munusculum denegare, quam in ore scurrae et nomine indigni, licet omni haberetur laude dignissimus, in orbe terrarum deferri et cum instrumento musicari vel decantari. Sed cum ignominiosus ille concentor nomen Arnoldi extinguere curavit, accensa lampade virtutum fama extulit et magnificavit. Quod enim avarus ille et cupidus nomen subtraxit per invidiam, immo per cupiditatem et avaritiam, cognita probitatis ejus gloria, ubique terrarum personuit, et praedicatum est ei in virtutis et laudis magnificentia.



[And nevertheless the intoner of a *Song of Antioch*, motivated by the zeal of avarice, and more desirous of the profit of temporal reward than Arnold was of human praise—oh insulting commendation of servants and minstrels, or rather of flatterers, oh unworthy and empty exultation (exaltation?) of slothful princes—, suppressed the glory and commendation of his justly deserved praise because,

In all things a noble hero in virtue and prowess, Arnold denied to the same jester, who is not considered worthy of any renown, two scarlet shoes; and he made no mention of him in his *chanson de geste*, in which, mixing fictions with truths, nonetheless he passed over in silence, untouched, many deeds of many praiseworthy people. But oh the military service of Arnold, worthy of praise and of publishing in all lands! Oh the glory and robustness of his prowess, to be remembered in all ages! Oh the constancy of his humility, un contemptible, but indescribable in virtuous works!—he who, in no way seeking human glory, preferred to deny however small a gift to the jester rather than to be carried through the whole world as a subject of music and song in the mouth of a jester unworthy of renown, granted that he would be considered most worthy of all praise. But when that disgraceful and disdainful man took pains to extinguish Arnold's renown, fame magnified and exalted it, the lamp of virtues having been lit. For although that greedy and avaricious man removed his renown through envy, nay through greed and avarice, it resounded in all lands once the glory of his prowess had been recognized, and was proclaimed to the magnificence of his virtue and praise.]

Lambert shows obvious hostility to the jongleur, an attitude which, as we have seen, was common among those of his clerical calling. What is important about his testimony is that it shows that the concept of the news of an important event being spread by a *chanson de geste* is not confined to the epics themselves, but is rather a part of the mental baggage of a late twelfth-century cleric who was no friend of jongleurs.

This conclusion does not depend on the veracity of the tale, which may indeed be true but may also be Lambert's attempt to



explain why versions of the *Song of Antioch* circulating in the chronicler's period make no mention of Arnold, whom he obviously wishes to praise. In fact none of the extant versions of the *Song of Antioch*, a poem in the cycle of the First Crusade, includes Arnold's name. If the anecdote is indeed true, it gives an extremely rare glimpse of a jongleur distorting history in the interests of his own economic benefit; even so, the history he distorted would convey information about a great event—the first resounding victory of the crusade to the Orient—to Arnold's contemporaries. If it is not true, Lambert at least found it plausible to use.

The quasi-totality of the poems we now possess that are based on historical events are not contemporary with those happenings, and whether they were originally composed shortly after the events is a question far too complex and controversial to take up here. But two poems, namely the *Song of the Albigensian Crusade*, in Provençal and composed in the first quarter of the thirteenth century by Guilhem de Tudela and an anonymous continuator, and Guilhem Anelier's Provençal song dedicated to the Navarrese civil war of 1276-1277,<sup>3</sup> undoubtedly were meant to function as carriers of information about contemporary events.

The same may be true of the more realistic among the poems of the crusade cycle, the French *Song of Jerusalem* and *Song of Antioch*. In the latter case the poet, Graindor de Douai, claims to have gotten his song from a previous poet, Richard the Pilgrim, who would have been present at some of the occurrences recounted in the text. Graindor's *Song of Antioch* deviates substantially from history, however (Duparc-Quioc 1976), and while some observers have defended the notion that the original song was composed by an eye-witness to the events, Robert Cook (1980:23-39) has argued cogently against such a view. Nevertheless, the audiences who were present at jongleurs' performances of the *Song of Antioch* probably believed that what they were getting was an historical account, and Graindor's claim to have gotten the poem from Richard, even if it was untrue, reinforces my contention that the concept of the *chanson de geste* as an informational genre is present in the period.

The epic poets themselves claim to provide information about great events, and carry that claim a step further in that they present themselves as generating sanctions for the conduct they recount: praise in the case of laudable actions and blame when the

person in question acted basely. Sanctioning is closely related to the informational aspect, since it functions as a special imparting of information, the conferring of value upon deeds.

The locus most commonly cited in any discussion of this function is in the eleventh-century Oxford version of the *Song of Roland*, in which Roland, having just learned that the Saracens are about to attack the rearguard of Charlemagne's army, exhorts his men to fight (Whitehead 1946:11. 1013-14):

Or quart chascuns que granz colps i empleit,  
Que malvaise cançon de nus chantét ne seit.  
[Now let each man take care to strike great blows,  
so that a bad song not be sung about us.]

Later, when King Marsile leads into battle the troops that he had been holding in reserve, Roland evokes again the possibility of an unfavorable song being sung, this time about him and Oliver.

But the *Song of Roland* is by no means the only poem to convey the idea that songs function to sanction conduct in battle. In *Raoul de Cambrai*, from the late twelfth century, the hero Bernier, also encouraging his men to bravery, expresses the fear (Meyer and Longnon 1882:l. 4144) that "Povre chançon en fust par gogleour" [a bad song might be made about it by a jongleur]. Similar phrases are found in *Aspremont* (Mandach 1975: ms. V6, l. 17) and in *La Chevalerie Ogier de Danemarque* (Eusebi 1963: l. 7902).

Presumably, then, the *Song of Roland* and *Raoul de Cambrai* are "good songs" about Roland and Bernier, while they are "bad songs" about the traitor Ganelon and the cruel and impetuous Raoul. But is this concept merely a literary convention, with no reality outside the *chansons de geste* themselves? Once again the passage from Lambert of Ardres' chronicle is of the greatest interest, and likewise in this case it matters little whether the anecdote is true because even if it is not, the fact that a writer contemporary with poems in which the sanctioning function of the *chansons de geste* is taken for granted considered it to be plausible is still sufficient to show that jongleurs were not the only ones to believe in it.

The effect of the epic's sanctioning function in medieval society was perhaps not confined to those whose deeds were being recounted in the poems. The word *geste* in "chanson de geste" could mean "deeds," as one might expect from its etymon, the

neuter plural form of the past participle of Latin *gerere*, but more commonly it signified “tale, narrative” and, from the very earliest examples of its use in Old French, “kinship group, lineage” (Van Emden 1975). In keeping with the well-known medieval principle of solidarity of the kin group (see, for example, Bloch 1961:134-42), the deeds of one member of a lineage could redound to the honor or disgrace of his kinsmen. This idea is expressed clearly in the *Song of Roland* in the speeches in which Roland refuses to sound his horn in order to call back the main body of Charlemagne’s army to repel the Saracen surprise attack (Whitehead 1946:11. 1062-64, 1073-76):

Respont Rollant: “Ne placet Damnedeu  
 Que mi parent pur mei seient blasmét,  
 Ne France dulce ja cheet en viltét “  
 . . .  
 “Ne placet Deu”, ço li respunt Rollant,  
 “Que ço seit dit de nul hume vivant  
 Ne pur paien que ja seie cornant.  
 Ja n’en avrunt reproece mi parent.”

[Roland replies: “May it not please God  
 That on account of me my relatives should be blamed,  
 Or that pleasant France should fall into degradation.”

. . .  
 “May it not please God,” Roland replies to him,  
 “That it should be said by any man alive,  
 Or by a pagan, that I should blow my horn.  
 Never will my relatives be reproached for that.”]

But how far into the future could a man’s deeds affect his kinsman?

Indications are that descendants living long after the deeds of their real or supposed ancestors derived pride from them and perhaps even promoted songs about them. In the *chansons de geste*, Aimeri de Narbonne is the father of Guillaume d’Orange, to whom an entire cycle of epics is devoted. If Aimeri had an historical prototype as count of Narbonne, all traces of him have disappeared from history. Nevertheless, beginning in the last third of the eleventh century, eighteen viscounts of Narbonne are named Aimeri (Lejeune 1966), probably in a desire to associate the family with a legendary epic forebear. Unfortunately, we can rarely trace

the provenience of a *chanson de geste* manuscript back beyond the late Middle Ages, with the result that, although one might suspect nobles of encouraging with their patronage the preservation in writing, or even the generation, of epics extolling the deeds of their ancestral lines, positive proof that the written copies result from genealogical concerns is lacking.

On the other side of the Pyrenees, María Eugenia Lacarra (1980) has shown that two powerful families of late twelfth-century Castile, the Laras and the Castros, are descended respectively from the Cid and the families of the Cid's poetic enemies, García Ordóñez and the counts of Carrión. The Laras and the Castros were on opposing sides in violent political struggles in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, and it now appears likely that the *Cantar de mio Cid* represents an attempt on the part of the Laras to discredit the Castros retroactively, as it were, by shaming their lineage, that of the counts of Carrión—who, incidentally, could not possibly have played in history the treacherous roles that the *Cid* poet assigns them. Since many commentators concerned with dating the poem now believe that it was composed within a quarter century before the year 1207, Lacarra's hypothesis may well carry the day.

A certain type of knowledge of the past pervades the French, Provençal, and Spanish epic, and is not limited to cases in which the deeds of characters with direct ties to the twelfth, thirteenth, or fourteenth centuries are being sanctioned. In fact, as one surveys the work done on the Romance epic over the past two centuries, it is obvious that the fourth function I deal with, preserving awareness of the past, has preoccupied scholars more than any other, probably on account of the obsession with origins passed on from Romanticism, the crucible of modern philology (see Gumbrecht 1986).

The *chanson de geste* presents itself as a true account of historical events. One could bring forth many passages in support of this proposition, but perhaps the most telling is that found in the prologue to the *Chanson des Saisnes*, 6-11, where Jean Bodel distinguishes among the three matters that story-tellers employ (Menzel and Stengel 1906: 11. 6-11) :

N'en sont que trois materes a nul home entendant:  
De France et de Bretaigne et de Romme la grant;  
Ne de ces trois materes n'i a nule samblant.  
Li conte de Bretaigne s'il sont vain et plaisant

Et cil de Romme sage et de sens apendant,  
 Cil de France sont voir chascun jour aparant.  
 [For any knowledgeable man there are only three matters:  
 That of France, that of Brittany, and that of Rome the great;  
 Nor are there any other similar to these three matters.  
 If the tales of Brittany are empty and pleasant,  
 And those of Rome wise and instructive,  
 Those of France are true, as is daily apparent.]

The word I translate as “empty” is *vain*, which has the semantic range “empty, soft, weak.” In this context I take it to signify that, for Jean Bodel, who is certainly closer to medieval mentalities than we are but who was also trying to sell his audience on the historical value of his own song, the matter of Brittany, that is to say the tales of King Arthur and of Tristan and Ysolt, are void of truth, while the matter of France, contained in the *chansons de geste*, is viewed as recounting events that really happened.

Nonetheless, we know that the historical accounts contained in the *chanson de geste* are rarely if ever true according to any modern standard. While many *chansons de geste* retain a kernel of the original historical events that they purport to relate, they are full of inaccuracies, distortions, and outright contradictions if we are to judge them against the evidence of, say, medieval charters and most chronicles. But they constituted an important repository of collective memory, preserving medieval popular society’s view of what the past was like.

The historical Charlemagne and his son Louis the Pious, for example, never conquered a Saracen kingdom nor went to the Holy Land, contrary to what the *Pèlerinage de Charlemagne* and other epics tell us; nevertheless, when Pope Urban II preached the First Crusade to the Orient at Clermont in 1095, he is said by the chronicler Robert of Rheims (III: 728) to have exhorted the knights who were present as follows: “Moveant vos et incitent animos vestros ad virilitatem gesta praedecessorum vestrorum, probitas et magnitudo Karoli Magni regis, et Ludovici filii ejus aliorumque regum vestrorum, qui regna paganorum destruxerunt et in eis fines sanctae Ecclesiae dilataverunt” [Let the deeds of your predecessors, the prowess and greatness of King Charles the Great and of his son Louis and others of your kings, who destroyed pagan kingdoms and extended into them the boundaries of Holy Church, move you

and incite your souls to manliness]. While sources other than *chansons de geste* told of Charlemagne's supposed trip to Jerusalem and Constantinople, the fact that Urban invokes the defeat of Saracen kings by both the great emperor and his son Louis and calls them *gesta* leads me to suspect that he was relying at Clermont on his audience's knowledge of history as preserved in the *chanson de geste*.

In many cases writers incorporated the history that they found in epics into their Latin treatises and vernacular histories, usually in an uncritical manner: in Italy, Godfrey of Viterbo; in French-speaking areas Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, Philippe Mousket, Girart d'Amiens, Jean d'Outremeuse, and David Aubert; and in Spain King Alfonso X of Castile and his successors (who refer directly to *cantares de las fiestas* [Menéndez Pidal 1957:287]). One also finds examples of epic heroes incorporated into forged charters as supposed witnesses (for details, see Duggan forthcoming a).

Typically the epic organizes history in genealogical fashion. *Geste*, we remember, means "lineage" as well as "deed." Beginning around 1180, several songs<sup>4</sup> speak of the three great *gestes* into which the French epic is divided; in this sense *geste* would signify not just "lineage" but "series of songs about a lineage," or "epic cycle." The earliest and most extensive account of the three *gestes* is found in Bertran de Bar-sur-Aube's *Girart de Vienne* (Van Emden 1977:11. 8-67):

A Seint Denis, en la mestre abaïe,  
 trovon escrit, de ce ne doute mie,  
 dedanz un livre de grant encesorie,  
 n'ot que trois gestes en France la garnie;  
 ne cuit que ja nus de ce me desdie.  
 Des rois de France est la plus seignorie,  
 et l'autre après, bien est droiz que jeu die,  
 fu de Doon a la barbe florie,  
 cil de Maience qui molt ot baronnie.  
 El sien linaje ot gent fiere et hardie;  
 de tote France eüsent seignorie,  
 et de richece et de chevalerie,  
 se il ne fuserent plain d'orgueil et d'envie.  
 De ce lingnaje, ou tant ot de boidie,  
 fu Ganelon, qui, par sa tricherie,  
 en grant dolor mist France la garnie,

qant en Espangne fist la grant felonnie  
 dont furent mort entre gent paiennie  
 li .xii. per de France.

Oï avez dire en meinte chançon  
 que de la geste qui vint de Ganelon  
 furent estret meint chevalier baron,  
 fier et hardi et de molt grant renon.  
 Tuit seignor fusement de France le roion,  
 s'an eus n'eüst orgueil et traïson;  
 mes par orgueil, por voir le vos dïson,  
 est trebuchiez en terre meinz hauz hom,  
 ausin com furent, de verté le savon,  
 deu ciel li engres, qui, par lor mesproïson,  
 trebuchié furent en l'infernal prison,  
 ou il n'avront jamés se dolor non.  
 Del ciel perdirent la seinte mansion  
 par lor orgueill et par for foloïson.  
 Et ausin furent li parant Ganelon,  
 qui tant estoient riche et de grant renon,  
 se il ne fussent si plain de traïson.  
 De ci lingnaje, qui ne fist se mal non,  
 fu la seconde geste.

La tierce geste, qui molt fist a prisier,  
 fu de Garin de Monglenne au vis fier.  
 De son lingnaje puis ge bien tesmongnier  
 que il n'i ot .i. coart ne lannier,  
 ne traïtor ne vilein losangier;  
 einz furent sage et hardi chevalier,  
 et combatant et nobile guerrier.  
 Einz roi de France ne vodrent jor boisier;  
 lor droit siegnor se penerent d'aidier,  
 et de s'annor en toz leus avancier.  
 Crestienté firent molt essaucier,  
 et Sarrazins confondre et essillier.  
 .iiii. fiz ot cil Garins an vis fier,  
 onques ne furent plus hardi chevalier,  
 mien escïent, que en un jor entier  
 lor grant bonté ne porroie noncier.  
 Li premiers fiz, mentir ne vos en quier,



si fu Hernaut de Biaulende le fier.  
 Li autres fu, si com j'oi tesmongnier,  
 Mile de Puille, qui tant fist a proisier.  
 Li tierz après fu de Genvres Renier,  
 et li carz fu dan Girart le guerrier.

[At Saint-Denis, in the main abbey,  
 we find written—I don't doubt it at all—  
 in a book of great antiquity,  
 that there were three lineages (*gestes*) in strong France;  
 I don't think anyone will contradict me on this.  
 The most powerful is that of the kings of France,  
 and the next—it is right that I should say it—  
 was of Doon of the white beard,  
 the one from Mainz who was a very great lord.  
 In his lineage were fierce and rugged people;  
 they would have had the lordship of all of France  
 and of power and of knighthood,  
 were they not full of pride and envy.  
 From that lineage, in which there was so much treachery,  
 came Ganelon, who by his treason  
 caused great suffering in France the strong  
 when he committed in Spain the great felony  
 that caused the death, among the pagans,  
 of the Twelve Peers of France.  
 You have heard tell in many a song  
 that, from the lineage (*geste*) that sprang from Ganelon,  
 many a great knight was descended,  
 fierce and bold and of very great renown.  
 They would have been lords of the whole realm of France  
 if they had not been given to pride and treason;  
 but through pride—we tell you truly—  
 many a high-placed man has fallen to earth,  
 just as the angels of heaven—we know it in truth—  
 who, through their own fault,  
 were thrown down into the prison of hell  
 where they will feel nothing but eternal pain.  
 They lost the holy mansion of heaven  
 by their pride and their folly.

And like that were Ganelon's kin,  
 who were so powerful and of such great renown,  
 if only they had not been so prone to treason.  
 Of this lineage, which did nothing but evil,  
 was the second cycle (*geste*).  
 The third cycle (*geste*), which was extremely praise-worthy,  
 was that of Garin of Monglane, of the fierce countenance.  
 In his lineage I can well testify  
 that there was not a single coward or good-for-nothing  
 or traitor or base flatterer;  
 rather they were wise and bold knights  
 and good fighters and noble warriors.  
 Never once did they wish to betray a king of France;  
 they endeavored to help their legitimate lord  
 and to further his honor everywhere.  
 They advanced the cause of Christianity  
 and destroyed and confounded Saracens.  
 Garin of the fierce countenance had four sons;  
 never were there bolder knights,  
 in my opinion, with the result that if one had a whole day,  
 one could not do justice to their great qualities.  
 The first son—I have no wish to lie to you—  
 was Hernaut of Beaulande, the fierce.  
 The second, as I have heard tell, was  
 Milon of Apulia, who was so praiseworthy.  
 The third was Renier of Geneva,  
 and the fourth was lord Girart the warrior].

Bertran's claim to have found a written model in the Abbey of Saint-Denis for his concept of the cyclical organization of epic should probably not be taken seriously, as it reflects a commonplace in a genre whose poets frequently attempt to acquire an aura of authenticity by linking themselves with written authorities, and his insistence (*de ce ne doute mie, ne cuit que ja nus de ce me desdie*) only renders the claim more suspect.

That the deeds of Charlemagne's and Garin de Monglane's lineages should aggregate into cycles is natural, and indeed in the case of the second of these, which includes Guillaume d'Orange, compilers of cyclical manuscripts were to transform schematizations

such as Jean Bodel's into codicological reality by collecting disparate songs about the lineage into continuous narratives, patched together by transitional passages that they called *incidences* (Delbouille 1927, 1960; Duggan 1984b). But the other cycle, that of Doon de Mayence, commonly known today as the "Cycle of the Rebellious Vassals," is entirely factitious, a retrospective attempt to link together in one lineage extremely disparate poems about vassals who stood up to or rebelled against the royal power. The traitor Ganelon heads this family of talented but ill-starred barons that Bertran compares, in typical medieval figural fashion, to the fallen angels.<sup>5</sup>

The emphasis on the genealogical is intimately connected with the view of history found in the epic and propagated by the jongleurs, a view that is conveyed in the words of characters. As Bernier tells his companions in *Raoul de Cambrai* (Meyer and Longnon 1882:11. 4141-44):

"Soiés preudoume et bon combateour:  
Chascun remembre de son bon ancesor.  
Je nel volroie por une grant valour  
Povre chançon en fust par gogleour."  
[Be worthy men and good fighters:  
Let each one recall his good ancestor.  
I would not wish for anything  
That a poor song should be made about us by a jongleur.]

Prowess consists in acting as one's ancestors acted, and acting especially like the ones whose exploits were the subject of song, whether they were historical or simply assumed to be so.

## II

[In my first lecture, I discussed four functions of the medieval epic within the Romance cultures: entertainment, dissemination of information, sanctioning of conduct, and preservation of the memory of past events. The main subject of this second presentation is the exemplary function, although I will include some remarks about another aspect of the genre that underlies all those discussed, namely the economic function.]

The world of epic is not, any more than any other world presented in literature, randomly constructed. The characters who make it up—kings and queens, princes, knights, ladies, monks, priests, armorers, merchants, moneylenders, and peasants—and who are supposed to have lived in a certain period of the past stretching from Merovingian times to as late as the poet's own age, constitute a paradigmatic society that the singers hold up for admiration. The audience, in turn, takes those characters as models to imitate or as examples of conduct that is to be avoided. Don Juan Manuel, nephew of Alfonso the Learned, expresses this notion succinctly in his *Libro de los Estados*, completed in 1330, in a passage setting out the daily routine of the ideal emperor (Tate and Macpherson 1974:105): “Et desque oviere(n) comido et bebido lo quel cunpliere con tenprança et con mesura a la mesa, deve oir, si quisiere, juglares quel canten et tangan estormentes ante él, diziendo buenos cantares et buenas razones de cavalleria o de buenos fechos que mueban los talantes de los que los oyeren para fazer bien.” [And as soon as he has eaten and drunk what he wishes with temperance and moderation, he should, if he wishes, hear while still at table jongleurs singing to him and playing their instruments before him, pronouncing good songs and good tales of knighthood and of good deeds, that they might move the desires of those who hear them toward doing well.]

Alfonso the Learned, king of Castile and Leon, tells the reader of his *Siete Partidas* (López 1555: II.21.20) that it was the custom in ancient days that, just as in time of war knights learned how to accomplish feats of arms by watching others do them and by practicing such feats themselves, so in time of peace they learned them by listening:

E por esso acostumbrauan los caualleros, quando comian, que les leyessen las estorias de los grandes fechos de armas que los otros fizieran, e los sesos, e los esfuerços, que ouieron para saber los vencer, e acabar lo que querian. E alli do non auian tales escrituras, fazian lo retraer a los caualleros buenos e ancianos que se en ellos acertaun. E sin todo esto aun fazian mas, que non consentian que los juglares dixessen ante ellos otros cantares, si non de guerra, o que fablassen en fecho de armas. E esso mismo fazian que quando non podian dormir cada uno en su posada, se fazia leer, e retraer estas cosas sobredichas. E esto era porque oyendo las

les crescian las voluntades, e los coraçones, e esforçauan se, faziendo bien, e queriendo llegar a lo que los otros fizieran, o passaran por ellos.

[And on this account, while they ate, the knights were accustomed to have read to them the stories of great deeds of arms that others had done, and the strategems and the feats of strength that they accomplished so as to be able to win out and achieve what they wished. And when such writings were not available, they had the good and old knights familiar with such matters recall their experiences. They even did more than this, for they did not consent that the jongleurs should say songs before them unless they were about war or treated of military matters. And they did this also that, when each one in his own lodgings could not sleep, he had the above things read and recounted. And this was so that, hearing them, their will and their courage would grow, and they exerted themselves in doing good and striving to achieve what others had done or to surpass their efforts.]<sup>6</sup>

Don Juan Manuel and Alfonso are, of course, writers with a bias toward inculcating in their readers the norms of proper conduct. French texts figuring under this rubric also tend, quite naturally, to have a moralizing tone. In his *Chronique de Bertrand du Guesclin*, the fourteenth-century *trouvère* Cuvelier evokes examples from the epic past that knights should emulate (Charrière 1839:11. 10711-16):

Qui veult avoir le non des bons et des vaillans,  
 Il doit aler souvent a la pluie et au champs  
 Et estre en la bataille, ainsi que fist Rolans  
 Et li bers Olivier, et Ogier li poissans,  
 Les .iiii. fils Aymon, Charlemaine li grans,  
 Li ducs Lions de Bourges . . . .

[Whoever wants to have the reputation of the good and the valiant should go freely into the rain and the field and be in battle, as did Roland and stout-hearted Oliver and Ogier the powerful, the four sons of Aymon, Charlemagne the great,

the duke Lion of Bourges ...]

A Latin tale found in the *Summa praedicatorum* of the late fourteenth-century Dominican John of Bromyard concerns a jongleur of the king of France who was asked why there were no longer such worthy knights as Roland and Oliver; he replied: “Give me a king like Charlemagne and I will give you such knights as you are now naming” (Wright 1842:126).

Thus the sanctioning of conduct, while it might well have applied to those who actually performed the deeds on which jongleurs’ songs are based—if one believes that songs were initially composed shortly after the events they narrate—had its corresponding function, as concerned the later receiving culture, in the provision of models for the future conduct of those who listened to the jongleurs’ songs.

These models were not always displayed in peaceful surroundings, however. The image of the jongleur singing heroic poetry at the head of an army as it moves into battle is among the earliest depictions of the social function of French epic. Guy, bishop of Amiens, who died in 1074, describing in his *Carmen de Hastingae proelio* (Morton and Muntz 1972) the Battle of Hastings, to which he was an eyewitness, ascribes the initial victory of the battle to a jongleur named Incisor Ferri, that is to say the Latin equivalent of the French name Taillefer, who taunted the English by juggling with his sword before the Norman army. William of Malmesbury, writing more than a half-century later, does not mention Taillefer, but asserts that a *cantilena Rollandi*, that is to say a “Song of Roland,” was sung to the Normans before the battle so that “the warlike example of that hero might inflame those who were about to fight” (Stubbs 1889, 2:302). When Wace wrote his *Roman de Rou* in the seventh and eighth decades of the twelfth century, he combined the two accounts available to him and embellished them, stating that Taillefer, a good singer mounted on a swift horse, sang a song before William the Conqueror about Charlemagne, Roland, Oliver, and the vassals who died at Roncevaux. William then granted him the right to strike the first blow. Taillefer killed an Englishman and exhorted his companions to strike (Holden 1970-73:11. 8013-38). Naturally some controversy has arisen concerning the proper interpretation of these details, but even if William and Wace are passing on fabricated accounts—which I doubt—the notion that a jongleur should lead troops into battle while singing was obviously not considered

unlikely by at least one twelfth-century author, and that the jongleur should sing a heroic tale, that is to say a *chanson de geste*, was plausible to both Wace and William of Malmesbury, whose anecdotes show that the exemplary function operated in the High Middle ages as a factor in what John Benton (1978-79) has called the “enculturation of a warrior class.”

Valuable corroboration of this particular manifestation of the exemplary function is found in a curious episode recounted by the eleventh-century Rudolphus Tortarius in his *Miracles of Saint Benedict*: sometime around 1070 or 1080, Burgundian robbers formed an army and invaded the lands of the monastery of Fleury-sur-Loire. Confident of their strength, they had a jongleur (*scurra*) precede them, singing the deeds and wars of the past (*res . . . gestas et priorum bella*) so as to incite them to success. In a sense this testimony is even more precious than that of William of Malmesbury, because it involves a living—though perhaps unintentional—parody: the mob obviously wished to clothe its enterprise in proper military trappings and so assigned a jongleur to lead it while intoning *chansons de geste* in imitation of a genuine military practice (Certain 1858:337).

It is no accident, I believe, that both of these pieces of evidence concern the late eleventh century, the period in which Urban II appealed to the French nobility to imitate the *gesta praedecessorum vestrorum* in undertaking the First Crusade to the Orient. That the practice of jongleurs leading troops into battle while singing heroic poetry is not attested for France in the period in which the extant manuscripts of *chansons de geste* were produced indicates perhaps that it became less common around the turn of the twelfth century. While no jongleur leads knights into battle in the *Chanson de Guillaume*, the poem’s eponymous hero at one point is thought to be carrying back from the battle of the Archamp the body of his dead jongleur, characterized as a singer of epics concerning Clovis, Floovant, Pepin, Charlemagne, Roland, Girart de Vienne, and Oliver, but also as a valiant fighter (Wathelet-Willem 1975:11. 1247-74). Later references come from Italy: a jongleur of Pistoia, author of a song on the taking of the castle of Torniella in 1255, was named Guidaloste, that is to say “Guide-the-army,” and Andrea di Goro, a *cantastorie*, led the assault on the public palace of Florence in 1392 (see Menéndez Pidal 1957:264n).

In the *Chanson d’Antioche* one sees a particularly poignant



extension of the motif of the jongleur leading troops into battle. Before the Christian knights engage the Saracen troops led by Corbaran, the poet catalogues the various *eschieles*, companies ranged into battle formation. He is very well aware of the historical dimensions of his subject as he addresses his audience (Duparc-Quioc 1976:11. 7678-84):

Hui mais orés cançon de bien enluiminee  
 Issi com les escieles istront fors en la pree.  
 Jo nel di pas por çou, bone gens honoree,  
 Que jo ruisse del vo vaillant une denree,  
 Se iceste cançons molt bien ne vos agree,  
 Mais iceste proece doit estre ramembree,  
 Car tels cevalerie n'ert jamais recovree.

[From here on you will hear an inspired song  
 Of how the companies will go forth into the meadow.  
 I do not say this, good, honored people,  
 So that I can ask for a *denier's* worth from you,  
 Unless this song pleases you very much.  
 But such prowess should be commemorated,  
 For such knighthood will never again be recovered.]

The last company is made up of old warriors, silver-haired and seemingly enchanted. One of Corbaran's men, Amidelis, explains to the Saracen leader that these are good knights of ancient days who conquered Spain by the force of their arms (11. 8116-17). The prose version of *Antioche* specifies further that the company is made up of those who triumphed at Roncevaux (Duparc-Quioc 1976:399). It may surprise us to hear the Battle of Roncevaux referred to as a victory, but the writer of the prosification may see it as such either because Roland, the sole survivor of battle, died not of his wounds but from the effort of blowing his horn, or because the ultimate victory over Baligant, recounted in all the surviving French versions of the *Chanson de Roland* except that found in the Lyon manuscript, took place at Roncevaux. In any case this ghostly troop is no doubt meant to provide, within the confines of the *Chanson d'Antioche's* world, the same type of inspiration by example that a jongleur would evoke if he were to be depicted singing a *chanson de geste* as the army proceeded into battle.

Since epic poetry held up models for emulation, political

authorities must occasionally have been tempted to use its portrayals of history for their own ends. After all, penurious jongleurs could no doubt easily be persuaded to depict the deeds of ancient heroes in such a way as to make listeners want to join in contemporary undertakings in imitation of those heroes.

The depiction of the hero and his social status in the *Cantar de mio Cid* is somewhat at variance with history. The poet never mentions, for example, that Rodrigo of Bivar fought in the service of the Arab king of Saragossa, nor that the Cid's wife Jimena was related by blood to the royal family of Castile and Leon. This reticence has the double effect of making the political climate in which the Cid's achievements occur appear much more like that of late twelfth-century Castile than it actually was, and of presenting the hero's ascent from the low nobility to the kingship of Valencia as more dramatic than it was in history. It would not be so striking, after all, if a noble who was already related to the king by marriage should conquer a kingdom from the Moors: hardly a ripple would stir the surface of the social hierarchy. As it is, the poet may have intended *his* Cid's meteoric rise in status, as I will argue in greater detail in a forthcoming book, as an example to be imitated by Castilian knights on the lower echelons of society: if a knight such as Rodrigo of Bivar could rise to kingship through military prowess alone, against formidable odds and exiled from his ancestral home, then any noble, however modest his status, might reasonably attempt to emulate him.

Such a depiction would have been particularly appropriate in one of the darkest periods of the Reconquest, between the Battle of Alarcos in 1195 and the victory of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212 (Fradejas Lebrero 1962:52-57). This stretch of time corresponds well with the proposed dating of the poem to 1207 or shortly before, which has been gaining ground among *Cid* scholars over the past 30 years. If the theory is correct, then the *Cantar de mio Cid* is, among other things, a work of propaganda, a revision of history whose purpose was to entice the reluctant to follow the Cid's example in extending the limits of Christian Spain.

That the Oxford version of the *Chanson de Roland* shared this propagandistic quality is likely. The Oxford version is isolated from the other *chansons de geste* in the dates of its text and of the manuscript in which it is found. It is the only *chanson de geste* that has been dated with some confidence to the late eleventh century, that is to say to about fifty years before the

*terminus post quem* of the next oldest songs (for a summary of dating, see Duggan 1976-77, 1984a). The manuscript was probably copied in the second quarter of the twelfth century, likewise about fifty years before the next oldest manuscript (Samaran 1973, Short 1973, Duggan 1984a). We know that at least three versions of the *Roland* in assonance existed in medieval England—Oxford and the sources of the Norse and the Welsh versions (Aebischer 1954:278-81; Rejhon 1984:66-68)—and we have just considered the legend that a “Song of Roland” was sung at the Battle of Hastings. It is with some interest, then, that one reads in the Oxford version that Charlemagne crossed the salt sea to England and established the tribute of St. Peter’s pence (ll. 372-73).<sup>7</sup> The line immediately preceding that extraordinary claim assigns equally unhistorical conquests of Apulia and Calabria to Charlemagne. Since the Normans did in fact conquer all three areas in the eleventh century, the jongleur’s revision of history is a transparent attempt to legitimize William the Conqueror’s invasion by furnishing an historical antecedent for the military achievements of his highly gallicized subjects. This interpretation would also explain why a song about Roland, the “right arm” of the epic Charlemagne, was more appropriate at Hastings than any other *chanson de geste*.

That the epic should have been used as a tool of political propaganda is not incompatible with its essential orality. According to the chronicler Roger of Howden, writing sometime after 1189, William Longchamp, bishop of Ely, chancellor, and judiciar of England under Richard I, and a Norman by birth, commissioned French singers and jongleurs to sing about him in the public squares in order to increase the fame of his name (Stubbs 1868-71, 3:143). There is no trace of the written word in this anecdote, any more than there is in the vast majority of the stories about jongleurs that have come down to us from the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries.

I suspect that the motivation for writing down many of the *chansons de geste* was genealogical, families wishing to preserve accounts of their imagined—or perhaps in a few cases their real—ancestors. The propagandistic use of epics may, however, also account for the *mise par écrit* in some cases. In this regard Georges Duby’s study of the genealogical concerns of French nobility in the eleventh and twelfth centuries is relevant. Duby reports that families of various categories could trace their lineages back to three epochs: comtal families to the tenth century, families

of castellans to around the year 1000, and the families of petty nobility to the middle of the eleventh century. These limits correspond to the periods at which the fiefs of the respective levels of the nobility began to be passed on in a hereditary system rather than reverting to the sovereign after the holder's death. According to Duby (1973b:297), the desire to push the families' genealogies back beyond those limits to the privileged moment of the Carolingian period described by the *chanson de geste* inspired domestic historiographers to create legendary ancestors. Thus Lambert of Ardres invents in his history of the counts of Guines a Scandinavian pirate, Sifridus, who is said to have seduced the daughter of the Count of Flanders and to have thus founded the lineage of Guines. Duby's studies are based partly on work done by the historian Karl Ferdinand Werner, who has shown that knowledge of the *chanson de geste* furnishes a typical component of the early twelfth-century genealogical legends of French noble families (1960:116-18). While all this suggests the possibility that the epic also invents ancestors for the convenience of noble families and that some *chansons de geste* were copied down as records of mythical ancestral lines, we can unfortunately seldom trace the provenience of a *chanson de geste* manuscript back beyond the fifteenth century.

Wolfgang Van Emden, editor of *Girart de Vienne*, has hypothesized that Bertran de Bar-sur-Aube's version of that poem was composed to please the family of Marie de Champagne, whose daughter Scholastica married William II, count of Mâcon and titular count of Vienne, around 1183, that is to say close to the time when Bertran composed his version. William had suffered several humiliations at the hands of King Louis VII of France, and Van Emden asks whether Bertran's transformation of Girart from a felon into an unjustly persecuted vassal was not politically motivated.

Broader purposes for the Oxford version of the *Chanson de Roland* have been proposed by John F. Benton (1978-79), all of which would come under the heading of the exemplary function as I conceive it: to glorify warfare, to stress the value of fighting the infidel, to inspire loyalty to king and country, and above all to inculcate values of group loyalty. While Benton limited his remarks largely to the *Roland* itself, what he has to say applies to most *chansons de geste* of the cycles of Charlemagne and Guillaume, and to many others outside those cycles.

Alfred Adler's (1975) model of the epic's exemplary function in society is brilliant and *sui generis*. Adler conceives of the epic poets as speculative observers, setting out examples of extreme conduct in response to extreme social pressures: what might happen, for example, if a good vassal were to be confronted by a bad lord, or if a lord were too close to his nephew or unjustifiably alienated from him, and so on. The *chansons de geste* thus portray a system of relations which should be viewed as a whole rather than in fragmentary fashion, so that one has an idea of the full spectrum of human responses to a variety of social situations.

The exemplary function is quite complex. I do not pretend to have exhausted its possibilities, but only to have sketched out a few of them.

In dealing with the last of the six social aspects of epic discussed here, the economic function, one must distinguish between the recompense accorded to the jongleurs themselves and the ways in which others profited from their craft. Jongleurs often tell us in the course of their songs that they are not singing purely for the sake of art. The poet of *Aliscans* formulates the principle by which all jongleurs probably lived (Weinbeck et al. 1903:4579 l-q):

Bien vos puis dire et por voir afermer:  
 Prodon ne doit jougleor escouter  
 S'il ne li veut por Dieu del sien donner.  
 Car il ne sait autrement laborer;  
 De son service ne se peut il clamer;  
 S'on ne li done, a tant le laisse ester.

[I can tell you and affirm for sure:  
 A worthy man should not listen to a jongleur  
 unless he wants to give him some of his own, for God's sake.  
 For he [i.e., the jongleur] does not know how to work otherwise;  
 he [i.e., the patron] cannot demand his service;  
 if one does not give to him [i.e., the jongleur], then let him  
 leave off right there.]

Jongleurs occasionally appeal for money in asides, as in *Gui de Bourgogne* (Guessard and Michelant 1859:11. 4135-37), where the poet states baldly that anyone who wishes to hear the rest of his

song should loosen his purse-strings: since this passage comes toward the end of the text, just before the capture of the legendary Saracen city of Luiserne, it amounts to a threat to leave the audience hanging. A similar passage is found at the beginning of an episode in *Les Enfances Renier* (Cremonesi 1957:11. 1188-90), whose text has been dated by its editor to the second half of the thirteenth century. The poet of *Doon de Nanteuil* conveniently allows us to look in on the beginning of a performance (Meyer 1884:16-17):

Il est einsint coustume en la vostre contree,  
 Quant un chanterres vient entre gent henoree  
 Et il a endroit soi sa vielle atempree,  
 Ja tant n'avra mantel ne cote desramee  
 Que sa premiere laisse ne soit bien escoutee,  
 Puis font chanter avant, se de rien lor agree,  
 Ou tost, sans villenie, puet recoillir s'estree.

[Thus it is the custom in your land  
 when a singer comes among honored people  
 and has, for his part, tuned his *vielle*,  
 that his first *laisse* be listened to  
 before he gets a cloak or a used jacket;  
 then they have him sing on, if it pleases them,  
 or else, without trouble, he can soon be on his way again.]

Thus the jongleur's performance was "on approval": audiences who did not like the subject as announced in the first *laisse* could send him off with no obligation to pay. Other appeals for money are found in *Jehan de Lannon*, *Baudouin de Sebourc*, and *La Naissance du chevalier au cygne* (Gautier 1892, 2:124n). Many a *chanson de geste* mentions gifts of cloaks, capes, furs, and even of precious cups, horses, and mules, extravagant gifts in the medieval economy. On June 14, 1300, at the marriage of Galeas and Beatrice of Este, a chronicler records that more than seven thousand pieces of clothing were distributed to the jongleurs (*ibid.*, 2:134n).

A striking passage in the delightful mid-thirteenth-century *chanson de geste* entitled *Huon de Bordeaux* records a jongleur in the midst of an oral performance. The poem in the Tours manuscript, basis for the edition (Ruelle 1960), is 10,553 lines long. Almost half-way through, at line 4,976, the jongleur announces

that, as the audience can well see, it is evening and he is quite tired. Wishing to take a drink, he will cease his performance. He asks those before him to return the next day after dinner, each one bringing as contribution a *maille*—that is to say a copper coin worth half a *denier*—but not, he specifies, a *poitevin*, which was worth only a quarter *denier*. Judging from that passage, a day intervenes before the next *laisse* begins, although there is no mark in the Tours manuscript to so indicate. The story continues: “Now I should speak again of Huelin [that is ‘little Huon’] who was in the bed of the giant from across the sea.” After the tale has progressed for seven *laisse*s, a total of 521 lines, the jongleur addresses his listeners again, complaining that although he has presented the song, the audience has hardly given him any money. He threatens to end his performance right then and there unless enough donations are given to his wife. No passage of a *chanson de geste* provides a clearer notion of the jongleur at work among his audience. Incidentally, the text also confirms that *Huon* was composed orally and taken down from performance, since no other hypothesis accounts adequately for the poet’s knowing that at this moment in his tale evening was descending, a drink was available, and the audience would be amenable to narrative blackmail.<sup>8</sup> (For discussion of other poets’ statements as evidence for oral composition or transmission, see Duggan 1980-81b.)

The second economic aspect of the *chansons de geste* is the way in which other elements of society profited from them. Joseph Bédier presented in his book *Les Légendes épiques*, first published between 1908 and 1913, the theory that the *chansons de geste* sprang from a collaboration between jongleurs and clerics who wanted to attract pilgrims to their monasteries, churches, and shrines. While this idea has not, as a theory of *origins*, survived the objections of Bédier’s opponents, it might well be reformulated as a theory of *distribution*. The jongleurs’ songs, often referring to heroic mementos or relics that were housed in monasteries located along the major routes of pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela or Rome, undoubtedly inspired many a prospective traveler to undertake a journey that would satisfy both his curiosity about objects associated with epic heroes and his desire for spiritual benefit. Likewise, inasmuch as epics generated a desire to visit the sites of famous battles, such as the Vaubeton of *Girart de Roussillon*, the Aliscans of the Guillaume cycle, or the Roncevaux of the *Roland*, the *chanson de geste*, and perhaps also the *cantar*



*de gesta*, contributed to the movement of people and thus the circulation of goods and money that is such an important element in any economy.

The Church's condemnation of jongleurs is not explicable solely on the basis of their status as economic hangers-on or wanderers or purveyors of spectacle. The fact that jongleurs also perpetuated the conceptions of history of the illiterate majority, whose collective memory was preserved in orally transmitted tales, made them a threat to that segment of society that privileged the written word. Just as, if one is to lend credence to Eric Havelock's (1963) thesis, Plato reacted against the poets because for him they represented the legacy of the preliterate past, so churchmen of the high Middle Ages saw the jongleurs as rivals to their own—literate—view of history informed by the relationship between God and man. For clerics, the theory of history was defined by the three momentous contacts between time and eternity: the Creation, the Incarnation, and the Second Coming (see Duggan forthcoming b). Man's life was seen primarily as a cycle of fall, redemption, and salvation, and the clerical culture, preserved in writing and based, after all, upon the Great Writing, the Scriptures, rejected any rival view of history along with the competing values that it implied.

In the relationship between oral and written culture, the jongleur's narrative epitomizes the pleasure given by the spoken word. Alain of Lille, on the other hand, betrays in his *Summa de arte praedicatoria* a clerical bias in linking the jongleur with undesirable prolixity: "Verbositas hominem mutat in scurram, transformat in mimum, in jocularorem deiicit, humanae naturae deponit dignitatem" [Wordiness turns man into a jester, transforms him into an actor, casts him to the level of a jongleur, lowers the dignity of human nature] (cited in Casagrande and Vecchio 1979:917). The vow of silence is a common enough feature of Christian asceticism, but how many monks have been known to take vows not to *write*? But the principal reason for the opposition between the two cultures, in my opinion, was that the jongleurs' songs, encapsulating as they did another view of the past, calibrated not with Christian history—despite their Christian veneer, inevitable in such a society—but with the worldly achievements of a few heroic lineages, were viewed with hostility, especially during the period in which the great mass of the population had little direct access to written culture.

From the period before the twelfth century, we have only a few scattered references to epic texts, and only one surviving example, the Oxford version of the *Chanson de Roland*. Even that single exception is preserved only in a twelfth-century manuscript, the only epic codex in the Romance languages to which a twelfth-century dating can be ascribed with assurance, that is to say on paleographic grounds (Short 1973, Samaran 1973). With the transformation in the Church's attitude toward jongleurs that began in the twelfth century, outlined in the first of these lectures, the clerics, custodians of the written culture, very gradually began to act with greater security and less suspicion toward them. The thirteenth century, in which St. Francis' followers assumed the jongleur's image and Thomas Aquinas justified the jongleur's salvation, is also the period during which the majority of the epic manuscripts now extant were copied on parchment (Duggan 1984a, 1985) and during which the first epic poets whom we can definitely identify as "authors" created their works in writing. Only then, when the written culture had become somewhat more firmly established, when literacy had begun to make inroads among the aristocracy, and when clerics had started to lose their sense of rivalry with the oral, in certain circles at least, did complete *chansons de geste* penetrate the scriptorium on a large scale.

Despite the fact that what we have of medieval epic texts is preserved in codices, however, the genre was not primarily the product of the scriptorium. I would like to go back for a moment to a topic that I alluded to at the beginning of my opening lecture, namely the theory of the text. If the jongleur typically performed without a book—and I am sure we have noticed the characteristic lack of the object "book" in medieval depictions of the epic in performance, a lack that is just as typical in iconographic representations—then the modern student of medieval literature has an obligation not just to teach and write about the epic as primarily an oral phenomenon, but also to make awareness of that orality a commonplace in the editing of *chansons de geste* and *cantares de gesta*. Contexts of performance contributed just as heavily to a poem's meaning in the Middle Ages as did the other aspects of its existence that have traditionally dominated philological inquiry. Only through a developed textual pragmatics can we hope to approximate an awareness of the attitudes of poet and audience toward the living work. After it was taken down, of course, the text underwent the normal processes of scribal

transmission in its book forms.

I would like at this point to construct the scenario of a late twelfth-century jongleur's performance. I imagine a character seated on a bench in the public square of a fortified town in Picardy, dressed in a loose-fitting shirt and pants, and on top of them a tunic and a coat. He is rather disreputable-looking, somewhat unkempt and in need of a bath. He is intoning, to a repeating melody sustained on his own *vielle*, a *chanson de geste* concerning knights who have gone as pilgrims to the Holy Land and who have been waylaid by a troop of Saracens. It is the second song he has started that day, the other having attracted no audience. In front of him is an open cloth, in its center a smattering of small coins. A rather animated crowd has gathered around him, some—mostly young—seated and listening intently to his tale, others talking to their neighbors or pausing for a moment before passing on to other concerns, still others in the process of arriving or leaving. A few knights and ladies, clad in expensive clothing and furs, are on the edge of a crowd which is mostly made up of townspeople and of peasants who have brought their produce into town to offer it for sale. Seemingly the most fascinated person in his audience is a young noble, about fourteen years of age, whose attention the jongleur holds by praising the brave exploits of the boy's maternal uncle, a man forty years his senior who died many years before on the return journey from Jerusalem. Suddenly a frowning priest pushes his way into the crowd, grabs the youth by the arm, and leads him out of the gathering, but not before the boy has managed to drop his own tunic onto the jongleur's pile of coins.

Is there a text in this scene? Not in the strict sense of a parchment codex, but beside the jongleur is a tonsured clerk, obviously in minor orders, taking down as fast as he can the tale he is hearing. He has a frustrated look on his face that appears to derive as much from the inadequacy of his writing materials as from the speed with which the jongleur is singing.

The song I imagine is familiar to the adult members of the audience, and most of the children, with the exception of the fourteen-year-old, have heard it. On this particular occasion they listen not because it brings them news that they did not know, or because the characters or the plot are new—although certainly some of the episodes, despite their familiar ring, were lacking in previous performances that they had heard—but because it

distracts them from their troubles and assures them once again that they are who they are, descendants of men and woman who knew some of the nobles the jongleur is mentioning.

The six major functions of medieval epic as it existed in the Romance cultures are illustrated in this scenario. The distinctions among them are not always clear, and there were no doubt few such scenes in which all of them came into play. Three were paramount during the period from which our texts descend: the economic function, without which the jongleurs would have little motivation; the entertainment function, without which their enormous popularity could never have been established; and the exemplary function, the primary mechanism of enculturation. Above all, as I have just adumbrated, the epic encapsulated the popular view of what it meant in diachronic terms to belong to a social group. In Ezra Pound's phrase, it was the "tale of the tribe," or, in the period that concerns us, the tale of the kinship group, the region, the language group, as it viewed its own past. As that kind of tale, it took on the qualities of a secular ritual, a reinforcement of group identity, and that was no doubt its most important role in medieval society. In my view the functions filled by medieval epic in modern society are just as fascinating and even more complex, but that would be the subject of another lecture.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>In a forthcoming book on economy and society in the *Cantar de mio Cid*.

<sup>2</sup>The surprising thing is that these are lines 3036ff. of the edition of Weinbeck et al., and *not* the beginning of the text. Gérard thus begins his performance in the middle of the poem.

<sup>3</sup>Both poems are rather chronicle-like in tone, but share the formal characteristics of the *chanson de geste*.

<sup>4</sup>In addition to *Girart de Vienne*, *Doon de Maience*, ll 125-29, and *La Mort Aymeri de Narbonne*, 1-71, 3053-93.

<sup>5</sup>Bertran's division does not, of course, take in the whole of medieval French epic, since it does not account for the Crusade Cycles or for a number of individual poems.

<sup>6</sup>I have consulted the Scott (1931) translation, *Las Siete Partidas*, 428-29,

but have preferred a more literal rendering that brings out nuances pertinent to the present topic.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. 1. 2332: Et Engleterre que il [i.e., Charlemagne] teneit sa cambre [And England, which he held as his bedchamber].

<sup>8</sup>Of the three manuscripts, two (Tours and Turin, closely related in other respects as well) contain the passages in question. See Ruelle 1960:9-15.

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