

The Reception of the Chansons de Geste

Paula Leverage

Purdue University

This article surveys the external evidence, dating from the eleventh to the sixteenth century, relating to the reception of the chansons de geste. The evidence, from sermons, property records, and a musical treatise, suggests a reception context for the chansons de geste which has strong ties with monasteries and ecclesiastical institutions, and which was institutionalized to some extent through confraternities, and probably exploited by the Church to political and doctrinal ends. The existence of such an audience does not necessarily place it in competition with military, aesthete, or marketplace audiences, since there may be many reception contexts for the genre.

Who was the audience of the chansons de geste? When we pose any question about the audience of the chansons de geste, a number of additional questions must follow, which sharpen its focus. Which chansons de geste are we talking about? Are we referring to oral performances, public recitals read from manuscripts, or an audience of individual readers reading either aloud or silently? Was there only one kind of audience at any particular point in the genre's history, since the extant poems range in date from the eleventh through the fourteenth centuries? What about the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century audiences who read adaptations of the epics in the Bibliothèque Bleue series (Babister), or the twentieth-century audience who knows Roland from Frank Cassenti's film (1978), or from the comic book *Roland: Days of Wrath* from the Terra Major miniseries (Amaya, Moon and Ba)?¹

Scholarly discussion of the reception of the chansons de geste during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries occurs mostly in the context of the debate about the origins, and thus performance, of the genre, with one or two exceptions, when the audience becomes part of a consideration of the social functions of the epic (e.g. Duggan, "Social Functions"). Several very different audiences of the chansons de geste have been proposed. On the basis of twelfth-century references by William of Malmesbury and Wace to a jongleur at the head of an army, incanting a song about Roland, and Pope Urban II's exhortation to crusaders at Clermont in 1095 to be inspired by the deeds (*gesta*) of Charlemagne and King Louis, a military audience has been suggested by Louis Bréhier, who emphasizes the importance of the *Chanson de Roland* in promoting the Crusades (*L'Eglise et l'Orient*, p. 48) and more recently by John F. Benton ("Nostre Franceis") and Joseph Duggan

¹ With respect to the eighteenth-century Bibliothèque Universelle des Romans, see Keith Busby's "Roman breton," pp. 17-45.

(“Social Functions,” pp. 748-52).² The work of Edward A. Heinemann (*L’art métrique*) and Jean-Paul Carton (“Oral-Traditional Style”), describing the complexity and artfulness of the genre, suggests implicitly a fairly sophisticated audience which might engage with, and appreciate the intricacies of, the genre’s style. Joseph Bédier’s work, of course, proposes an audience of pilgrims. Traditionally, and perhaps overridingly, the *chanson de geste* has been presented as an oral, sung genre, performed in marketplaces for thronging masses of peasants. Léon Gautier’s imaginative portrayal of what he calls “the day, the year, the life of the *jongleur de geste*,” in the second volume of his study of the *chansons de geste*, has been influential in spite of its predominantly fictive status:

Mais déjà le bruit de son arrivée a couru dans tout le pays; on se le montre, on l’entoure, on le suit: “Un jongleur, un jongleur” et, avant d’avoir ouvert la bouche, il a déjà plus de cent auditeurs. La place est en face de l’église; c’est un *âtre* au milieu duquel il y a un bel orme, vieux de deux ou trois siècles... il y a un banc où viennent s’asseoir les vieilles gens qui espèrent se chauffer au soleil. C’est sur ce banc que monte le jongleur, et il commence par exécuter sur sa vielle quelques accords bruyants, et même un peu criards, pour attirer la foule. Autour de lui le cercle s’épaissit. L’auditoire est des plus variés... (*Les épopées*, pp. 112-13).

This nineteenth-century reconstruction of the reception of the *chansons de geste* is the image often conjured in classrooms and lecture halls in survey courses of early medieval literature. Joseph Duggan in his Milman Parry lecture has also given his reconstruction of a *jongleur*’s performance, which is more detailed than Gautier’s, and includes the figure of a hooded monk trying with much frustration to transcribe the performance onto wax tablets (“Social Functions,” p. 759).

Reconstructions of the performance of the *chansons de geste* are alluring precisely because hard evidence about the reception of the *chansons de geste* is relatively scarce. What we know with some certainty about these poems falls into four categories: a) references to the *chansons de geste* in writing such as sermons, letters and musical treatises; b) internal evidence from the texts of the poems; c) the codicological evidence of the extant manuscripts; d) the transmission history of the manuscripts. Additionally, there is a large body of scholarly articles and books debating the relative orality or literariness of the *chansons de geste*, which has largely centered on arguments based on internal evidence, namely the poems’ style.³ Here I discuss only the first category of evidence, ranging in date from the eleventh to the sixteenth century, about the reception context of the *chansons de geste* from sources external to the poems themselves.

The external evidence available gives some laconic details about the place of performance, the composition of the audience, the material offered to the audience, and the audience’s reaction. Most of the

² Joseph J. Duggan has also argued that the verse lines of the *chanson de geste* derive from the Vulgar Latin songs sung by the soldiers of the Roman armies (“The Antecedents,” pp. 167-74).

³ On the oral composition of the *chansons de geste*, see Rychner, *La chanson de geste*, and Duggan, *The Song of Roland*. For a perspective challenging the orality of the genre, see Delbouille, “Les chansons de geste.”

known external references to the *chansons de geste* come from sermons, historical treatises, and occasionally property records. The evidence suggests a reception context for the chansons de geste which has strong ties with monasteries and ecclesiastical institutions. The existence of such an audience does not necessarily place it in competition with the military, aesthete, or marketplace audiences mentioned above, since, as stated, there may be many reception contexts for the genre. However, the monastic and ecclesiastical audience has not been sufficiently emphasized in chanson de geste scholarship. This may be explained by the lack of clarity surrounding the term jongleur. If we mistakenly assume that all jongleurs were condemned by the Church, and recognize that the chansons de geste were performed by jongleurs, then we are unlikely to admit an ecclesiastical audience. Carla Casagrande and Silvana Vecchio emphasize the extent to which jongleurs were ostracized:

L'homme d'Église ne s'adresse *directement* au jongleur que pour signifier ce qu'implique son exclusion de la société des hommes et de la communauté des fidèles au regard de la loi civile et religieuse. Les manuels de droit canonique, les manuels de confession, les décrets pontificaux, conciliaires, synodaux ratifient cette expulsion en refusant au jongleur l'accès aux sacraments et aux lieux sacrés ("Clercs et jongleurs," p. 914).

However, all jongleurs were not made equal, and the jongleurs who performed chansons de geste and saints' lives were distinct from the contortionist jongleurs who were denied the sacraments and even entry into sacred places. The *locus classicus* for ecclesiastical tolerance of the chansons de geste is a passage from a thirteenth-century penitential (c. 1216) written by an English cleric, Thomas Chobham, who was the sub-deacon of Salisbury and the archbishop of Canterbury (Page, *The Owl*, pp. 22-27). Chobham makes an exception for those jongleurs who perform "gesta principum et vitam sanctorum" ["the deeds of princes and the lives of saints"]. Thomas Chobham's doctrine appears to represent a widely held view of minstrels, since it appears in a number of penitentials (*sommes de pénitence*) of the thirteenth century, in Thomas Docketing, and in the fifteenth-century *Jardin des Nobles*, as well as in the work of Peter the Chanter (Gautier, *Les épopées*, vol. 2, p. 23). Recognizing the extent to which the chansons de geste interface with a monastic or ecclesiastical context has important implications for our contemporary understanding of the chansons de geste.

The external evidence connecting the chansons de geste to a monastic and ecclesiastical context demonstrates three ways in which religious culture and religious authority engaged with the jongleurs and the chanson de geste: 1) the religious (priest, monks, etc.) constituted an important audience for the poems; 2) the jongleurs were involved in confraternities which constitute a further religious forum and contextualization for the poems' reception; 3) audience response, either intended and directed, or actual, drew parallels between the heroic deeds of epic heroes and the venerated lives of saints; in other words, the chanson de geste might well have carried a significant residue of religious meaning or association for some audiences.

These findings corroborate a growing body of evidence which indicates quite clearly that the chansons de geste have a strong clerical connection. The pioneer in this domain was, of course, Joseph Bédier, who advanced the theory that the chansons de geste were composed and recited along the great pilgrimage routes. While Bédier's theory has been hotly contested as a theory of origins, it has been suggested that his ideas may be "reformulated as a theory of *distribution*" (Duggan, "Social Functions," p. 756). Most recently, work on the manuscript tradition of the poems by Keith Busby (*Codex and Context*), and on the Oxford *Roland* by Andrew Taylor, suggests that the poems, if not composed in monasteries, were at least copied and read there. Keith Busby argues that the vernacular and the monastic were not mutually exclusive:

... there is no real incompatibility of vernacular narrative and monastic setting, linked as they are from the beginnings of manuscript production. Furthermore, while it may be true that some religious authors railed against the popularity of secular tales as harmful to the soul, there is little doubt that the intellectually curious inhabitants of monastic institutions enjoyed non-spiritual literature as well as the more morally uplifting kind, either openly or in secret (p. 736).

The evidence from sources external to the poems confirms Busby's view that the secular and the monastic are not incompatible. There is good reason to believe that between 1376 and 1564 jongleurs performed chansons de geste to the monks of Beauvais at Christmas, Easter and Pentecost before the High Mass. The statutes of the fief of the confraternity of jongleurs of Beauvais from 1376 state that the proprietor of the fief will be charged with the expenses of jongleurs performing chansons de geste on high feast days.

Item le dit Jehan a cause du dit fief est tenu de faire chanter de geste ou cloistre de l'eglise saint Pierre de Beauvez le jour de Noel, le jour de grans Pasques, et le jour de Penthecoustes depuis prime lasquie jusques atant que on commenche l'Evangile de la grant messe ou cas que il puet recouvrer de chanteur en le ville de Beauvez... (qtd. in Faral, *Les jongleurs*, p. 45).

It is significant that in this case the chansons de geste were not performed in the church as part of the liturgy, but in the cloister of the monastery. In the cloister, the monks interacted with lay people from the community for business purposes, but they worked and prayed there too.⁴ Mary Carruthers has emphasized the role of the architecture of the cloisters in meditation. She describes the cloister as a "richly rememorative structure" which was "surrounded by *intercolumnia* which, as at the Cistercian abbey of Fontenay, 'divide' the space within the gallery walks into a series of visual *cellae*" (*The Craft of Thought*, p. 272). She compares the cloister to a church: "Like the church, the cloister has its *ductus*, its very predictability and simplicity—its

⁴ In seeking to explain the source of the quadrangular shape of the cloister, first codified in the "Plan of St. Gall," Walter Horn has emphasized the role of economics born of "the association of Benedictine monasticism with a new type of agrarian feudalism" which brought increasingly more lay people from the community into the monasteries (Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, p. 272).

‘silence’—giving it extraordinary cognitive flexibility” (p. 272). It is within this meditative space that the monks of Beauvais heard, and perhaps reflected upon, the chansons de geste.

The alignment of the jongleurs’ performances with high feast days suggests that the jongleurs would have acquired a heightened awareness of the liturgical calendar through the practical ways in which it determined their lives. In addition to performing on high feast-days, as was the case in Beauvais, it has been argued that since the jongleurs were forbidden to perform during Lent, they used this time to attend “minstrel schools” which were gatherings of jongleurs sent by their employers, or on their own initiative, to share and learn new repertoire (Reese, *Music in the Middle Ages*, p. 203). One might expect that such practical intimacy with the liturgical calendar would manifest itself in the chansons de geste, and this is indeed the case. In *Girart de Roussillon* narrative events are aligned with the liturgical calendar, such that Girart’s return from exile occurs on Easter Sunday (Leverage, “Reading Hagiography”).

The statutes make a second reference to the performances in the monastery of Beauvais in 1564 when an amending clause signals an end to this practice. Perhaps even more interesting than the documented performance of chansons de geste in monastery cloisters, is the eventual suppression of the tradition, which according to the dates given for the original statute and the amending clause, was lengthy.

Et pour ce que l’on ne chante plus les dits gestes ou cloistre de la dicte eglise, – du consentement du chapitre de mon dit seigneur, – le dit Pierre Gayant... (qtd. in Faral, *Les jongleurs*, p. 45).

In addition to being recited in cloisters, it is probable that the chansons de geste were also recited inside monasteries, in the refectory during mealtimes, especially under the Benedictine Rule, perhaps even using liturgical chant (John Stevens, *Words and Music*, p. 247).⁵ Andrew Taylor’s study of Bodleian MS Digby 23 leads him to the conclusion the Oxford *Roland* “was never far from clerical hands” and he conjectures that:

The book may have had something of the status of a saint’s life, serving as an inspirational moral poem to read aloud, or possibly even to chant, to the canons and their guests in the refectory (*Textual Situations*, p. 59).

A fourteenth-century inscription in the Welbeck manuscript of Anglo-Norman saints’ lives (London, BL, Add. 70513) from the time when it belonged to the community of Augustinian nuns of Campsey Priory in Suffolk is clear evidence that vernacular texts were read during mealtimes in religious institutions:

⁵ Busby notes that “The Benedictines seem to show the most predilection for vernacular narrative among the English religious houses, for with the exception of Guy de Beauchamp’s bequest to the Cistercians of Bordesley, all the manuscripts falling under the purview of this study were owned by them” (*Codex and Context*, vol. 2, p. 753).

Ce livre deviseie a la priorie de Kanpseie de lire a mangier (qtd. in Busby, *Codex and Context*, vol. 2, p. 750).

My second example of contact between a monastic institution and a confraternity of jongleurs indicates a somewhat different dynamic between the monks and the jongleurs. In the case of the Beauvais confraternity, the audience was composed of monks. In our second example, the audience appears to be a lay religious audience, composed perhaps of visitors to the monastery's relics, while the confraternity of jongleurs collaborates with the Benedictines to disseminate information about the monastery's relics. The earliest association between a monastery and a confraternity of jongleurs dates back to the first half of the eleventh century (Faral, *Les jongleurs*, p. 138). The confraternity was established under the protection of St. Martin in Fécamp, Normandy and associated with the Benedictine monastery of Holy Trinity, which was famous for its relics of the Precious Blood (Gouttebroze, "A l'origine"). The relics of the Precious Blood are connected to the relic known as the St. Voulte de Luques, which is a carving of the crucified Christ by Nicodemus, who miraculously reproduced Christ's likeness in the wood. It is believed that vials of Christ's blood were attached to the St. Voulte. Jean-Guy Gouttebroze has shown how the two legends of the Precious Blood in Fécamp and the St. Voulte in Lucca, Italy have been influenced by each other. The mission of the confraternity of jongleurs at Fécamp appears to have been to propagate the cult of the Holy Blood, and it is probable that the jongleurs involved in the propagation of the legend were the jongleurs we associate with the chansons de geste.

The thirteenth-century poem of *Saint Voulte de Lucques* in the vernacular (ed. Foerster), which is linguistically compatible with the area of Fécamp, is written in decasyllabic, assonanced laisses, and in its style resembles the chanson de geste. One might wonder if the style of the chanson de geste was adopted to more effectively transmit what amounts to religious propaganda to the lay religious. Additionally, one of the characters of the poem, Hélène, echoes the famous words of Roland when her husband suggests to her that she should leave the battle, "Ne nus jongleres mauvairement n'en chant" (l. 227).

The interest of chanson de geste poets in the legend of St. Voulte in general is attested by three references to St. Voulte, in *Aliscans* (ll. 4759-69), *Ogier le Danois* (II, laisse 367), and *Raoul de Cambrai* (ll. 4208-09) (Gouttebroze, "A l'origine," p. 4). The most extensive reference to the St. Voulte legend occurs in *Aliscans* which reproduces a detail of a twelfth-century Latin text, preserved at Lucca. The Latin text recounts how a minstrel, ashamed that he is unable to make an offering to Saint Voulte, started to sing and play before him. Saint Voulte rewards him by throwing at him one of his silver slippers. In *Aliscans* these details are reproduced:

Bien vos puis dire et por voir afermer,
 Prodom ne doit juleor escouter,
 S'il ne li velt por dieu del suen doner.
 Car il ne set autrement laborer.

De son servise ne se puet il clamer;
 S'en ne li done, atant le laisse ester.
 Au vout de Luque le poez esprover,
 Qui li gita de son pié son soller;
 Puis le covint chierement rachater.
 Les juleors devroit on mout amer:
 Joie desirrent et aiment le chanter. (ll. 4759-69)

The involvement of jongleurs in confraternities clearly contradicts Casagrande and Vecchio's point, cited above, that the jongleurs were on the margins of society and excluded from recognized institutions. The fact that the jongleurs are reportedly involved in confraternities rather than trade guilds is also significant, since the principal distinction between the two is that the former is a professional body and the latter a religious society (Runnalls, "Mediaeval Trade Guilds," p. 263). In addition to holding masses and religious ceremonies, confraternities also fulfilled charitable functions. Faral has argued that the main charitable responsibilities of the confraternity of Arras, established in 1120, was to honor the dead. He comments:

Il apparaît bien alors que la confrérie des Ardents était, comme beaucoup d'autres en France, une mutuelle funéraire. (*Les jongleurs*, p. 138).

The statutes of the confraternity of Amiens also relate to the care of the dead (Faral, *Les jongleurs*, p.140). In Paris, the confraternity of minstrels, which appears to have included only instrumentalists, was established on the Feast of the Holy Cross (September 14) in 1321 (Faral, p. 128). The interest in the cult of the dead, apparent in these confraternities of jongleurs, may relate to their status as individuals whose work it is to represent, and commemorate, which Jean-Guy Gouttebroze has recently argued is the manner in which the jongleurs of saints and *gesta* redeemed themselves in the eyes of the Church ("A l'origine," p. 6).

Moving from the monastic context to the ecclesiastical, 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. What stands out in the references to the chansons de geste in the sermons is the degree of emotional involvement of the audience with the poems. In one case the audience's reaction is described, and in another we can see how the preacher encourages the lay audience to draw comparisons between epic and religious material, but in each case the audience is fully engaged with the material.

One of the most vivid references to the performance of a chanson de geste comes from a thirteenth-century sermon, which describes the performance of a chanson de geste on a bridge in Paris.

Cum voce jocularis, in parvo ponte sedentis, quomodo illi strenui milites antique, scilicet Rolandus et Oliverius, et cetera, in bello occubuere recitatur, populus circumstans pietate movetur et interdum lacrymatur.

The voice of the minstrel sitting on the Petit Pont tells how the mighty soldiers of long ago, such as Roland, Oliver and the rest, were slain in battle, then the people standing around them are moved to pity and periodically burst into tears (qtd. and trans. in Page, *The Owl*, p. 177).⁶

This striking description seems to support the idea that the poems were performed to a popular audience in an outdoor setting. However, the bridge does not necessarily indicate an outdoor setting for the performance, since throughout the Middle Ages, the two bridges of Paris linking the Île-de-la-Cité to the banks of the Seine, the Petit Pont and the Grand Pont, were built up with houses, shops and mills. Indeed the bridges were, in many ways, the center of medieval Paris's activity (Egbert, *On the Bridges*, p. 21). The Grand Pont was so established as a center for money changers and goldsmiths that Philippe le Bel, in 1304, ordered that the Exchange be set up on the east side of the bridge and forbade the money changers to conduct their affairs in any other location (Egbert, p. 22). In a letter to a friend, written in c. 1175, Gui de Bazoches⁷ characterizes the Grand Pont, which led to the Right Bank, as commercial, while he describes the Petit Pont, which led to the Left Bank, as being filled "with logicians who pass by, walk about, or discuss there" (Berger, *Public Access*, p. 3). This is a reference to one of the schools of Paris that had been established in a house on the Petit Pont during the twelfth century, by an Englishman, Adam du Petit Pont or Adam Parvipontanus, whose group of philosophers is known as the *parvipontani*.⁸ Gui de Bazoches in his letter praises the Île-de-la-Cité as a seat of intellectual pursuit,

"On that island, the Seven Sisters, namely the seven liberal arts, have themselves created a perpetual domain, and, by sounding the trumpet of the noblest eloquence, decretals and law are studied there..." (qtd. in Berger, *Public Access*, p. 3)

⁶ Page refers us to Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 14925, f. 132, and MS lat. 3495, f. 192. Page understands this reference to the jongleurs on the Petit Pont to demonstrate an urban, popular audience for the chansons de geste. He also gives a variant reading of 'in parvo ponte' as "in plateis" which he translates as "in the streets" and which obviously supports his argument of an outdoor setting for the performance better than the reading "in parvo ponte."

⁷ Gui de Bazoches, also known as Guido de Basochis, was a monk from Châlons-sur-Marne. He visited Paris from 1175-1190 and wrote letters to his friends about his experience. (Berger, *Public Access*, p. 2).

⁸ Adam Parvipontanus was from Balsham, near Cambridge. He studied with Peter Lombard, and John of Salisbury was his student. In his eighteenth-century history of the University of Paris (1761), Jean Baptiste Louis Crevier affirms: "Quiconque avoit droit d'enseigner, pouvoit ouvrir une Ecole en tel lieu qu'il lui plaisoit, pourvû que ce fût dans le voisinage des Ecoles principales. Ainsi nous avons parlé d'Adam Anglois, qui tenoit la sienne près le Petit pont. Un autre Adam Parisien, enseignoit au Grand pont, qui est celui que nous appellons le Pont au change" (*Histoire de l'Université de Paris*, vol. 1, p. 272).

In the twelfth century, the subprior of the abbey of Saint-Victor, Godfroi, described the construction and the inhabitants of the Petit Pont:

Des hommes ont construit un pont de leurs propres mains et ont créé un passage commode au-dessus du fleuve; ils ont établi des maisons pour chacun d'eux; et c'est de là qu'ils ont pris le nom d'habitants du pont (Parvi-Pontins). [...] Là se tient une école de docteurs vénérables, éminents par leur science et leurs moeurs, qui instruisent les populations ignorantes. Heureux le peuple qui a de tels maîtres (qtd. in Egbert, *On the Bridges*, p. 88, n. 43)

In addition to being known for the *Parvipontani*, the Petit Pont was also associated with apothecaries and doctors (Egbert, pp. 40, 36).

This recontextualisation of the Petit Pont as a center of intellectual activity, which has never before been brought to the discussion of the chansons de geste, clearly calls into question whether the quotation from the sermon given above supports the model of the chanson de geste as an oral genre performed to the populace in an outdoor setting. I propose that, on the contrary, it is more indicative of a scholarly or clerical audience.

The emphasis on the emotional involvement of the audience on the Petit Pont in the sermon quoted above is also a key component of the scholar Johannes de Grocheio's definition of the genre, which occurs, unusually, in a musical treatise. Writing in Paris around 1300, he surveys the secular music of the city in a work entitled *De musica*.⁹ Johannes de Grocheio worked on some aspects of his treatise with a certain Clement who has recently been identified as a monk of the Benedictine Abbey of Lessay in Normandy. Indeed Grocheio himself may have been a priest (Page, *Music and Instruments*, p. 18). While he does not write extensively about the chansons de geste, he provides some tantalizing details which should be brought to a consideration of the genre. He defines a chanson de geste as follows:

Cantum vero gestualem dicimus in quo gesta heroum et antiquorum patrum opera recitantur, sicuti vita et martyria sanctorum et proelia et adversitates quas antique viri pro fide et veritati passi sunt, sicuti vita beati Stephani protomartyris et historia Regis Karoli. Cantus autem iste debet antiquis et civibus laborantibus et mediocribus ministrari dum requiescunt ab opera consueto, ut auditis miseriis et calamitatibus aliorum suas facilius sustineant et quilibet opus suum alacrius aggrediatur. Et ideo iste cantus valet ad conservationem totius civitatis.

We call that kind of cantus a chanson de geste in which the deeds of heroes and the works of our ancient fathers are recounted, such as the life and martyrdom of saints and the battles and

⁹ Johannes de Grocheio, *De musica*. Critical text of the treatise published by Ernst Rohloff with a translation by Albert Seay. Corrected text and new annotated translation of Grocheio's remarks about secular music, chapter XX of Page's *Music and Instruments*, pp. 17-24, and also Page, "Johannes de Grocheio on Secular Music."

adversities which the men of ancient times suffered for the sake of faith and truth, such as the life of St. Stephen, the first martyr, and the story of King Charlemagne. This kind of music should be laid on for the elderly, for working citizens and for those of middle station when they rest from their usual toil, so that, having heard the miseries and calamities of others, they may more easily bear their own and so that anyone may undertake his own labor with more alacrity. Therefore this kind of cantus has the power to preserve the whole city (qtd. and trans. in Page, *Music and Instruments*, pp. 22-23).

In this definition, the emphasis is squarely on the audiences' emotional engagement with the chansons de geste which redefine lives through a process of identification and comparison. The audiences referred to here by Johannes de Grocheio are composed of "the elderly," "working citizens" and "those of middle station (*mediocribus*) when they rest from their usual toil." But is he telling us that the groups he mentions compose the audience of this genre, or is he prescribing the genre for groups who do not usually have access to this material? His prescription of the chansons de geste for these particular audiences that this kind of music "should be laid on for" or "ministered to" ["*debet ministrari*"], together with his idealistic intent of bringing about social good through literature, and his concern for the "whole" community or city, suggests that Johannes de Grocheio is not so much describing the habitual audience of the chansons de geste as innovatively expanding its ranks.

The contiguity of the saints' lives and the chansons de geste, evident in ecclesiastical tolerance of both, is demonstrated in the mind of a preacher who explicitly compares an epic to a saint's life. The sermon, by Daniel of Paris, preached in 1272 at the church of Leufroy, draws a comparison between Roland's epic blow and St. Martin's cutting of his cloak:

Hic fuit pulcher ictus...Satis cantatur de Rolando et Olivero et dicitur quod Rolandus percussit unum per caput ita quod scidit ipsum usque ad dentes, Oliverus scidit alium per medium ventrem totum ultra. Sed hoc nichil est totum uia nec de Rolando, Olivero, Karolo maiore nec de Hogero le Danois invenitur quod fecerit ita pulchrum ictum quia numquam erit usque in finem mundi; quin sancta ecclesia cantet et recolat illum ictum non sic de aliis ictibus ipsa intromittit, et licet aliqui hystiones ictus predictorum cantent tamen hoc nichil est quia multa mendacia addunt.

This was a handsome blow...A great deal is sung about Roland and Oliver and it is said that Roland smote his adversary upon the head so that he cut him down to the teeth, and that Oliver cut another in the stomach so that the lance passed right through. But this is all nothing because it is nowhere found to be true of Roland, of Oliver, of Charlemagne nor of Ogier the Dane that he made such a handsome blow [as St. Martin] because there will be none such until the end of the world. Whence Holy Church must sing of the blow and call it to mind but does not concern

itself with the other blows, and even if some minstrels sing of the blows of the aforesaid [heroes] that comes to nothing because they add many false things. (qtd. and trans. in Page, *The Owl*, p. 11).

Daniel of Paris's attitude to the chansons de geste is double edged, if you'll excuse the pun. On the one hand, Roland and Oliver's epic blows are intolerable and yet, on the other hand, essential superlative examples against which the worth of St. Martin's blow is measured and inflated. Here is the same comparative impulse which Johannes de Grocheio encourages in his prescription of the chansons de geste for the elderly and poor. Whether or not all medieval audiences drew comparisons between their lives and the lives of their epic heroes is not clear, but we can say that for preachers and those associated with the Church, the moral value of the genre lay in its propensity to provoke comparison between epic heroes and mere mortals.

From evidence external to the chansons de geste, we can draw the following conclusions: a) most importantly we can note that while some ecclesiastical records indicate that the Church was hostile to jongleurs, the evidence demonstrating the Church's favor, at least towards a certain group of jongleurs, outweighs the negative, and some of the most important contemporary comment on the chanson de geste is found in sermons, which are favorable, or at least neutral, towards them; b) monks and clerics composed one kind of audience for the chansons de geste, and from these monastic and ecclesiastical settings for performance, the chansons de geste were further recycled to audiences of religious lay people in churches and academic settings run by the church; c) jongleurs formed (or were members of) confraternities, which, extant records prove, exhibited a rich and varied devotional life and were founded for the purpose of honoring a saint or supporting a religious cult; d) recorded evidence shows that at least some audiences drew parallels between the lives of saints and the exploits of epic heroes, which may have been encouraged by the jongleurs reciting saints' lives alongside the chanson de geste. Naturally, it was in the Church's interest to exploit these parallels in advancing its devotional and doctrinal teachings.

In recognizing a monastic and ecclesiastical audience of the chansons de geste, it becomes necessary to reevaluate our frequently secular twenty-first century reception of the poems and to recognize that some, or all, of the extant poems, may have contributed to lay religious culture, that is to say, religion-related activities or practices sponsored and performed by the laity in addition to, or in place of, those officially prescribed by the Church.

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