Recent Dissertations

This month we are happy to be able to present once again, in advance of publication in DAI, the abstract of another dissertation by one of our members:

WAR AND THE MISSING HERO: AN EXPLORATION OF THE POETRY OF BERTRAN DE BORN THROUGH COMPARISONS WITH THE AENEID, THE CHANSON DE ROLAND, AND BEOWULF

Patricia Lynne Harris Stablein
Northwestern University

It is the purpose of this thesis to explore the imagery of war and the hero in the poetry of the twelfth century troubador, Bertran de Born, illuminating it by comparison with this imagery in the Aeneid, the Chanson de Roland, and Beowulf. The image is defined as a knotting of the forces which constitute the structure of the work. The tension among these forces produces energy, an energy which is expressed in the words that weave, mass, and collide within the image. The image is thus a quivering structure of energy tensions, energy paths, and energy voids.

War images in the Aeneid efface heroism by focusing on the body, on physical experience and physical suffering. Through the physicality of the image, Virgil expresses the horror of war. Bertran too employs bodily imagery, but for a different purpose—to express war's beauty. Imagery in the Chanson de Roland is abstract, a structure of tableau and sign; its static nature contrasts with the dynamism of meaningful gesture in Bertran. Beowulf may be characterized by its imagery of condensation and expansion, which produces a typical circular form within which occur acts of fragmentation. Bertran too speaks in a language of circle and fragmentation, but for him this meaningful structure remains only an ideal.

Bertran's ideal hero, functionally expressed in the poet's war imagery, is compared with the hero expressed in the war images of the Aeneid, the Chanson de Roland, and Beowulf. This central problem in Bertran's work, the nature of the hero who is missing in the world of his poems, is used as the organizing principle of this thesis. The epics are discussed in order of increasing resemblance to Bertran's concept of heroism. The Aeneid is first because the Virgilian hero functions passively, an instrument of divine will, even sacrificing his private interests to those of the gods. The hero himself is effaced. In the Chanson de Roland, on the other hand, the hero's function is far more complex because the epic begins with a tri-partite hero figure. This figure is composed of the passive Charlemagne, the active Roland,

and the mediating Oliver, who acts between the two extremes. Each aspect of the figure fulfills a different rôle in the society, but the heroic figure functions as a unit in the balanced world. When that unity and balance are interrupted by the catastrophe at Rencesvals, there is a great crisis in the Roland world because the heroic function formerly carried out jointly by three characters must be condensed into one, Charlemagne. This crisis, however, never effaces the heroic role. The force of the heroic presence is even more compelling when the tripartite hero has been dissolved and the heroic identity synthesizes around Charlemagne. The hero is present, but throughout the Chanson de Roland he serves to represent an abstract idea rather than to incarnate heroism within humanity. In Beowulf, the hero exerts his own will in the heroic struggle, as Bertran de Born wished the hero to do.

In the preparation of the thesis, I used standard editions of the epics and my own translations of the passages cited from them. The edition and translation of Bertran de Born that I have used, however, is a forthcoming one prepared from microfilms of the manuscripts by William D. Paden, Jr., Tilde Sankovitch, and myself.

Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vi
Chapter One. Introduction	1
Chapter Two. Bodily Imagery: Beauty for Bertran, Horror for Virgil	10
General remarks	10
Death in war	12
Battle in war	46
War and the hero	80
Chapter Three. Tableau and Sign: Fixity in the Chanson de Roland, Dynamism in the poems of Bertran de Born	116
General remarks	116
Death in war	117
Battle in war	142
War and the hero	163
Chapter Four. Circle and Fragmentation in Beowulf and in the poems of Bertran de Born	197
General remarks	197
Death and battle in war	201
War and the hero	246
Chapter Five. Conclusion	279
Footnotes, Bibliography, Appendix	281, 283, 285