

Further Reflections on the Luminosity of the *Chanson de Roland*

It is a commonplace to affirm that the epic as a *genre* deals in simple binary oppositions. These are manifold in their forms of expression but are ultimately reducible to the essential one of Good vs. Evil, however these may be conceived by the society producing the epic. One realization of this thematic structure is the constant warfare in the Old French epic between Franks and Saracens, which Th. Frings identified with the motif of the dichotomy between North and South which underlies so much European epic poetry and which he saw as being inherited from a common Indo-European past.¹ Another variation on this elemental structure is the sociologically more sophisticated *riche* vs. *povre* that J. Batany and J. Rony find underlying the *Couronnement de Louis*.² In a corpus like the *chansons de geste*, which is, at least, heavily christianized even if not fundamentally Christian, one would also expect to find almost inevitably a symbolic conflict of Light and Dark.³

Predictable as this last conflictual pattern seems, its actual realization, at least in the early *chansons*, is both rare and incomplete. The theme of light in the *Roland* was first treated by Jean Frappier in a paper delivered to the Association internationale des études françaises,⁴ in which the *Roland* was just one of a number of texts examined. Significantly, as we shall see, it was the only *chanson de geste* considered. Brief though his comments were, Frappier inevitably sketched out with his accustomed thoroughness and perspicacity the main lines of the use of the motif of light in the *Roland*. Nevertheless, the full import of the poet's handling of the theme could not be brought out in the face of the wider requirements of the investigation. More recently, A. Crépin turned his attention to the position of *clarté* in the poetic economy of the *Roland*,⁵

¹Th. Frings, "Europäische Heldendichtung," in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, 91 (1969-71), 257-95.

²Jean Batany and J. Rony, "Idéal social et vocabulaire des statuts," *Langue française*, 9 (1971), 110-18.

³This polarity is not, of course, the sole prerogative of the Christian religion, but no writer working in that tradition could fail to bear in mind such fundamental texts as John 1:1-5: "In the beginning was the Word ... In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not."

⁴Jean Frappier, "Le Thème de la lumière de la *Chanson de Roland* au *Roman de la Rose*, *CAIEF*, 20 (1968), 101-24.

⁵André Crépin, "Formule, motif et thème: la *clarté* dans la *Chanson de Roland*," paper delivered to the VII^e Congrès international Rencesvals,

but he was predominantly interested in the word as the focus of a formula-cluster and was chiefly concerned with establishing the atomic nature of the formula with the single word as its nucleus.⁶ Although M. Crépin's paper hovered tantalizingly on the borders of *clarté* as formula and *clarté* as motif, his material never quite led him into the more interesting thematic territory. Against this background of studies of the theme, I have no apologies to make for offering this *mise au point* of the question.

The figure of light, as Frappier pointed out, provides one of the major themes of the *Chanson de Roland*, not only in terms of physical manifestations of luminescence, but also in the metaphorical expressions. On the one hand we find descriptions of sun glinting on armour and weapons:

Luisent cil elme ki ad or sunt gemmez
E cil escuz e cil osbercs safrez
E cil espiez, cil gunfanuns fermez;
(vv. 1031-3)⁷

references to dawn and the return of daylight:

Tresvait la nuit e apert la clere albe.
(v. 737)

and lights shining through the night:

En sum cez maz e en cez haltes vernes
Asez i ad carbuncles e lanternes;
La sus amunt pargetent tel luiserne
Par la nuit la mer en est plus bele;
(vv. 2632-5);

on the other is the constant expression used by the *Roland* for the alleviation of a troubled mind:

"Que jo n'esclair ceste meie grant ire"
(v. 301)

Liège, 1976. Summary in *Olifant*, 4 (December 1976) 2, 138-9.

⁶The theory outlined by M. Crépin fits well enough the patterns of Old English poetry with its four stress beats per line, in which the word-formula can be called up by the need to supply a beat; the purely syllabic nature of the Old French epic line, on the other hand, would admit the single word as a formula only where it also filled one of the four or six-syllable units available. A useful example for comparison is the *Qhwat!*, which opens so many Anglo-Saxon poems, corresponding to an inevitable *Oiez*, *seignor*/*baron* in Old French.

⁷*La Chanson de Roland*, ed. Frederick Whitehead, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1946). All quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from this edition.

"Si esclargiez voz talenz e voz coers!"
(v. 3628).

As Frappier remarks, this saturation, of the poem with light is further enhanced, paradoxically, by references to the brightness of the night.⁸ One of these we have already quoted, and another is to be found in the scene in which Charles takes his rest after destroying Marsilie's army in the battle in which the sun stays its course:

Clere est la noit e la lune luisant(e).
(v. 2512).

This is not to say that darkness is totally absent from the poem. Roland's eyes, as Charles contemplates the dead hero, are *turnez* and *tenebros* (v. 2896), and on two occasions the "refrain" recalling the site of the battle also contains the word *tenebrus*:

Halt sunt li pui e li val tenebrus
(v. 814)
Halt sunt li pui e tenebrus e grant
(v. 1830).

However, we must accept it as significant that the Battle of Roncevaux is not presented by the *Roland* poet as an eschatological battle in the great Indo-European epic tradition, in which the enemy is *per se* afflicted with darkness.

The list of words, expressions and formulas in which *clarté* and related terms occur in the *Roland* is lengthy. Light is not merely a theme of the poem; it is an overriding lexical preoccupation. *Clartet* itself appears a mere five times.⁹

N'i ad clartet, si li ciels nen i fent
(v. 1432)
"Charle, chevalche! car tei ne falt clartet"
(v. 2454)
Ceinte Joiuse ...
Ki chascun jur muet .xxx. clartez
(vv. 2501-2)
Tute la noit grant clartet lur dunent
(v. 2644)
.... ceinte Joiuse
Ki pur soleill sa clartet nen escunset
(vv. 2989-90).

⁸Jean Frappier, art. cit., 104-8.

⁹The following tables and statistics were compiled with the help of Joseph J. Duggan, *A Concordance of the Chanson de Roland* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1969).

Two of these refer to the brightness of the mystical sword Joyeuse, whose shining can only in part be said to derive from the cargo of relics carried in its pommel. A third example actually draws attention to an absence of light in the signs announcing the death of Roland. In addition, however, the adjective *cler* occurs in 39 contexts of visual:

soleilz fu cler (v. 157)
jur cler (v. 162)
clere albe (v. 737)
vis fier e cler (v. 895),

aural:

graisles clers (v. 2150)
voiz . . mult cleres (v. 3309),

or moral phenomena:

clere Espagne la bele (v. 59),

all of which in their different ways contribute to the aesthetic homogeneity of the text. Furthermore, these basic unequivocal terms are supported by a number of others which, if less explicit, nonetheless have distinct connotations of light and brilliance:

ardent 1 example
blanc 41 examples
(es)carbuncle 6 examples
cristal 6 examples
(d')or (non-
pecuniary) 21 examples
esclairir/
esclarier/
esclargir 9 examples
gemmes 9 examples
(re)luire 17 examples,

and one could continue.

The first reaction of the critic confronted by this data is to link it with the so-called "gold and glitter" aesthetic of the early Middle Ages.¹⁰ However, the number of moral or abstract qualities presupposed by the contexts in which the terms are placed soon makes it apparent that something more profound is at stake. A second impulse, which is perhaps nearer to the truth, provokes an association with the monumental idealization which is such a well-known feature of the poem. But it will be best to leave such speculations until we have considered the epic tradition in which this text is set more closely.

¹⁰As Frappier does, art. cit., 101.

For purposes of comparison, I propose to examine five epic texts from the first half of the twelfth century, plus the *Vie de Saint Alexis*, which for monumental grandeur is probably closer to the *Roland* than any of the chansons de geste we shall have to study. It is, in fact, in considering the hagiographie text that the first surprise is vouchsafed us. Even in the description of the saint's apotheosis in lines 606-10,¹¹ there is no mention of light. Indeed the nearest approach to the magnificence with which the *Roland* treats the theme does rather strike a note of "gold and glitter" by comparison. Of the saint's burial we read:

Ad ancensers, ad ories candelabres,
Clers revestuz an albes ed an capes
Metent le cors en un sarqueu de marbre . . .

D'or e de gemmes fut li sarqueus parez
Pur cel saint cors qu'il i deivent poser.
(vv. 581-7)

If there is a key concept in the *Alexis* comparable to the *clarté* of the *Roland*, it is *ledece*:

"Cesta lethece revert a grant tristur" (v. 70)
"Ne ja ledece n'ert en tei demenede" (v. 142)
Ne vus sai dirre cum lur ledece est grande (v. 610)

The same lack of interest in the theme is found in the fragmentary *Gormont et Isembart*, which in all its 661 lines presents us with not one example of the phenomenon in question. Not that the *Gormont* is a relentlessly realistic text in any sense of the word. The vast hordes of the pagan army, the four-day long battle, the equivocal figure of Hugolin, the oddly described epic blow with which Louis kills Gormont and fatally injures himself, all vouchsafe the poet's interest in the superhuman facets of his tale. It must, of course, be admitted that we have only one battle scene in our fragment. Lost are the accounts of the arming of the heroes, the description of Gormont's tent on the night of the feast referred to in lines 241-6 and 256-63, and we have no way of knowing how the poet would have continued the scene of Isembart's repentance and salvation.¹² Nonetheless, not one coat of mail gleams, no carbuncles shine, there are no references to the nature of the terrain or to sympathetic weather conditions such as we find in *Raoul de Cambrai*, *La Chanson de Guillaume* or the *Roland*. The small part of the fate of these warriors which we are now

¹¹*La Vie de Saint Alexis*, ed. C. Storey (Oxford, 1947). All references are to this edition.

¹²For this purpose, the *Chronique rimée* of Philippe Mousket and *Loher and Maller* must be ignored, since, while they can give us the content of the poem, they cannot reproduce the lexical prejudices of the epic poet, his artistic theme-building.

privileged to observe is reduced to a ritualized ballet, in which the rhythms of the verse provide the only key to supra-textual themes.

The William Cycle inevitably provides the most coherent corpus for the study of any theme, but, once again, what must principally be recorded is the isolation of the *Chanson de Roland* in the face of more typical epic traditions. Of the *Chanson de Guillaume* itself it can be said that, at least as far as G1 is concerned, light is not a preoccupation of the poet.¹³ There is but one reference combining an evocation of the brightness of the weather on the day of Vivien's martyrdom and the gleam of the pagans' arms :

Clers fu li jurz e bels li matins,
Li soleil ræd, si est li jurz esclariz.
Pæen devalent parmi un broilled antif;
Par unt qu'il passent tote la terre fremist;
Des dur healmes qu'il unt a or sartid,
Tres lur espalles tut li bois en reflambist.
(vv. 232-7)¹⁴

This passage is frequently held to be an interpolation by a hand imitating the *Roland* in the scene where Oliver first catches sight of Marsilie's forces:¹⁵

Païen s'adubent des osbercs sarazineis . . .
Clers fut li jurz e bels fu li soleilz,
N'unt guarnement que tut ne reflambeit . . .
(vv. 994-1003)

Oliver est desur un pui halçur,
Guardet sur destre parmi un val herbus,
Si veit venir cele gent païenur,
Si.n apelat Rollant sun cumpaignun:
"Devers Espagne vei venir tel brunur,
Tanz blancs osbercs, tanz elmes flambius,
Icist ferunt nos Franceis grant irur." (vv. 1017-23)

¹³*La Chanson de Guillaume*, ed. Duncan McMillan (S.A.T.F., 1949-51). I adopt the now virtually universal convention of referring to vv. 1-1980 as G1 and vv. 1981-3554 as G2. My use of the terra "poet" here, as elsewhere in this paper, does not imply a strict individualist approach but should be understood in the sense of the *jongleur/trouvère* responsible for the versions studied.

¹⁴Ed. cit. All references are to this edition unless otherwise stated.

¹⁵Attention was first drawn to this similarity by H. A. Smith in his article "The Composition of the *Chançon, de Willame*," *RR*, 4 (1913), 84-111; 149-65.

There are indeed clear similarities between the two texts and the likelihood of a borrowing is perhaps increased when we add to the dossier the nearest equivalent scene in the *Guillaume*, in which Deramé's army comes before William's on the identical battlefield:

Ces Sarazins de Segune tere,
Cent mile furent si apresté de guere,
N'i ad nul qui n'ait halberc e healme,
D'or les fruntels e les esses,
Espees ceintes, les branz burniz vers terre;
Les escuz tindrent as manveles,
Espez tranchanz eurent en lur poinz destres,
Chevals d'Arabe unt corant suz lur seles.
(vv. 1108-15)

Despite the retention of the gilt nasels, the overall effect of this second passage, more in keeping with the general tone of the *Guillaume*, is much more sombre.

The *Guillaume* is, in fact, under the general aegis of night—or, at least, of evening. This tonality is, of course, set by the refrain¹⁶ and supported by the first appearance of Tedbald and Esturmi, who are returning from vespers when they are met by Vivien and the messenger who had brought the news of the Saracen invasion. This evening-darkness motif pervades the whole poem to the extent that each of the relieving armies that sets out for Larchamp, despite rising very early, does not get under way until evening. On the first occasion, Guillaume is accompanied by Girard and Guischard:

Tant dormi Girard qu'il fu avespré¹⁷
Puis salt del lit cume francs naturel.
"Munjoie!" escrie, "chevaliers, car muntez!"

¹⁶The evening tonality belongs properly only to the Vivien section of the poem, with its refrain "lunsdi al vespre" taken up by the G2-continuator, and to the first battle of revenge, where the refrain becomes "joesdi al vespre." The Gui-continuator introduces a new version, "lors fu mecresdi" in the MS. and the McMillan edition, normally now corrected to "lors fu dimerces."

¹⁷The text of the MS., which has so far been accepted without demur by all editors, does not seem to make overmuch sense in the context, unless we understand either 1) Girard slept so much because the evening was come (which requires the dislocation of the normal conjunction *tant . . . que*, which is a contrary proceeding) or 2) accept that Girard slept the clock round, an understandable but gratuitous assumption. Since in the previous *laisse* Girard's meal is seen to continue to the evening, it is logical to assume that the text originally read *ajurné*, both here and at v. 1494. The substitution could first have been made by a scribe misunderstanding a *primes* as a time of day rather than in the sense of "for the first time."

Armes demande, e l'en li va apporter.
Idunc a primes fu Girard adubé . . .

Quant il avesprad a la bone cité,
Issu s'en est Willame al curb niés
Od trente mile de chevalers armez.
(vv. 1070-85).

True we have interpolated Girard's official "dubbing," but since this is scarcely more than an official "kitting out" it can hardly be considered a ceremony requiring a whole day for its performance. The second departure in which Guillaume sets out alone but followed by Gui is even harder to explain in "realistic" terms:

Tant dort Willame qu'il fu avespré
Puis salt del lit cum hardi sengler;
Criad: "Munjoie! Frans chevalers, muntez!"
Armes demande, e l'em li vait apporter

Quant il avesprad en la bone cité,
Issuz s'en est Willame al curb niés
Od trente mile de chevalers armez;
(vv. 1494-507).

The scene is described in identical terms to those used for Girard, but there is no possibility of any ceremonial for William, who has been a knight for many years, and he can scarcely need a whole day to pull on his mail! The significance of this odd timetabling is surely that the night march and meeting with the enemy at dawn mimics the first battle, thereby creating a genuinely cyclic effect linking the three battles into one. However, the symbolic status of this mimicry clearly escaped the author of G2 who, seeing only the lexical mechanism, satirizes this dilatoriness on the part of the Franks in the rambunctious scene in which Reneward chases the reluctant crusaders out of bed à *coups de tinel*:

Reneward leve ainz que l'albe apert,
pe la quisine est al paleis turné.
"Munjoie!" escrie, "Frans chevalers muntez! ..."
. . . Dient Franceis: "Lais nus, lecchere, ester! . . ."
Uncor n'ad li cocs, ço quid, que dous feiz chanté."
Dist Reneward: "Ja l'ai jo comandé! . . ."
Halce le fust, si fert sur un piler
Que un estage en ad parmi colpe;
Tote la sale fait sur els trembler,
Pur petit ne l'ad tut acraventé;
De la pour qu'il unt sunt Franceis sus levé.
(vv. 2896-914)

The dependance of this passage on the earlier ones is further guaranteed by the formulas of the first three lines quoted, which recall very closely the

previous scenes; the third line in particular is a literal repetition.

The other major theme presented in the *Guillaume* (especially in G1) is that of heat and thirst. The two terms do not, of course, form an antithesis this time but a complement to each other. Illustrated in the agony of Vivien (laisse LXIX) and in the scene in which Girard is forced to abandon one piece of equipment after another as he goes for help (laisse LVIII-LXIII), this theme is satirized by the Gui-continuator¹⁸ in Guiot's sally to the pagan ships in search of food and drink and by the G2-continuator in many of Reneward's escapades and laments. The physical oppression which dominates the Vivien section of G1 in particular, borrowed as it may be from the *passio Christi*, is an obvious source of satirical material for *jongleurs* presenting *cendrillon* heroes, which both Gui and Reneward are, at least in part. The *Guillaume* has always been famous for its brutal realism in the portrayal of the deaths of heroes, especially that of Vivien, but this is not realism in any modern literary sense of the word. The desert landscape, the oppressive assaults of the elements belong rather to the symbolic framework of encroaching evil to which the constant reminders of evening and darkness also belong. Vivien's death may be an *imitatio Christi*, but in this poem even Christian martyrs fall in oppressive isolation from the blessings of the divine presence.

The three cyclic *Guillaume* poems I wish to consider, *Le Couronnement de Louis*, *Le Charroi de Nîmes*, and *La Prise d'Orange*,¹⁹ remove us completely from the hieratic structures of the *Roland* and the *Guillaume*. Concerned with problems of Church and State, the rôle of the king, the interdependence of *pontificas* and *imperium*, the position of the landless knight and assarting (which is what the conquest of fiefs in pagan territory amounts to), these are more nearly social epics than spiritual ones, even in the widest sense of the latter term. As such, it is normal that the opposition *riche-povre* should dominate all others in the *Couronnement*, with *riche* frequently figuring the evil elements of society and *povre* the good.²⁰ The same opposition has a certain rôle to play in the *Charroi* as well, although in that poem it becomes far more equivocal than it was even

¹⁸H. A. Smith, art. cit., first posited a more or less parodic continuation of the Vivien material, in which Gui is a comic imitation of Roland rather than of his cousin. This opinion is also accepted by Jeanne Wathelet-Willem, *Recherches sur la Chanson de Guillaume* (Paris, 1975).

¹⁹*Le Couronnement de Louis*, ed. E. Langlois, 2^e éd. revue (C.f.m.a., 1966). *Le Charroi de Nîmes*, ed. J.-L. Perrier (C.f.m.a., 1931). *La Prise d'Orange*, éditée d'après la rédaction AB, Cl. Régnier, 2^e éd. (Paris, 1969). All references are to these editions.

²⁰Batany and Rony, art. cit. The term *riche*, although applied to Louis, is chiefly associated with attempts to bribe Guillaume away from Louis's party, according to those critics, while the word *povre* is primarily associated with the *bachelers* who support Guillaume and the royal cause.

in the *Couronnement*.²¹ In keeping with this outlook we find that or and argent have, if not always a strictly pecuniary, at least a constant evaluative connotation in the *Couronnement*. Light and dark do not bother the poet at all; *matin* and *vespre* are strictly temporal and fit into no wider symbolic scheme, be it growth and decay or any other. Darkness, of an attenuated sort, might be held to play a part in the Gui l'Allemand episode, where a *broïne* masks the attack made by the German's army on Louis's camp (v. 2304), but it equally prevents the attackers' seeing Guillaume arrive with his foraging party, thus enabling him to massacre the marauders (v. 2528). Symbolically, then, if it has any force at all, which is doubtful, the mist remains neutral in the Good-Evil balance.

There is also, in the same Gui l'Allemand episode, an isolated reference to the brightness of arms. Gui is described arming:

El dos li vestent son alberc jaseranc
Roge est la maille plus que n'est feus ardenz
Et puis li lacent un vert helme luisant,
Une escarbocle el nasel par devant;
(vv. 2478-81),

and Guillaume, more briefly:

Il vest l'alberc, lace l'elme luisant
(v. 2500).

The diabolic attributes of Gui in his fiery red armor are manifest, but the symbolism of the arms is quickly passed over. The *jongleur* has no real interest in such matters, as can be seen from the off-hand way he dismisses Guillaume's preparations.

The *Charroi*, is drawn blank in our hunt for symbolism of this nature. Only in the scene of the Dame de Saint Gilles, with the descent into a *souterrain* followed by mounting to the *solier* (vv. 558-9) to observe the ravages perpetrated on the country by the pagans, do we approach a Hell-Heaven, or more appropriately a death and resurrection sequence. It is the isolation of this passage in the general tonality of even the first half of the *Charroi* which accounts for much of the mystically compelling force of the scene in the motivation of the poem. However, in this scene, as in the *thé* episode which contains it, the weight of the symbolism is carried by the pseudo-romance motifs of hunting and hospitality, which contrast with the suddenly revealed truth about the evil suppurating in this apparently peaceful country. In this respect the Dame de Saint Gilles episode echoes the opening scene, where the idyllic return from the hunt provides a foil for the pusillanimity and injustice of Louis's court. The symbolic patterns of the *Charroi*, such as they are, bring us back squarely

²¹For the ambiguous rôle of the *riche-povre* opposition in the *Charroi*, see Jean-Charles Payen, "Le *Charroi de Nîmes*, comédie épique?" in *Mélanges Jean Frappier*, Publications romanes et françaises, CXII (Genève: Droz, 1970), II, 891-902.

to the central preoccupation of the poem with the problems of society.²²

With the *Prise d'Orange* we take yet one more step away from the sublime and remote world of the earliest epics into that of romanticized and partially burlesque adventures. The massive concepts of Good and Evil in the *Roland* and the *Guillaume* are here reduced to the puppet antics of Aragon and a lovelorn Guillaume. It is therefore not surprising that light is here divorced from metaphysical and eschatological concepts and associated with the exotic. There is one reference to light gleaming on armor, presented as the most commonplace of notions:

De Sarrazins qui viennent par aïr
Vit les hauberz et les heaumes luisir
(vv. 1192-3).

Otherwise it is Orange which is described as a paradisiac setting with its "pomeaus et les aigles dorez" (v. 408); or, more specifically, the tower of Gloriete which becomes a highly artificial *locus amoenus*:

A une part de la chambre leanz
Avoit un pin par tel esperiment
Com vos orroiz se vos vient a talent:
Longue est la branche et la fueille en est grant:
La flor qu'en ist par est si avenant,
Blanche est et inde et si est vermeillant.
(vv. 651-6)

Et Rosiane, la niece Rubiant,
Le vent li [=Orable] fist a un platel d'argent.
Ele est plus blanche que la noif qui resplent
Et plus vermeille que la rose fierant.
(vv. 664-7).

In such a scene as this, it is impossible to take as anything but idyllic the shade inside the tower:

De marbre sont li piler et li pan,
Et les fenestres entaillies d'argent;
Soleil n'i luist ne n'i cort point de vent;
Bien fu paree, mout par fu avenant.
(vv. 646-50)

In this respect, despite the absence of sun common to both, Gloriete is in an affective universe diametrically opposed to that accursed land of Charnuble de Munigre in the *Roland*.²³

²²Mario Mancini, *Società feudale e ideologia nel "Charroi de Nîmes"* (Firenze, 1972). Mancini integrates very well the study of the social problems underlying the *Charroi* and the literary implications of the *riche-povre* ambiguity of Guillaume.

²³Ed. cit. , vv. 975-83.

To turn back to *Raoul de Cambrai*,²⁴ from the romantic exoticism of the *Prise* is to reenter a brutal and bloody world, but also a highly equivocal one, and again one in which the ambiguities of the central figure, Raoul, are worked out in terms of light-dark imagery. So, the hero's helmet is illuminated by a carbuncle (vv. 484-5), a troubling element in itself, since carbuncles are so frequently associated with pagans. Equally his sword, a truly remarkable one and on a level, in one sense, with Durendal and Joyeuse, none the less:

. . . fu forgie en une combe obscure
Galans la fist qui toute i mist sa cure
(vv. 488-9).

The darkness, which represents the evil side of Raoul, is here openly expressed along with the disturbing associations of the weapon with the nordic smith of the gods. At the same time the brightness of Raoul's arms in general is expressed in *laissez* XXIV-XXV. This equivocation over Raoul's arms is the outward manifestation of that complexity of his character which makes him on the one hand so popular with all and sundry that he becomes Louis's seneschal and is entrusted with the education of the sons of the greater part of the barony, while on the other he is capable of waging war on Good Friday, ordering the massacre of a town and convent and afterwards settling down to a game of chess and a feast. This reintegration of light and dark into the moral sphere in Raoul is further underlined by the use of *esclairier* in a psychological sense as we find it in the *Roland*:

"Diex, secor moi que je m'en esclaire"
(v. 2641),

a plea for vengeance which, in its usage, reminds us strikingly of Ganelon's threat:

Einz i frai un poi de (le)gerie
Que jo n'esclair ceste meie grant ire
(*Roland*, vv. 300-1)

Yet even so, Raoul is far removed from the *Roland*. In Raoul there is no binary opposition Good-Evil to be reflected in the polarity of light and dark. Raoul is indeed "la tragédie du désordre,"²⁵ but this disorder is as much within the characters themselves as in the society in which they live. Thus, rather than confrontation, we have a suspension of the two

²⁴*Raoul de Cambrai*, ed. Paul Meyer and Auguste Lognon (S.A.T.F., 1882). All references are to this edition.

²⁵The quotation comes from the title of an article by R. A. Eisner, "Raoul de Cambrai, ou la tragédie du désordre," *French Review*, Special Issue 3 (1971), 41-51.

elements, which just refuse to blend within the solvent provided by the personalities of men like Raoul, Guerri, and even Bernier. With the *Roland*, as we have seen, the problem is of a rather different order, for, as Frappier rightly remarked, darkness is virtually absent from that poem. Not that evil does not exist in the cosmos of the *Roland*, but, in general, it finds no expression in the opposition of Light and Dark.

Frappier concluded from this that the aesthetic of the *Roland* poet was that of the stained-glass window, in which the beauty of the light represents the beatification of the divine.²⁶ Approaching the problem from this angle, it is not surprising that Frappier links the *Roland* with a chain of texts including Giraut de Bornelh's *alba*:

Reis glorios, verais lums e clartatz

and the *Roman de la Rose* of Jean de Meung.

Indeed, the perspective given to the *Roland* by this approach draws it inevitably into the orbit of Grosseteste and the twelfth and thirteenth century philosophers of optics, for whom light was the *ultima ratio* of matter.²⁷ There is, however, an older tradition than Grosseteste's which also equates God with light and sees all creation as an emanation of that Godhead. Ultimately neoplatonic, like Grosseteste's system, this cosmogony is represented in the ninth century in the writings of John Scot Erigena. John also follows scriptural precedent for his views:

James I:17: omne datum optimum et omne donum perfectum
desursum est, descendens a Patre luminum.

Ephesians V:13: omne quod manifestatur lumen est.

Erigena reduces this to:

Omnia quae sunt lumina sunt.²⁸

John, however, fell into the heretical claim that nothing is ultimately denied access to the divine presence, and that hence there is no total absence of light, since to posit such, would be to posit the ultimate triumph of Evil, in itself unthinkable.²⁹

The preoccupation with light which runs through the *Roland* would

²⁶Frappier quotes E. de Bruyne, *L'Esthétique du moyen âge* (Louvain, 1947). De Bruyne deals with this problem more fully in his *Etudes d'esthétique médiévale* (Bruges, 1946), III, 1-29.

²⁷De Bruyne, *Etudes*, III, 19-20.

²⁸*Super hierarchia coelesti*, quoted in E. Gilson, *La Philosophie au moyen âge*, 3rd ed. (Paris, 1947), 213-14.

²⁹Gilson, op. cit., 221.

tend to indicate the presence of a poet thinking in the tradition of Eri-
gena. This in itself separates the *Roland* from orthodox thought in the
period 900-1150 A.D., in which John's writings were repeatedly condemned.
It is therefore not surprising that on this count as on so many others the
Roland is separate from the main traditions of epic poetry at the time.
The cyclic Guillaume poems do not concern themselves with the metaphysical
aspects of a conflict, which, from one of Good vs. Evil, has been reduced
to one between Right and Wrong on a very human level. Even the *Chanson de*
Guillaume itself and in its most intensely speculative Vivien section, is
more concerned with the passion of the martyr than with salvation. As for
Raoul, it transposes the conflict from the macrocosm to the microcosm,
making the hero himself the prey of his contradictory Light-Dark urges.
The *Roland*, however, is concerned, at least on one level, with salvation:
the salvation of the rearguard, the salvation of the hero, the salvation of
the pagans. This is the true import of the light imagery which pervades
the poem, and why the simple statement about Munigre:

Soleil n'i luist

is the most terrifying that the poet can make, since it implies that it
lies beyond the scope of the Redeemer's reach.

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Medieval Meetings

The Third Annual Southeastern Medieval Association Conference took
place at Virginia Commonwealth University (Richmond, Virginia) on March
24-26, 1977. The Old French section consisted of papers by Nancy Bradley
Cromey (Sweetbriar College): "*Roland* as '*Baron Révolté*' "; E.R. Woods
(Stanford University): "*The Ascendance of Love in Aye d'Avignon*"; and
Amelia Rutledge (George Mason University): "*Death and Chrétien de Troyes*."
Robert Francis Cook, Review Editor for *Olifant*, served as respondent.

The Eighth Annual Mercy College Medieval Symposium took place on
March 26 and was devoted to the theme "*Arthur of Britain: in his time and*
ours." The main speaker was Dr. Helmut Nickel, curator of Arms and Armor,
The Metropolitan Museum of Art.