

**William and Rainouart:
Comic Renewal in the *Chançon de Willame***

IN DEALING WITH THE *Chançon de Willame*, critics have tended to focus on two central issues: the evaluation of the poem within the context of the French epic tradition and the determination of the unity versus the composite nature of the work. Attempts to define the literary value of *Willame* as an epic poem have largely involved comparison with the *Chanson de Roland*, the results predictably corresponding to the individual critic's predisposition towards the work. Thus for M. Wilmotte, who posited inept plagiarism on the part of the *Willame*-poet and the artistic superiority of the *Roland*, the *Song of William* was "une oeuvre, qui, à côté de beautés réelles et fortes, montre une absence complète d'ordonnance et de goût, abonde en lacunes, en répétitions et en contradictions, semble, enfin, avoir été écrite—et surtout transcrite—à la diable."¹ The opposite critical stance—most staunchly represented by Jean Frappier who qualified the *Willame* as "une oeuvre originale, à un niveau épique très comparable à celui de la *Chanson de Roland*"²—attempts to justify the poem as a serious epic in the best medieval tradition. Admittedly, in this interpretation, there are problems with the Rainouart episode³ which often is conveniently attributed to "un

¹"La Chanson de Roland et la Chanson de Willame," *Romania*, 44 (1915-17), p. 55. See also L. M. Gay, "La Chanson de Roland and La Chanson de Willame," *University of Wisconsin Studies in Languages and Literature*, 20 (1924), 21-43; E. Hoepffner, "Les Rapports littéraires entre les premières chansons de geste," *Studi Medievali*, 4 (1931), 233-58; and John D. Niles, "Ring-Composition in La Chanson de Roland and La Chançon de Willame" *Olifant*, 1 (December 1973) 2, pp. 4-12.

²*Les Chansons de geste du cycle de Guillaume d'Orange* (Paris: SEDES, 1955), I, p. 201.

³"On sait qu'à notre avis la première épopée de Vivien et de Guillaume ignorait Rainouart et que l'énormité bouffonne de ses exploits est autre chose que le réalisme parfois plaisant ou caricatural de la *Chanson de Guillaume*... (C)ela ne signifie pas non plus que l'emploi d'un comique trivial dans une chanson de geste ne se rattachait pas à une tradition littéraire et savante bien antérieure au XII^e siècle; on se tromperait aussi en

remanieur qui pouvait avoir la main lourde"⁴ and which has initiated a second field of inquiry centering on the unity or disparate composition of the work.⁵ Source investigations have done little to clarify the anomaly of our *chanson*⁶ and instead have evaded the principal critical challenge posed by the *Willame*. As Howard S. Robertson has argued:

The real point to be decided is: does the *Chanson de Willame* in the form in which we possess it reveal a total meaning worthy of consideration or does it not?... Hitherto, the unity of the text has been equated, or rather confused, with the unity or disparity of the possible sources much along the lines of "did the poet of the *Chanson de Willame* join two poems together or did he write the whole *chanson* as a piece?" The obvious answer would be that the *Chanson de Willame* looks like the union of two separate legends, but the real point is that it does not matter. What matters is whether or not the poem is a thematic whole; if the poet did join two legends, is the result cohesive? Are the themes sustained? Does the poem, in short, form an "artistic unity"?⁷

Now the principal difficulty with the *Chançon de Willame* has always been its comic elements. Robertson's monograph is the first extended

expliquant Rainouart par une intention de parodie et de dénigrement: les trouvères de la *Chanson de Rainouart* et d'*Aliscans* ne songeaient pas le moins du monde à rabaisser l'idéal chevaleresque et chrétien" (Frappier, *Les Chansons de geste*, I, pp. 219-20).

⁴Jean Rychner, "Sur la *Chanson de Guillaume*," *Romania*, 76 (1955), p. 38.

⁵On the unity or disunity of composition, see Alfred Adler, "Rainouart and the Composition of the *Chanson de Guillaume*," *Modern Philology*, 49 (1951-52), 160-71; Frappier, *Les Chansons de geste*, I, pp. 141-48; Rychner, "Sur la *Chanson de Guillaume*," 28-38; H.A. Smith, "The Composition of the *Chanson de Willame*," *Romanic Review*, 4(1913), 84-111, 149-165; J.Wathelet-Willem, "La *Chançon de Willame*: Le problème de l'unité du MS British Add. 38663," *Medium Aevum*, 57 (1952), 366-77, and "Sur deux passages de la *Chanson de Guillaume*" *Le Moyen Âge*, 65 (1959), 27-40.

⁶See J. Bédier, *Les Légendes épiques: Recherches sur la formation des chansons de geste*. I. *Le Cycle de Guillaume d'Orange*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Champion, 1926); Frappier, *Les Chansons de geste*, I; and Theodore Ely Hamilton, *The Cyclic Relations of the "Chanson de Willame"*, University of Missouri Studies, 2 (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1971). M. Tyssens (*La Geste de Guillaume d'Orange dans les manuscrits cycliques* [Paris: Belles Lettres, 1967]) does not treat the *Chançon de Willame*.

⁷Howard S. Robertson, "*La Chanson de Willame*": A Critical Study, University of North Carolina Studies in Romance Languages and Literatures, 65 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), pp. 15-16.

consideration of the rôle of comedy in the poem; his conclusion, however, that the *chanson* (both G₁ and G₂)⁸ is simply an anti-chivalric burlesque is untenable and results from the same type of simplistic misreading with which he charges Frappier. The *Chançon de Willame* is neither a second *Chanson de Roland* as Frappier would have us believe nor mere slapstick satire as Robertson purports. The comic element which distinguishes the *Willame* is endowed with far more complexity than burlesque buffoonery, and ultimately, as we shall see, comedy in its structural function as *mythos* informs the entire meaning of our epic poem.

Antithesis through Comedy: Vivien and Tedbald-Esturmi

In his study, Robertson takes a salient feature of the initial episodes of the *Chançon de Willame*—the burlesque comedy represented by the figures of Tedbald and Esturmi—and assumes that this characterizes the mood of the entire *chanson*. He concludes that Tedbald and Esturmi embody a common sense attitude toward the realities of the battlefield with which the audience readily identifies: "The sheer pathetic comedy of Tedbald's headlong flight can be appreciated by any audience which recognizes the limits of individual courage and has tired of the sterility of tales of superhuman courage and endurance repeated over and over again."⁹ In contrast, Vivien, encompassing the qualities of the stock epic hero, is emblemized by his helmet which restricts his perception of reality and holds him up to the poet's ridicule.

While it is possible to refute Robertson's observations one by one, our main concern here is to assess the use of comedy in the Vivien-Tedbald episodes. Although Tedbald and Esturmi are clearly recognizable as

⁸G₁ is conventionally used to denote vv. 1-1980 of the *Chançon*, G₂ vv. 1981-3554; the use of the terms in this study does not imply acceptance of the theory postulating a juxtaposition of two separate poems and the lack of thematic or artistic integrity in the *Willame*.

⁹P. 23; "pathetic" is hardly the appropriate word to qualify the comedy of Tedbald's flight. The statement, moreover, involves the complex problem of defining the *Chançon's* audience (see below, n. 26).

figures of the anti-knight, they hardly represent the ethos of the *Willame-poet*:

Si cum li ors s'esmere fors de l'argent,
Si s'en eslistrent tote la bone gent;
Li couart s'en vont od Tedbald fuiant,
Od Vivien remistrent tuit li chevaler vaillant,
Al chef devant fierent cunmunalment.
Si cun li ors fors de l'argent s'en turne,
Si s'en eslistrent tut li gentil home.
Premerement si ferirent en la pointe
Cunmunalment ensemble li prodome:
Le plus hardi n'i solt l'em conuistre.

(vv. 328-337)¹⁰

The poet divides the French army into "bone gent" (those who remain with Vivien) and "li couart" (those who flee with Tedbald), and his own position is clearly indicated in his remarks on Girard's return to aid Vivien:

Une plus gent home ne mist Jhesu en l'ost
Que fu Girard quant parti de Tidbald.
Vint a la bataille cum il plus tost pout.

Crie "Munjoie!" *Ço est l'enseigne des noz.*

(vv. 434-36, 440)

The subsequent portrayal of Vivien's battle with the Saracens is bereft of humor; here even Robertson fails to note any hint of burlesque. Rather than viewing Vivien from the Tedbaldesque perspective suggested by Robertson, the poet clearly views Tedbald and Esturmi from an ethical stance more akin to Vivien's chivalric helmet.

The contrast between the ludicrous description of Tedbald's cowardice and the genuinely epic quality of Vivien's courage¹¹ serves to

¹⁰Textual references are cited from Duncan McMillan's edition of the *Chanson de Guillaume* (Paris: Picard, 1950); verse numbers will be indicated in parentheses.

¹¹See Frappier, *Les Chansons de geste*, I, pp. 189ff., for a more reasoned analysis of Vivien as an epic hero; cf. Lynette Muir, "Est-ce qu'on peut considérer Vivien comme un 'anti-Roland'?" *Société Rencesvals IV^e Congrès International*, *Studia Romanica*, 14 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1969), pp. 238-44, and Barbara L. Silver, "The Death of Vivien in *La Chançon de Willame*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 71 (1970), 306-11.

create an antithesis between two poles of the society depicted in the *Chançon de Willame*. This dialectic underlies the entire structure of the poem: at the one end, Vivien and William, and at the other, Tedbald, Esturmi, Louis and the queen; the significance of this antithesis will be examined in detail below.

Humanization through Comedy: William and Guibourc

William's presence in the first nine hundred lines of his *chanson* is primarily legendary: Vivien constantly recommends his intervention in the battle of l'Archamp (vv. 55-56, 72-74, 85-88, 116, 122, 165-66, 179-82), Tedbald and Esturmi measure themselves against his renown (vv. 60-68), Tedbald refuses to fight Deramed without William (v. 201), Girard sarcastically compares Tedbald and Esturmi to William and Vivien (v. 423-29), Vivien refers to the arrival of William to rally his own men (vv. 453-54, 485-86, 562-63, 750-51), laments his absence (vv. 479-82), prays for his coming (vv. 797-98, 825-26, 894-96, 906-08), and dispatches Girard to bring his uncle (vv. 634-89). The poet himself assures us of William's indispensability in battle:

Dolent est le champ senz le cunte Willame (v. 472)
Mar fud le champ comencé sanz Willame (v. 488)

William's actual physical presence in the poem (vv. 933ff.), however, is less awesome: we learn immediately that he has recently lost his "nobile barné" at Burdele (vv. 1017-21), he alone escapes his two encounters with Deramed, he twice loses his "riche parenté," is mistreated at the court of Louis, etc.

The gap between the legendary reputation of William—his *geste*—and the reality of his initial two battles with Deramed is underscored by the comic exchange between William and Guibourc as he returns alone from his first defeat:

"Dame Guiburc, des quant gardas ma porte?
—Par ma fai, sire, de novel le faz ore.
Sire, quons Willame, mutt as petite force!
—Seor, duce amie, des quant iés mun porter?
—Par ma fie, sire, de novel, nient de vielz.
Sire Willame, poi en remeines chevalers!"
(vv. 1282-87)

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The ironie juxtaposition of *geste* vs. reality is again apparent in the doubts expressed by Guibourc regarding William's identity on his second return (note the implicit contrast between the present situation of William [reality] and his epic epithet [*geste*]):

"Si vus fuissez Willame al curb niés,
Od vus venissent set mile homes armez,
Des Frans de France, des baruns naturels;
Tut entur vus chantassent ces juglers,
Rotes e harpes i oist hom soner.
—Allas, pecchable!" dist Willame al curb niés,
"A itele joie soleie jo ja aler.
Dame," dist il, "ja Ile savez vus assez:
Tant cum Deus volt ad home richeté,
E quant li ne plaist si rad poverté.
Ja repair jo de l'Archamp sur mer
U ai perdu Vivien l'alosé;
Mun niefs Bertram i est enprisoné,
Le fiz Bernard de Bruban la cité,
E Guielin e Guischard l'alosé."
Guiburc regarde tut un chemin ferré,
Si veit venir set mille paiens armez.

Veit le Guiburc, comence a plurer:
"Se vus fuissez Willame al curb niés,
Ja fust escuse sainte crestientez,
E cele preie qu'i meinent cels lecchers."
(vv. 2244-60, 2267-70)

While the mood is undoubtedly comic, the tone is not satirical as Robertson would have us believe; the poet's presentation of William's plight is sympathetic, and Guibourc's rôle in the *chanson* is, as we shall see, infinitely more meaningful than that of the straight man in a comic duo.¹²

¹²Robertson (pp. 28-36) sees William as a hesitant, incompetent, and somewhat henpecked husband, eclipsed by Guibourc who consistently takes the initiative in her husband's affairs. Cf. Jeanne Wathelet-Willem, "Guillaume, mari ridicule ou complaisant?" in *Mélanges d'histoire littéraire, de linguistique et de philologie romanes offerts à Charles Rostaing . . . par ses collègues, ses élèves et ses amis*, ed. Jacques De Caluwé, Jean-Marie d'Heur, and René Dumas, 2 vols. (Liège: Association des Romanistes de l'Université de Liège, 1974), pp. 1213-33.

William bears the burden of sustaining his *geste* against the realities of the battlefield; he is an epic hero faced with potential ruin:

"Par Deu, Guiburc, tu as dreit que tu plurs!
Kar ja diseient en la cur mun seignur
Que eres femme Willame, uns riche hom,
Un hardi cunte, un vaillant fereur.
Or estes femme a un malveis fuieur,
Un cuart cunte, un malveis tresturnur,
Qui de bataille n'ameine home un sul . . ."
(vv. 1303-09)

And the poet's stance before his protagonist is *not* sarcastic. On the contrary, it is warmly human, and consequently we weep with William over the loss of his nephews, we feel his disappointment in defeat—for his conduct in battle is always exemplary—and, most importantly, we share his sense of injustice in the court at Laon, for William must also sustain his *geste* in a society controlled by Tedbald and Esturmi, by Louis and his queen.

Renewal through Comedy: The *Mythos* of Comedy

We have suggested above the import of comedy in understanding the meaning of the *Chançon de Willame*; the following discussion comprises first a theoretical presentation of the *mythos* or generic plot of comedy, then an independent examination of the *chanson*, and finally an application of the concept of the comic *mythos* to our poem. The summary which follows consists of selected statements from Northrup Frye's discussion of the theory of myths about narrative and comedy applicable to our study of the *Willame*.¹³

Narrative involves movement from one structure to another; there are two fundamental movements of narrative: a cyclical movement (the alteration of life-death-rebirth) and a dialectical movement between opposing poles (pp. 161-62).

¹³ *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973); the relevant sections are "Theory of Mythos: Introduction" (pp. 158-62) and "The Mythos of Spring: Comedy" (pp. 163-86). Pages are indicated in parentheses.

1) The movement of comedy is usually a movement from one kind of society to another. At the beginning of the play, the obstructing characters are in charge of the play's society, and the audience recognizes that they are usurpers (p. 163). The extent to which they have real power implies some criticism of the society that allows them their power (p. 165).

2) The movement in comedy is from a society controlled by habit, ritual bondage, arbitrary law, and the older characters to a society controlled by youth and pragmatic freedom. The society emerging at the conclusion of the comedy represents by contrast a kind of moral norm or pragmatically free society; its ideals are seldom defined or formulated (p. 169). The tendency of comedy is to include as many people as possible in its final society (p. 165).

3) The obstacles to the hero's desire form the action of the comedy and the overcoming of them the comic resolution (p. 164).

4) In the rituals and myths the earth that produces the rebirth is generally a female figure, and the death and revival, i.e. rebirth, of human figures in comedy generally involves the heroine (p. 183).

5) The humor in comedy is usually someone with a good deal of power who is able to force much of the play's society into line with his obsession (p. 169).

6) At the end of the play, the crystallization of the new society occurs at the point of resolution in the action, the comic discovery or *cognito*. The appearance of this new society is frequently signalized by some kind of party or festive ritual (p. 163). The normal response of the audience is the recognition that the new society is "as it should be" (p. 167).

The Dialectical Movement: The Renewal of Society

In accordance with the above model, the *Chançon de Willame* would constitute a comic movement from one society to another. Before examining the mechanics of comic transition in the *chanson*, let us delineate the components involved in this process. Alfred Adler¹⁴ has very adeptly demonstrated the function of recurrent motifs as organizational devices; one which he does not cover is the theme of food with its sub-motifs of thirst and hunger.

¹⁴"Guillaume, Vivien et Rainouart: Le souillé et le pur," *Romania*, 90 (1969), 1-13.

William's line is characterized by a voracious appetite which is in turn associated with courage on the battlefield:

"Par Deu, bel sire, cist est de vostre lin,
E si mangue un grant braun porcin,
E a dous traiz beit un cester de vin.
Ben dure guere deit rendre a sun veisin,
Ne ja vilment ne de champ fuir."

(vv. 1054-58)¹⁵

Battle is frequently viewed in terms of hunger ("Les nuiz veiller e les jurz juner / La grant bataille souffrir ne endurer," vv. 1642-43; cf. vv. 2674-80). Food or the lack of food is consistently linked with the absence or surplus of manpower in its dual sense of individual human strength and of collective force. The hunger of Vivien (vv. 838-42), Girard (vv. 1158-61), and Gui (vv. 1737-51) occurs after the loss of the entire French army, when the three are in a weakened physical state; Girard and Gui both request food in order to engage again in battle. The rôle of the leader is connected with the giving of food both socially ("Li quons Willame demande le super / Que la meisné seit ben conreïé," vv. 2852-53) and symbolically (William's administering of lay communion to Vivien, vv. 2026-30, 2048-50), with the supplying of manpower, and with the correct use of both food as a source of strength in battle and of manpower in war against the Saracens. William thus embodies the good leader; he provides for his men, leads them into battle against the Moors, but requires continual reinforcement.

In contrast, Tedbald-Esturmi-Louis-Queen are characterized by overindulgence in food (Tedbald and Esturmi return drunk from vespers, vv. 32-34; the queen was drunk before William's arrival at Laon, v. 2599), by an abundance of manpower, and by a wasteful misuse of both. Tedbald does not transmute food into strength, and his intake of food quite literally results in waste (vv. 345-54); he has sufficient manpower but, cowardly, abandons his forces in battle. Likewise Louis does not use his manpower to combat the Saracens. The contrast between William and the court of Louis (here represented by the queen) is explicit in vv. 2603-07, 2614-16, 2620-22:

¹⁵Cf. also vv. 1425-32: "Qui mangue un grant pain a tamis, / E pur ço ne laisse les dous gasteals rostiz, / E tut mangue un grant braun porcin, / E en aproef un grant poun rosti, / E a dous traiz beit un sester de vin, / Ben dure guere deit rendre a sun veisin; / Ja trop vilment ne deit de chanp fuir / Ne sun langage par lui estre plus vil."

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"Pute reine, pudneise surparlere,
Tedbald vus fut, le culvert lecchere,
E Esturmi od la maiveise chere.
Cil deussent garder l'Archam de la gent paene;
Il s'en fuirent, Vivier remist arere.

Quant tu sez as chaudes chiminees,
E tu manges tes pudcins en pevrees,
E beis tun vin as colpes coverclees,

E nus en traïum les males matinees,
Sin recevon les buz e les colees,
Enz en l'Archamp les sanglantes testés!"¹⁶

The Saracens, on the other hand, constantly consume French manpower and are associated with cannibalism; the demonic imagery which characterizes the pagans (see, for example, vv. 2136-39) culminates in the cannibalistic image of Tabur:

Este vus errant Tabur de Canaloine,
Un Sarazin, qui Dampnedeu confunde!
Gros out le cors, e l'eschine curbe,
Lunges les denz, si est velu cun urse;
Ne porte arme for le bec e les uncles;
Veit Guielin, si li est coru sure;
Baie la gule, si l'i quidad trangleutre,
Tut ensemment cum une meure pome.

Il traist s'espee e Willame la sue,
Fierent e caplent, e cil baie la gule,
Les branz d'ascer mangue e runge
Od les denz granz, que Danpnedeu cunfunde!

¹⁶The type of food eaten is important throughout the *chanson*: healthful food characterizes William's table (unleavened bread, roasted meat, wine) in contrast with the decadent fare at the court (peppered chicken); Vivien drinks from the impure ditch and vomits; Gui partakes of bread and wine at the pagan table and is captured.

Reneward vint corant par mi une cumbe,
 Veit le paien, si li est coru sure,
 E cil a lui, qui nel meschoisit unques.
 Baie la gule, car il le quidad transglutre . . .
 (vv. 3170-77, 3184-87, 3192-95)

The joint theme of food and manpower serves as an organizational motif which establishes the dialectical axes of the *chanson*:

<i>Saracens (External Threat)</i>	→	<i>William-Vivien</i>	←	<i>Tedbald-Louis (Internal Threat)</i>
devouring		deprivation		over-indulgence
perverted use of food:		righteous use of food:		decadent use of food:
cannibalism		sacred battle		waste
consumption of manpower		need of manpower		abundance of manpower
destruction: destructive force		sustenance: active force		abuse: passive force

The food-man power motif is also employed to dramatize the hero's plight: before the intervention of Rainouart, William has descended from the place of honor at the dining table to "la plus basse table" (v. 2392), alone in his empty dining hall:

Il veil les bancs, les formes e les tables,
 La u soleit seer sun grant barnage;
 Il ne vit nul juer par cele sale,
 Ne deporter od eschés ne od tables.
 Puis les regrette, cum gentil home deit faire.
 "Ohi, bone sale, cum estes lung e lee!
 De totes parz vus vei si aurné,
 Beneit seit la dame qui si t'ad conreié.
 Ohi, haltes tables, cum estes levees!
 Napes de lin vei desure getees.
 Ces escuiles emplies e rasees
 De hanches e d'espalles, de niueles e de obleies.
 N'i mangerunt les fiz de franchises meres.
 Qui en l'Archamp unt les testes colpees!"
 (vv. 2394-2407)¹⁷

¹⁷Again we have William's social and symbolic value as a good leader (note the unleavened bread and consecrated water of v. 2405); in his society, he alone provides the means of attaining chivalric salvation through battle against the pagans.

Guibourc summarizes the import of his situation:

"Sire Willame, ad Dampnedeu congié!
Par main a l'albe munte sur tun destrer,
Dreit a Loun pense de chevalcher
A l'emperere qui nus solt aver chiers,
Qui del socurs nus vienge ça aider.
E s'il nel fait, si li rendez sun fee;
Mar en tendré un jur un demi pee.
Met en provende e tei e ta moiller,
U a sa table nus laist, pur Deu, manger
A chascun jur de sun pain dous quarters."

(vv. 2422-31)

William is threatened with the possibility of relinquishing his position of leadership (=giving of food) and of becoming a mere dependent (=receiving of food).

Guibourc is very intimately involved with this organizational motif. Her pagan origins are carefully vindicated by the poet: among William's first words is the statement that Guibourc has been baptized into Christianity (vv. 946-47), William tests her loyalty (v. 1012), and Guibourc reacts with unfailing devotion to the Christian cause, offering her nephew in battle against the Saracens (vv. 1030-32), and the poet himself concludes:

Il n'i out tele femme en la crestienté
Pur sun seignur servir e honorer,
Ne pur eshalcer sainte crestienté,
Ne pur lei maintenir e garder.

(vv. 1487-90)

Guibourc is clearly established as the heroine of our *chanson*; moreover, within the symbolic framework of the poem, she represents a female figure of renewal or rebirth, for Guibourc is constantly depicted as the giver of food and of manpower.¹⁸ Guibourc has nurtured both Vivien

¹⁸Guibourc's negative counterpart is, of course, the queen. While Guibourc furnishes food, rest, and manpower as vital regenerative sources of strength in battle, the queen wastes food, sleep, and manpower in debasing sexual activity. The two female figures are spiritual representatives of their respective households. The rôle of woman as nourisher and/or armer of men is common in epic and may be traced from ancient times (e.g., Achilles and Thetis, Aeneas and Venus, Odysseus and Athena) up to the Serbo-Croatian tales studied by Albert B. Lord in *The Singer of Tales*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature, 24 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960).

(vv. 684-85, 994-95) and Gui (vv. 1450, 1737-40). She serves the messenger Girard with water, bread, wine, and meat (vv. 1042-50), puts him to bed (vv. 1066-67), helps him to mount for battle, and commends him to God (vv. 1081-82). She serves the returning William with water, bread, meat, and wine (vv. 1401-11), puts him to bed (vv. 1485-91), helps him to mount for battle, and commends him to God (vv. 1503-04). She arms Gui (vv. 1541-47), helps him to mount for battle, and commends him to God (vv. 1551-52, 1560). She arms Rainouart (vv. 2846-48). In addition, she assembles thirty thousand men for William's second battle, feeds them, and serves them wine (vv. 1233-39, 1353); and she offers to assemble four thousand horsemen for the third encounter with the pagans (vv. 2379-81).

Rainouart¹⁹ is the masculine counterpart of Guibourc: he is the instrument of renewal. Rainouart comes from the kitchen; his *tinel* may well be a folkloric reminiscence of the Indo-European tree-god or vegetation-god.²⁰ While he is both provider (kitchen-boy) and provided-for (socially he is William's liegeman), in reality Rainouart is an autonomous and self-renewing figure: like Vivien, Girard, and Gui, Rainouart experiences hunger on the battlefield; unlike them, his deprivation transmutes itself into a source of renewed strength:

"Si jo fusse a Loun la cité,
En la cusine u jo soleie converser,
A cest hure me fuisse jo digne;
Del bon vin cler eusse beu assez,
Si m'en dormisse juste le feu suet.
Ço comparant Sarazin e Escler!"

(vv. 3000-05)

¹⁹On the figure of Rainouart, see Adler, "Rainouart and the Composition of the *Chanson de Guillaume*" and "Guillaume, Vivien et Rainouart: Le souillé et le pur"; Bédier, *Les Légendes épiques*, I, pp. 97ff.; H.M. Evers, "Notes on Rainouart," *Romanic Review*, 2 (1911), 144-62; Frappier, *Les Chansons de geste*, 1, pp. 219-33; Gerald Herman, "Rainouart au tinel" and the Rustic Hero Tradition in *Baudouin de Sebourc*," *Romance Notes*, 16 (1974-75), 415-21; A.H. Krappe, "The Origin of the *Geste Rainouart*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 24 (1923), 1-10; J. Wathélet-Willem, "Le Personnage de Rainouart dans la *Chanson de Guillaume* et dans *Aliscans*," *Société Rencesvals IV^e Congrès International*, *Studia Romanica*, 14 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1969), pp. 166-78.

²⁰For this seasonal figure of rebirth in European literature, see William A. Nitze's study on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, "Is the Green Knight a Vegetation Myth?" *Modern Philology*, 33 (1935-36), 351-66.

Rainouart is the comic catalyst which brings about the crystallization of William's society; his symbolic function is best understood in conjunction with Guibourc. Guibourc immediately recognizes her brother but does not acknowledge him (vv. 2822-29, 2846-51). After proving his worth as an instrument of renewal in vanquishing the Saracens and after being baptized (religious integration), Rainouart is formally acknowledged by Guibourc (social integration); he has deserved his place beside her as the guiding spirit of the new society.

It now remains for us to apply our findings to the suggested model of the comic *mythoi*. The opening antithesis between Vivien and Tedbald-Esturmi establishes the ethos of the *chanson* and presents the basic anomaly of the society represented in the *Willame*: Tedbald-Esturmi (and by thematic association, Louis-Queen) are recognizable usurpers²¹ who hold positions of social power; Vivien-William represent the desirable society but are confronted with obstacles which supply the action of the poem (external threat = Saracens, internal threat = weak lords, cowardice, lack of manpower). Vivien and William fail to achieve the establishment of the desirable society, however, because they cannot free themselves from social conventions: they are subject to the "habit, ritual bondage, arbitrary law" of the old society; they do not completely disassociate themselves—and are not disassociated by the poet—from Tedbald-Louis.²² Both Guibourc and Rainouart are outsiders and can effect renewal. Guibourc is a symbolic figure of rebirth: she offers nourishment, sustenance, rest, replenishment, manpower. The instrument of renewal is Rainouart:²³ he vanquishes the external threat of the pagans and successfully confronts the internal problems of weak leadership (he forcefully leaves Louis's court, vv. 2669-94), cowardice (he turns the cowards back and adopts them as his "pople" and his "barnez," vv. 2960-78), and lack of manpower (when Rainouart intervenes in the third battle there are no mortalities mentioned, he frees William's "parenté"). Rainouart comes to represent a pragmatically free, self-

²¹From, of course, a moral rather than political standpoint.

²²For the inability of William and Vivien to disassociate themselves from Tedbald-Louis, see Adler, "Guillaume, Vivien et Rainouart: Le souillé et le pur." 1-13.

²³Rainouart—the humor of our *chanson*—alone has the power "to force much of the play's society into line with his obsession," which is that of William, i.e. to defeat the Saracens and avenge Vivien's death.

assertive society.²⁴ When William forgets to seat him at his dining hall (vv. 3350 ff.), Rainouart vows to avenge the personal injustice he has suffered. Guibourc, as matron of the new society, effects a reconciliation, and we are told that William and Rainouart subsequently always eat together:

Ore sunt Willame e Reneward assemblez,
Par grant amur se sunt entre acordez.
Il en alerent a la cité de Orenge,
Poez saver que a manger eurent sempres.
(vv. 3474-77)

The crystallization of this new society is appropriately signaled by a feast and by Rainouart's ritual baptism. The comic *cognitio* is Guibourc's acknowledgement of her brother and his subsequent integration into William's newly triumphant society. The final society of the *chanson* is all-inclusive: the old society is not explicitly repudiated in the affirmation of the new.²⁵

The Cyclical Movement: The Renewal of Epic

We have noted above the comic discrepancy between *geste* and reality. In a sense, the *Chançon de Willame* is an epic about an epic. Throughout the poem, there is a unique awareness on the part of the characters of *being* characters in an epic. When William returns with Guischart's body, a baron assures Guibourc:

"Ainz ad mun seignur Willame un juleur.
En tote France n'ad si bon chantur,

²⁴His sister Guibourc has represented al] along this same sense of moral pragmatism; see Robertson, pp. 28-36.

²⁵In comedy, the emergent new society is not always all-inclusive; if the "usurper" or the blocking character refuses to go along with the vision of the protagonist(s), will not adopt a festive attitude, etc., he is either ritually punished or expelled. See Maurice Charney, *Comedy High and Low: An Introduction to the Experience of Comedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), and Erich Segal, *Roman Laughter: The Comedy of Plautus*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature, 29 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968).

N'en bataille plus hardi fereur;
 E de la geste li set dire les chançons,
 De Clodoveu (etc.) . . .
 Cil furent si parent e sis ancesur.
 Preuz est mult, e pur ço l'aime mun seignur,
 E pur sul itant qu'il est si bon chanteur
 E en bataille vassal conquereur,
 Si l'en aporte mun seignur de l'estur."
 (vv. 1258-62, 1270-74)

Likewise Guibourc refers to the reciting of William's *geste*:

Si vus fuissez Willame al curb niés,
 Od vus venissent set mile homes armez,
 Des Frans de France, des baruns naturels;
 Tut entur vus chantassent ces juglers,
 Rotes e harpes i oist hom soner.
 (vv. 2244-48)

William himself shows an awareness of his ancestral *geste* ("Aincui verrum al chef e en la cue / Quele est la geste Naimeri de Nerbune," vv. 3166-67) and demonstrates a pseudo-Pirandellian preoccupation with the content of his own *geste*:

"Par Deu, Guiburc, tu as dreit que tu plurs!
 Kar ja diseient en la cur mun seignur
 Que eres femme Willame, uns riche hom,
 Un hardi cunte, un vaillant fereur.
 Or estes femme a un malveis fuieur,
 Un quart cunte, un malveis tresturnur,
 Qui de bataille n'ameine home un sul."
 (vv. 1303-09)

Geste denotes both the "historical" deed and its subsequent glorification through song. The jongleuresque recreation is intimately related to the nature of the listening audience, and in this regard it is clear that the *Chançon de Willame* reflects a different milieu than the *Chanson de Roland*, an audience long since acquainted with the superhuman feats of the traditional epic hero.²⁶ Now it is more than probable that the

²⁶The precise character of the twelfth-century audience of the *Willame* has yet to be satisfactorily analyzed; two studies have recently explored the relationship between the Old French *chansons* and their public: Hans-Erich Keller, "Changes in Old French Epic Poetry and Changes in the Taste of Its Audience," in *Philologica Romanica: Erhard Lommatzsch gewidmet*, ed. Manfred Bambeck and Hans-Helmut Christmann, hgg. in

Rainouart episode was not originally connected with G₁, yet we have seen how Rainouart is thematically central to the meaning of the *chanson*. We shall now briefly examine his appropriateness as a surrogate for the epic figure of William.²⁷

The extant version of the *chanson* presupposes a considerable anterior elaboration of the Orange cycle—perhaps literally the three hundred fifty years of v. 1334—and reflects a critical stage in the epic tradition, that of maintaining audience interest in a *geste* that is well-known and well-loved. A.H. Krappe noted that

Rainouart appears for the first time in the second part of the *Chanson de Guillaume*, the earliest extant poem of the cycle; nevertheless it is fair to suppose that he did not originally belong to the *Geste Guillaume d'Orange*. On the other hand, it cannot be said that the rôle played by the giant in the *Guillaume* and *Aliscans* is nothing but an inorganic addition. It is true, the minstrels who composed the poems did not know how to avoid certain gross inconsistencies; but it must be admitted that the story of Rainouart forms quite an essential part of both. Take away those episodes in which he is the real hero, and there remains little more than the tiresome *chanson de geste* battle with nothing to relieve the monotony.²⁸

William in our *chanson* is already a well-defined epic hero—bearing both the onerous burden of his own *geste* and of that elaborated around his ancestral lineage²⁹—who both literally and figuratively lacks the

Verbindung mit Erich von Richthofen (München: Fink, 1975), pp. 150-77 (an abridged version of this study was previously published in *Olifant 1*, [April 1974] 4, pp. 48-56); and Peter Noble, "Attitudes to Social Class as Revealed by Some of the Older *Chansons de geste*," *Romania*, 94 (1973), 359-83.

²⁷Three recent studies have addressed this problem. David Schenck ("Towards a Re-Interpretation of the William of Orange Cycle," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation [Pennsylvania State University, 1971]) examines the artistic unity of five of the Guillaume epics. James R. Nichols, III ("Heroes and Clowns: A Character Study in the Old French William Epic," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation [University of Michigan, 1971]) analyzes the meaning of heroism and the comedy within the medieval William cycle and includes character studies of Vivien (hero), Rainouart (clown), and William (hero-clown). Rita Lejeune focuses on the latter two characters in "La naissance du couple littéraire 'Guillaume d'Orange et Rainouart au Tinel'," *Marche Romane*, 20 (1970), 39-60.

²⁸Krappe, "The Origin of the *Geste Rainouart*," pp. 1-2; his assumption that the audience of the *Willame* would have been bored with "tiresome" epic battles is debatable.

²⁹See Guibourc's remonstrance in v. 1326: "Que tun linage seit per tei avilé."

"grant juvente" necessary to redeem his *geste*:

"Treis cenz anz ad e cinquante passez
 Que jo fu primes de ma mere nez;
 Veil sui e feble, ne puis armes porter,
 Ço est failli que Deus m'aveit presté,
 La grant juvente, que ne poet retourner . . ."
 (vv. 1334-38)³⁰

After the death of Vivien, the action of the *chanson* consists of William's attempts to avenge himself through Girard, Gui, and Rainouart. The three youths share many elements in common, and each is a potential surrogate for William:

<i>Girard (Epic Figure)</i>	<i>Gui (Puer Senex)</i>	<i>Rainouart (Comic Figure)</i>
association with Tedbald; his squire		association with Louis; his kitchen boy
	comes from the hearth	comes from the kitchen
repudiation of Tedbald		repudiation of Louis
fed by Guibourc	fed by Guibourc	fed by Guibourc
mounted on horse and blessed by Guibourc	armed, mounted on horse, and blessed by Guibourc	armed and blessed by Guibourc
faces cowardly Esturmi, knocks him off saddle		turns cowards back, adopts them
hunger on battlefield (infertile): death	hunger on battlefield (impure): capture	hunger on battlefield (fertile): victory

Were Girard the catalytic agent of William's triumph, we would have little more than another conventional epic, for the figure of Girard introduces little novelty into the *chanson* and would hardly spark the interest of a listening audience. Gui, on the other hand, does constitute a certain innovation, the intercalation of *the puer senex* in an epic context. Thematically, however, he is not dynamically involved in the dialectical axes established above: he undergoes no symbolic dissociation from Tedbald-Louis; he rather initiates a reverse movement from purity to

³⁰ William's puzzling statement of v. 1334 may well reflect the same awareness of his own oral-literary existence as vv. 1303-09. The historical William of Toulouse was born ca. 748; a literal interpretation of his statement would date the poem in the first half of the twelfth century (well within the range of speculation) and may perhaps be justified by the repeated identification of William and his *geste* throughout the *Chançon*.

impurity, from nourishment by Guibourc to the partaking of bread and wine at the pagan table. Moreover, within the poetic limits of the text, he is aesthetically unsatisfactory, for the *puer senex* lacks the necessary stature to effect a renovation of William's *geste*. Of these figures, Rainouart alone combines the necessary qualities to function effectively as a surrogate for William: he meaningfully participates in the conflict between the two axes of society; as a comic figure, he introduces a desirable element of novelty; and he convincingly exhibits his superiority (albeit comic) over the other characters in bringing about the new society.

We have examined the thematic reasons governing the logic of Rainouart as an appropriate figure of renewal, but there are, however, artistic motives as well which qualify him as a comic type for William. When Frappier examined the causes of William of Orange's popularity in the medieval epic, he noted two characteristics of this figure which seemed to capture the popular imagination initially: his popular origins (he exemplified the self-made man, "d'Orange" being a title acquired by personal worth and prowess rather than by hereditary right) and his inordinate strength:

Il est aussi Guillaume Fierebrace, Guillaume "aux bras redoutables,"
Guillaume dont le poing terrible est capable d'assommer un homme.
Ces noms prêtent déjà au personnage une vaillance pittoresque, une
allure épique dégagée de toute raideur, un ton qui n'atteint pas
toujours à une beauté tragique et austère, mais descend volontiers dans
un registre plus bas, plus familial, plus humain peut-être . . .³¹

Rainouart—also "très peuple" and endowed with superhuman strength—is thus a comic sublimation of William's traditional *geste*. He is, therefore, both thematically and artistically justifiable as a surrogate for William in the process of renewal evidenced in the poem. His inclusion in the *Chancun de Willame* marks an involution of the epic—a self-critical and humorous turning inward—in order to renew both its meaning and its interest, an essential procedure of the "épopée vivante."

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³¹Frappier, *Les Chansons de geste*, I, p. 10.