## Book Review

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Joël H. Grisward. *Archéologie de l'épopée médiévale : Structures trifonctionnelles et mythes indo-européens dans le cycle des Narbonnais.* Préface de Georges Dumézil. Paris: Payot, 1981. Pp. 341.

IN 1980, JOËL H. GRISWARD defended his *doctorat d'état* thesis at the Sorbonne, under the title *Naissance d'AymerIdes : l'idéologie des trois fonctions dans le cycle des Narbonnais* (report in *Perspectives médiévales,* 6 [1980]). Note 24 on page 26 of the volume here under consideration tells us that the printed version has somewhat shortened notes and bibliography, and that the original chapter 10, on "Les Trois Choix du roi Hugues", is to be published separately as part of "un travail d'ensemble sur le *Voyage de Charlemagne* et le thème du roi-laboureur. "

As the subtitle makes clear, and as the author frequently emphasizes, the basis of the study is the work of Georges Dumézil on Indo-European mythological / epic structures, in which "the world is apprehended through a tripartite system of categories" (Grisward, p. 20). Dumézil, in vol. I of his *Mythe et épopée,* subtitled "L'Idéologie des trois fonctions dans les épopées des peuples indo-européens" (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), lists them as priests, warriors, producers or, more abstractly — and more basically — the "'fonctions' hiérarchisées de souveraineté magique et juridique, de force physique et principalement guerrière, d'abondance tranquille et féconde" (p. 16; quoted by Grisward, p. 20). Dumézil himself is convinced by Grisward's analyses; the master's preface (pp. 9-15) is in itself a good review of the latter's thesis (in both senses of the word).

Perhaps the most striking thing about Grisward's book is that it is both fascinating and well-written. Although the *chanson de geste* of *Les Narbonnais* is at the center, the work covers all of the William cycle, as well as Andrea da Barberino's prose *I Nerbonesi,* and makes frequent forays of varying depth into Arthurian literature in both French and English, the Irish epic (the *Táin),* Iranian literature, in particular the Shahnamah of Firdousi, Indian literature, above all the *Mahabharata,* not to mention other French, old German, and *j'en passe* texts.

Even for the scholar who may have delved into some of the texts taken up, this activity could be dizzying. Grisward keeps it all clear and maintains interest, even through what may seem long digressive passages. Fur-

thermore, the work does not smell of the library carrel; the prose is not musty, the ordinary tics of dissertation style do not occur. Clearly, Grisward is convinced by his research thesis and is mightily interested in his findings (anyone who heard him speak at the Arthurian congress in Glasgow could have no doubt of that); his enthusiasm is catching. On the other hand, his is no grab-you-by-the-lapel, listen-to-my-great-theory style. Interesting and interested, but not hectoring or browbeating. *Bref,* I found reading these 319 pages to be interesting, enlightening, and a pleasure.

Well, as they used to say, so much for the *forme;* what about the essential, the *fond* (not really to accept the old dichotomy)? Grisward notes (p. 19) that previous attempts at explaining the family of Aymeri have been fruitless, based as they were on seeking historical antecedents for the members. But even the partial successes in this domain cannot explain the constitution of the group. Such an explanation is furnished from much earlier times, as codified in Indo-European myth. The Aymerides are organized, according to Grisward, in a series of three pairs, each pair being composed of a son from the elder three and another from the younger three; thus Bernard and Beuve represent Dumézil's first function (rule : King), Guillaume and Aïmer the second (power : Warrior), Hernaut and Garin the third (abundance, riches : Rich man or Producer). Guibert, the youngest son, is chosen by Aymeri to be his successor (and thus belongs to the first function). The first chapter is a demonstration of this classification.

The second chapter "Les Fils irrespectueux et le péché du père" takes up the question of the test to which Aymeri puts his sons. All of them but the youngest failing it, he exiles the six and keeps Guibert with him. The first part of the Mahabharata, called by Dumézil the "roman de Yayati," presents a parallel case: One of the sons offends the father the most gravely and is cursed for the offense. In the *Narbonnais,* the cursed son is Hernaut "le roux," but in the Italian *Nerbonesi* it is Namier: (Aïmer "le chetif" — an adjective which Grisward insists, with a full argument, means "the exile" and not "the captive"). Which is the "original" version? An examination of the two Romance versions will not allow a determination. Grisward maintains that the Mahabharata shows the Italian version to be the "original" Indo-European one, that the cursed son is a Warrior and not a Rich Man. The French version makes up for its change in category by qualifying Hernaut as an arrogant man; pride (improper) is the reason for the character and the curse.

A review cannot replicate the argument or present, even if desired, a counter-argument. What is of importance is that Grisward's discussion

shows how wider contextualization (diachronic) in the Indo-European epic in general allows a better understanding of the prehistory (Grisward's "archaeology") of the Narbonnese cycle and also allows a better understanding of the cycle's dynamics, that is, the compensatory qualification of the "Rich Man" Hernaut as overweeningly proud.

The third chapter examines the seven Aymerides as a whole in the *Nerbonesi.* Chapters four through nine focus on the functional divisions of the sons in the French cycle, with a very interesting, if brief, chapter on the only Aymeride daughter, Blanchefleur.

The final chapter takes up the conundrum, in laisse 112 of *Aymeri de Narbonne,* of Hernaut's three vows:

1) never to have a red-haired woman (if not wife);
2) never to flee in combat, no matter what the enemy;
3) never to eat *tourte* (a sort of heavy, dark, cheap bread);

all of which vows he breaks later (or would gladly have, in the case of the third). Through comparison with an Ossetian (north Caucasian = "Iranians of the North") legend about their heroes, called Narts (as reported by Dumézil [*Mythe et épopée* I]), and with the *Avowing of Arthur,* as well as with the beginning of the *Táin,* Grisward explains that the three vows correspond, once more, to Dumézil's three functions: Magico-religious sovereignty; Strength in battle; Abundance.

Grisward is aware, in his conclusion, that he has concentrated on the resemblances, "attenuating the divergences and differences" (p. 326), which can be taken up in further study. This is a quite proper methodological stance. He sees other questions which could be examined: the Vivien / Rainouart complex; the place of Guiborc, and of Aymeri himself and Hermenjart. Modestly, he gives his study as a simple beginning.

It would seem that he has indeed demonstrated the existence of the trifunctional schema in the cycle. The epistomological question — are the structures in the work, in the "mind," or even simply an artefact of an analytical grid? — can be left aside at this point. The main first question is: does the notion help us to understand the cycle? I am convinced, by this reading, that it does. At the risk of using the decried "mind as muscle" metaphor, I also find the mind-stretching exercise provided by the reading tobe *tonifiant.*

Many of us have sincerely and even profitably sacrificed at the altar of positivist historicism. Grisward's *locus cultus,* in the same gathering

place, may well be higher. He certainly shows it to be legitimate.

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Guillaume d'Orange and the Chansons de geste
Guillaume d'Orange et l'épopée romane
Essays presented to Duncan McMillan in celebration of his seventieth birthday by his friends and colleagues of the Société Rencesvals
Edited by Wolfgang van Emden and Philip E. Bennett

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