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Initials and Laisse Division in Two Later Epics: *Aiol* and *Parise la Duchesse*

From the beginning of modern studies of the Romance Epic, the basic narrative unit has been unanimously considered to be the laisse and, almost as unanimously, a change of assonance or rhyme has been accepted as the sole determining factor for starting a new laisse.[1] This idea goes hand in hand with the attitude that the chanson de geste was destined for an oral performance, either having been written down by a poet for a jongleur to recite, or being re-created by the jongleur himself during his performance through an oral-formulaic technique. This method of determining narrative divisions within an epic poem works well when dealing with those few works that feature an average laisse length of, say, twenty lines or less, for it is only this small part of the epic corpus that seems to fulfill canonical expectations as to narrative divisions. When dealing with this type of work the presence of initials, those generally alternating red and blue capital letters, seems redundant since they appear only where there is an assonance change.

However, in dealing with epics beyond those of the first generation, I have found that initials other than those corresponding to changes of assonance or rhyme are frequently revealing for determining laisse division. A few editors have taken initials into

[1] However, some scholars, such as Jean Rychner, have suggested that this dependency is not absolute: "Cette réalité [de la laisse] repose apparemment toute entière sur l'assonance, puisque c'est elle qui groupe les vers constituant la laisse et qu'en changeant d'assonance le jongleur commence une laisse nouvelle...mais...elle n'en assure pas pour autant à elle seule la réalité de la laisse." *(La Chanson de geste: essai sur l'art épique des jongleurs* [Geneva: Droz, 1955] 69).

account when determining divisions of the text;[2] however, the notion that the laisse exists completely independently of an initial, that the initial is only added as an afterthought, as a marginal decoration, is extremely widespread among the editors whose works I have consulted. A typical case is that of *Garin le Loheren*, a poem which has 75% of its 16,000 lines assonating or rhyming in *-i*, a fact which causes any juxtaposed laisses to have the same assonance. In spite of the obvious lack of assonance change to determine textual divisions, in the 1947 edition of MS A, no explanation is given other than the typical statement: "The initial

[2] In his precise modern edition *of Huon de Bordeaux* (Université libre de Bruxelles, Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres, Travaux 20 [Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1960]) Pierre Ruelle describes the presence of initials with unusual clarity. In this work, the starting of a new laisse becomes an editorial decision, influenced, but not determined, by the presence of an initial. At line 916, the appearance of an initial without assonance change is rejected (9) and the current laisse continues: however, at line 4976, the assonance does not change, but the initial is accepted which announces the first line of the well-known passage of 16 lines in which the jongleur addresses his listeners directly, and a new laisse is begun at this point. At line 4492, when the narrative resumes, a second new laisse is begun, in spite of the absence of both an initial and a change of assonance. As a result, the 16-line passage becomes a separate stanza, exactly as it appeared in the Guessard A. P. F. edition. This editorial decision was accepted without question by at least two scholars who felt that the lack of assonance change was intended to provide the jongleur with the option of displacing this plea to another section of the poem (Maurice Delbouille, "Les Chansons de geste et le livre," *Technique littéraire des chansons de geste, Actes du Colloque de Liège* [Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1959]; Marguerite Rossi, *Huon de Bordeaux et l'évolution du genre épique au XIIIe siècle* [Paris: Honoré Champion, 1975] 155-156).

A second editorial decision based on an initial is that of Sven Andolf in his 1941 edition of *Floovant*. In a note to line 1204, he states: "Ce vers commence par une lettrine...Comme le scribe, nous préférons commencer une nouvelle laisse ici, bien que l'assonance soit la même: le contenu du récit varie." *(Floovant, chanson de geste du XIIe siècle* [Uppsala: Almquist og Wilkells, 1941] 99).

Finally, in his edition *of Le Moniage Rainouart*, which is preserved in nine MSS, Gerald Bertin created two laisses which he designated as CXIV and CXIVa. This solution recognized a change of rhyme that occured in the absence of both the initial and the *vers orphelin* found elsewhere in the MSS in question. (S.A.T.F. [Paris: J. Picard, 1973] 133).

letter B...of the first laisse...represents a knight...The other laisses begin with initials..."[3] Are there initials elsewhere? Did the initial determine the beginning of a new laisse? As with so many editions, in this instance it is not possible to determine without directly viewing the MS.

Of all the works that compose the epic corpus, perhaps none invites a study of its initials more than *Parise la Duchesse.* Up until 1986, this poem of 3106 lines had been generally regarded as having only 19 laisses, since it features but 19 assonance changes. The resulting average laisse length of 155 lines causes *Parise* to appear as an especially marked example of the lengthening of the laisse in later epics. In calculating the number of laisses in *Parise,* scholars and editors adopted the view that in the unique MS, Bartsch's Law is totally inoperative, leaving *-é* and *-ié* so thoroughly mixed as to constitute a single assonance (as are *-en* and *-an).*[4] However, in her 1986 edition of *Parise,*[5] May Plouzeau establishes a distinction between laisses in *-ié* and *-é,* thus raising the number of assonance shifts to 35 and lowering the average number of lines per laisse to 86.[6]

In order to limit the length of this study, I have included only one other similar poem, *Aiol.* Both works are preserved in late thirteenth-century MSS; more importantly, in their content both

[3] Josephine Elvira Vallerie, ed. *Garin le Loheren, According to Manuscript A (Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 2983)* (Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers, 1947) 13.

[4] It is difficult to attribute this phenomenon to occasional scribal errors or poetic licence such as that which Bédier found in the Oxford *Roland* (Joseph Bédier "Les Assonances en *-é* et en *-ié* dans la *Chanson de Roland," Romania* 47, 465-480).

[5] May Plouzeau, ed. *Parise la Duchesse (chanson de geste du XIIIe siècle), Senefiance* 17 & 18 (Aix-en-Provence: Publications du CUERMA, Université de Provence, 1986).

[6] Plouzeau, 88-89, 90, 94.

works display a roughly equal mixture of canonical epic and romance elements. Here the evolution towards the *chanson d'aventures* is far from being completed: neither poem yet presents enchanted objects, magicians, or fairies, nor leaves the European continent for its settings. Compared to rambling works such as *Tristan de Nanteuil, Beuve de Hanstone,* or *Lion de Bourges,* both poems display relatively clear and concise plot structures, which move fairly rapidly toward final resolution. Since the contents of *Parise* continue to bear a strong resemblance to those of earlier models, it appeared incongruous that its versification could have undergone such a radical transformation.

When I began this study the Plouzeau edition had not yet appeared and, unfortunately, the attitude that considers initials as non-pertinent decorations is reflected in the other editions of *Aiol* and *Parise la Duchesse.* Of the four editions of these two poems, only the earliest edition of *Parise,* by G.F. Martonne (1836), notes the initials. Neither the two nineteenth-century editions of *Aiol* nor the 1860 edition *of Parise* reflect their presence at points where the assonance does not change.[7] The second A.P.F. edition uses indentations from time to time; however, these paragraphs seldom correspond to the placement of the initials. In the Plouzeau edition the initials are faithfully mentioned in the notes below the text, even to the point of indicating an initial at line 612 where a personal inspection of the MS failed to reveal one.

[7] Guillaume François de Martonne, ed. *Parise la Duchesse,* Romans des Douze Pairs de France 4 (Paris: Techner, 1836); Jacques Norman and Gaston Raynaud, eds., *Aiol: chanson de geste,* Société des Anciens Textes Français (Paris: Didot, 1877); Wendelin Foerster, ed., *Aiol et Mirabel und Elie de Saint Gile* (Heilbronn, 1876-82); François Guessard and Lorédan Larchey, eds., *Parise la Duchesse,* Les Anciens Poëtes de la France 4 (Paris: Vieweg: 1860).

By consulting the two unique MSS in which *Aiol* and *Parise* have been preserved,[8] I discovered that in both the placement of initials does not always correspond to a change of assonance. In the *Aiol* MS, there are four initials that occur within the text at points where there is no shift of assonance. These initials, however, do not appear to be placed at random, for in each instance they signal a type of break or shift in the narrative, a function which has often been associated with the shift of assonance at the beginning of a traditional laisse.[9]

In the first example, the hero is being pursued through the streets of Orleans by a group of youths who are taunting him; at the initial, they exit the scene, and Aiol turns his attention towards one of the city gates and its gatekeeper:

"Enfant," che dist Aiol, "tornés de chi...
Li auquant s'en tornerent qui pités prist,
Por chou que belement lor respondi.
A Aiols vint a le porte devers Berri... 2779
Et trova le portier quil dut servir

[8] Quotations from *Aiol* are based on my own transcription of B.N. f. fr. 25516 for an edition of this poem which Sandra C. Obergfell and I are preparing. Quotations from *Parise la Duchesse* are based on my transcription of B.N. f. fr. 1374. Line numbers for these poems are from the S.A.T.F. edition for *Aiol*, and the Plouzeau edition for *Parise.*

[9] Some scholars question the role of a change of laisse to signal a narrative transition. Nico Van Den Boogaard states that it occurs most often within the interior of a laisse: "Les transitions explicites ne permettent pas de diviser la représentation en tranches, mais elles indiquent l'articulation de la narration. C'est pourquoi elles se trouvent le plus souvent à l'intérieur de la laisse..." ("Le Caractère oral de la chanson de geste tardive," *Langue et Littérature françaises: Etudes réunies par R.E.V. Stuip* [Assen: Van Gorcum, 1978] 31). A similar lack of relationship between assonance change and narrative shift was detected by Duncan McMillan while editing *Le Charroi de Nîmes:* "Parfois même un changement d'assonance interviendra sans qu'il semble correspondre au mouvement du récit, par exemple, laisses LI-LII, LIII-LIV." ([Paris: Klincksieck, 1972] 41).

In the next instance, a long speech by Hersent, the userer's wife, about how she will make up for past wrongs by delivering goods, comes to an end; the initial signals a switch to Aiol's triumphant entry into the city at the king's side:

"...Je vous gabai gehui al comenchier,
Or vous en ferai droit mout volentiers
Par quatorse toniaus de nos cheliers...
Qu'ai fait ciés Ysabiau ja caroier."
Ançois qu'Aiols i vienge, sont descargié.
Q Quant Aiols entra primes dedens Orliens, 3635
Meïsmes Loëys qui France tient,
Dejouste lui chevauce par amistié

In the third example, the initial coincides with the beginning of a speech. In the line preceding the inital, we learn that a proclamation by the king was announced in the city. The initial accompanies what first Jacques Chailley, then Jean Rychner called *le timbre d'intonation,*[10] as a direct speech begins which gives us the contents of the proclamation and continues for 13 more lines:

Quant l'entendi li rois, s'en fut mout liés;
Son senescal en apele par amistiés,
Se li a fait el bourc un ban crïer:
O "Or m'entendes," fait il, "franc chevalier," 3733
Marceant et borgois, vous del marchié

In the final occurence of an initial not placed at a change of assonance at line 4165, we can observe a definite scene change from the Saracens in Pamplona to King Louis in Paris.

[10] Jacques Chailley, "Etudes musicales sur la chanson de geste et ses origines," *Revue de Musicologie* 27, (1948): 5. Jean Rychner incorporated this concept into his classic study mentioned in note 1: "Le dessin musical de la laisse était marqué par un timbre d'intonation et par un timbre de conclusion; dans le corps de la laisse, le timbre d'intonation, répété, pouvait alterner avec un timbre de développement" (69).

In addition to the four initials that do not correspond to changes in assonance in *Aiol,* there is a single change of assonance not signaled by an initial (at line 8157).[11]

In *Parise la Duchesse,* the lack of correspondence between changes of assonance and the placement of initials is much more marked.[12] There are three points at which assonance changes without an initial (lines 456, 1657 and 2372); but, most strikingly, there are 39 initials in this poem of only 3106 lines that are unaccompanied by a change of assonance (this number is lowered to 31 if a shift between *-ié* and *-é* is accepted as a change of assonance). The following table notes the Plouzeau edition's line and laisse numbers and the distribution of initials and assonance shifts in the MS.

line	laisse	initial	change of assonance
1	I	S	
120	II	S	-on to -i.e
168	III	Q	-i.e to -é
369	---	L	---
456	IV	---	-é to -i
487	---	A	---
488	V	---	-i to -é
515	---	Q	---

[11] This phenomenon produces what some editors, such as Duncan McMillan, term "laisses multirimes." In his edition of *La Chanson de Guillaume* ([Paris: S.A.T.F. 1949] xxxi-xxxii) this scholar, in the absence of an initial, chose not to start a new laisse, in spite of a change of assonance, thus reducing the edition's number of laisses from 182 to 130. Of course, this editorial decision becomes immediately evident to a reader of the edition, who is able to criticize the idea of "strophes composites," as did Rychner (68).

[12] The initials in the *Parise* MS are very simple, but large and bold, ranging in height from 1.0 to 1.5 cm and occupying the vertical space of between 2 1/2 and 3 1/2 lines.

519	VI	---	(-é to -ié)
534	VÏÏ	---	(-ié to -é)
612	VIII	---	(-é to -ié)
636	IX	D	(-ié to -é)
682	---	S	---
708	---	C	---
803	X	O	-é to -i
823	XI	O	-i to -é
887	---	space left	---
993	---	L	---
1074	---	Q	---
1107	XII	A	-é to -on
1132	XIII	S	-on to -é
1136	---	O	---
1198	---	S	---
1231	---	E	---
1261	---	L	---
1306	---	S	---
1330	---	E	---
1343	---	S	---
1390	---	S	---
1396	---	E	---
1411	---	S	---
1425	---	P	---
1507	---	D	---
1599	XIV	O	(-é to -ié)
1637	XV	S	-ié to -oi
1657	XVI	---	-oi to -é
1697	---	O	---
1883	XVII		(-é to -ié)
1885	---	space left	---
1897	---	H	---
1910	XVIII	---	(-ié to -é)
1924	XIX	---	(-é to -ié)
1934	XX	H	(-ié to -é)
1959	XXI	M	-é to -i
1969	---	C	---
1979	XXII	M	-i to -ié

2022	XXIII	L	(-ié to -é)
2200	XXIV	---	(-é to -ié)
2233	XXV	M	-ié to -an/-en
2246	XXVI	L	-an/-en to -é
2286	XXVII	Q	(-é to -ié)
2316	XXVIII	C	-ié to -é.e
2352	XXIX	A	-é.e to -on
2372	XXX	---	-on to -é
2431	XXXI	S	(-é to -ié)
2458	---	A	---
2471	XXXII	O	(-ié to -é)
2606	---	S	---
2615	---	O	---
2817	---	M	---
2830	---	L	---
2845	XXXIII	---	(-é to -ié)
2874	XXXIV	Q	(-ié to -é)
2923	---	A	---
3066	---	F	---
3073	XXXV	M	-é to -é.e
3086	XXXVI	H	-é.e to é

Whereas in *Aiol* the presence of an initial not at a change of assonance could be explained in every case as indicating a type of break or shift in the narrative, in seven of the 38 instances in *Parise* the narrative rupture is difficult to discern.

In two instances, a tightly knit exposition of ideas is broken by the initial:

1. Et Beuves en manja; ainz que n'aüst gosté,
   L Li furent de la teste andui li oil volé. 369

2. "Sire," ce dit la dame, "cinc cens merciz de Deu
   C Cant vos a toz mes manbrez me laisiez eschaper. 708

In five cases, it seems that the line following the initial is where the initial really should have been placed, and we are perhaps simply witnessing a scribe's mistake:

1. Cosin fu Ganelon, Beranger et Hardré,
Por l'amor Ganelon est an Ongrie alez.
L Li rois l'ot retenu que de plait sot asez. 993
"Sire," ce dit Gontagles, "un petit m'antandez.

The description of Gontagle is followed by the beginning of this character's speech, which would naturally produce a *timbre d'intonation,* thus representing a more logical point for the initial.

The initial at line 487 marks the last line of a laisse assonating in *-i,* before a shift to *-é:*

2. A Donc s'en vont li baron des armes conreïr. 487
Li dux et la duchoise funt Milon conreer.

Its inclusion in the scansion of the line (as *adonc)* results in a hypermetric hemistich. Had the scribe left a space one line lower, the rubricator's initial would have caused it to support a traditional shift of assonance.

3. Il a a son cheval le frain abandoné,
Le chemin vers Cologne s'an est Hugues tornez,
E En quatre jorz horra de sa mere parler. 1396
Il a tant par jornees esploité et hovré
Que il vint a Cologne la mirable cité.

Once again, one could more comfortably start a new stanza at "Il a tant..." The *timbre d'intonation* which we sense in the second line of

the above passage is due in large measure to its reference to the hero.[13]

The fourth example in this category gives the impresssion that the initial is placed one or two lines too late:

4. A iceste parolle an l'enfant apelé:
"Hugues, vendras ou nos aus eschas por joer.
S Si gaaigne cent sols a l'eschaquier doré, 1198
Et s'i nos mostreras des eschax et des dez.

One line higher and the initial would have signaled an enunciatory division beginning with the outset of a direct speech; however, line 1197 continues the *verbum quasi loquendi* that has as its direct object the speech which begins at this line. While this does represent an enunciatory division between *diseur* and *dit*, a more satisfying break would be created by placing the initial two lines higher at line 1196.

In the last case of this type, the initial seems to appear one line too soon:

5. "Sire," ce dit Antoines, "ne m'en puis consirer.
M Ma dame m'a nori doucement et soé." 2817
Li dus [Raymond] a fait sa feme sus un cheval monter,

The obvious choice is not to interrupt Antoine's speech, but to cause a break to occur with the duke's placing his wife on a horse.

The above examples, however, are the only ones in *Parise* that are particularly difficult to justify; all the remaining occurrences

[13] "Il arrive très fréquemment, dans toutes les chansons, que le nom d'un héros, ou le nom commun qui le désigne précisément, figure dans le premier vers d'une laisse comme sujet de la proposition ... C'est une manière d'intonation, qui marque d'autant plus nettement le début de la laisse que, le plus souvent, ce personnage ne sera pas nommé de nouveau à l'intérieur de la laisse, qui concernera pourtant ses faits et gestes, ses discours" (Rychner 71-72). This is also certainly the case in the first two examples from *Aiol.*

happen at much more customary points for epic laisse division. Elsewhere in the *Parise* MS, an initial appears exactly at the beginning of a speech a total of ten times (lines 636, 682, 1231, 1343, 1411, 1507, 1897, 2431, 2606, 3066). In seven cases, an initial signals a line that begins with a temporal adverb such as *or* or *quant.* These adverbs often appear supported by another traditional indication of laisse division: at line 1599, "Or chevauche Hugues..." we find one of these adverbs linked with an epic inversion and the name of the hero; at line 2471, *or* is coupled with parallelism, and at line 1697, with a scene change (Or vos dirons d'Uget qui est arriers remez).

In two examples, an initial marks a slight shift in the mode of action. Finding a horse in the stable shifts to saddling and bridling it:

Venus est a l'estable ou chivauz ot assez,
Tot le meillor a pris quë il i pot trover.
L La selle li a mise et le peitral fermé; 1261
Le frain li mist ou chié, si l'a estroit cenglé.

Coming from the forest to find a castle shifts from exterior to interior and taking up lodging inside:

Par defors le boschage a un chastel trové,
Lai au sa mere vint por la messe escoter,
Quant ele vint ou bois ou ses fiz fu amblez.
E Enz en l'ostel meïsme ou sa mere ot esté, 1330
Ches le riche borjois prist Hugues son ostel.

At line 1934, an initial calls attention to the beginning of an action after the end of a direct speech.

Twice an *oratio recta* is interrupted, but the initial signals a transition within the speech. Hugues first tells his pursuers that he will not return with them, thus defying the king's order; then the initial marks a change of tone as Hugues sends his greetings and his best wishes to the king and his daughter:

"Seignor," ce dit Huguez, "n'i vuel mie or aler.
S Salüez moi le roi et sa fille au vis cler; 1306
Dex li mire l'enor qu'il m'a tojorz porté."

At the end of an epic prayer, the final "If all these things be true..." section is set apart from the preceding recital of Biblical events:

Melchïon fu li tierz, bien l'ai oï conter,
Quant tu les fis des mains Erodë echaper,
Car par autre chemin les an feïs aler.
S Si voirement, beaux Sire, com cë est verité, 1390
Lai moi le chemin segre aler et trestorner...

Two simple changes of scene provide satisfying stanza beginnings: from Duke Raymond's forces to those led by Antoine at line 2458, and back to Raymond's army from Antoine's troops at line 2830.

Evidence of parallelism at six initials, however, provides perhaps the most compelling argument for the initial's presence.[14] The description of two combattants in a judicial duel is restated at the initial:

Et Berangers li fex s'est corus adober...
D'auberc et de vert hiaume et de branc aceré...
Miles fu d'autre part qui plains fu de malfé.
Q Quant il furent ansamble, mout furent esgardé. 515
Chacun drece la lance, s'a l'escu acolé.

In this case, the initial's presence is also supported by the use of *quant.* An initial signals the second half of a double statement by thieves that nothing was stolen:

"A la moie foi, sire, riens n'avons conquesté.
P Plus a de set semaines nos n'avon rien amblé, 887
Fors un petit anfant que vos ici veez,

[14] Rychner 88.

Clarembaut's troops make their sortie twice:

Clarembauz et si ome sont tuit apareillié;
Il issent de la vile, baut et joiant et lié.
P Par de desus la vile sont issuz li archier... 1885

Raymond's men arrive, recount their defeat, and the duke swears revenge upon Clarembaut; then the inital begins the scene again with the duke first inspecting his vanquished troops:

Quant l'antandi li dux, lo san cuide desver;
Il jure Damedeu, le glorïeus dou ciel
Clarembauz an sera, ainz que li solez liet,
Durement asallis et forment domagés.
L Li dux a toz ses homes devant lui esgardez, 2022
Il i avoit des plusors et plaiez et navrez,...
Il jure Damedé.. .Clarembaut asaudra...

The messenger's activities the following morning are restated at the initial:

La noit furent servi et mout bien ostelé;
L'andemain par matin ont congié demandé.
A Au matin, par soz l'aube, s'an vont li messagier 2923

King Hugues' offer of his kingdom and his daughter's hand to his godson is repeated in its entirety:

"Je met jus ma quorone; se la vos vueil doner,
Et si prenez ma fille a moillier et a per.
F Filleuz," ce dit li rois, "ma fille recevez. 3066
Je vos doign la quorone don serez queronez.

A final type of occurrence at first appears without justification, but may create the intriguing possibility of a short pause by the performer / reader in order to leave the audience in suspense. In the line before the initial comes the dramatic moment

when Parise first begins to look at Hugues, her long-lost son. This point in the narrative constitutes a perfect spot for a pause in the recitation without the fear of losing part of the listeners, as the audience would be wondering what the heroine's reaction will be:

Et Hugues sert a table de vin et de claré
Avec le seneschal, auques n'en fu blasmez.
Sa mere la duchesse le prist a regarder.
P Plus resamble son pere que home qui soit nez. 1425
Ele nel conuit mie, ne merveille n'enn ert.

At the initial, the narrative smoothly resumes, answering the listeners' questions.

In summary, if we consider that the assonances *-ié* and *-é* are intimately mixed, *Parise la Duchesse* features 19 assonance changes and 39 initials at a point without assonance change. Only seven initials of these 39 appear at a point in the narrative where a laisse division would be inconsistent with canonical practice, due perhaps to a scribe's error (lines 369, 487, 708, 993, 1198, 1396, 2817). In the remaining 32 cases, at least one, and often a combination of traditional epic features supports the starting of a new stanza (parallelism: 515, 887, 1885, 2022, 2923, 3066; *or, quant:* 1074, 1136, 1599, 2286, 2471, 2615, 2874; beginning of a speech: 636, 682, 1231, 1343, 1411, 1507, 2431, 2606; shift in the action or within a speech: 1261, 1306, 1330, 1390; name of the hero: 1897, 1934; end of a speech / beginning of an action: 1969; change of scene 1697, 2458, 2830; suspense: 1425).

The acceptance of the idea that some sort of break in the narrative is indicated, if only to a reader of the text, may change, to some degree, our view of works like *Parise,* whose editions, up until now, have only reflected changes of assonance or rhyme. A case in point is William Kibler's insightful article entitled "La

'Chanson d'aventures'."[15] *Parise la Duchesse* was chosen by this scholar as being a very representative example of a younger genre, halfway between the canonical epic and the romance. And indeed, the short, lyric laisses, commonly associated with early epic songs, do appear to have yielded to a uniform flow which closely resembles the contemporaneous prose romances. References by scholars to the early epic are consistently limited to the Oxford *Roland* in discussing laisse lengths. This poem, with 291 laisses for a total of 4002 lines in the Moignet edition, has an unusually low average of only 13.8 lines per laisse. By contrast, *Parise* contains a meager 19 changes of assonance for a total of 3106 lines. Nine of these 20 laisses, or almost half the total, assonate in a mixture of *-é* and *-ié*. As Professor Kibler observes: "C'est comme si le poète s'était décidé à narrer son poème en *-é* et n'interrompait cette narration que rarement pour donner du relief à tel ou tel incident."[16] Moreover, a consideration of assonance change only in *Parise* leaves us with one laisse of 701 lines, a phenomenon which has attracted critical attention on more than one occasion.[17] However, if we were to begin new laisses with each initial and thereby admit a new total of 58 laisses instead of only 20, the average number of lines per group would be reduced from 155 to 53 and the uninterrupted group of 701 lines would be broken down into eleven "new" laisses. The adoption of Professor Plouzeau's distinction between laisses in *-é* and in *-ié* would add eight assonance changes without an initial

[15] William W. Kibler, "La 'Chanson d'aventures'," *Essor et fortune de la chanson de geste dans l'Europe et l'orient latin, Actes du IXe Congrès International de la Société Rencesvals 2* vols. (Modena: Mucchi, 1984), II: 509-15.

[16] Kibler, 512.

[17] In addition to a group of 701 lines without assonance change (lines 2372-3073), *Parise* contains three other very long groups of this type: 315 lines (488-803), 284 lines (823-1107), and 505 lines (1132-1637).

(lines 519, 534, 612, 1883, 1910, 1924, 2200, 2845) to this total, thus lowering the average laisse length to 47 lines.[18]

Although an average of either 53 or 47 lines per laisse seems quite high compared to the canonical 13.8 lines of the Oxford *Roland,* a closer look at the works in the epic corpus reveals that the average poem has a longer laisse length than one might expect. The results of this overview are illustrated by the charts in appendices A and B. Appendix A surveys the length, versification, and laisse breakdown of 73 Old French chansons de geste, ordering them by average laisse length. The bar chart of appendix B analyzes this data, showing that most chansons de geste average between 20 and 50 lines per laisse and that a real cut-off point, above which the epic genre appears to hesitate to go, seems to be around 50 lines. *Parise la Duchesse,* with its initials taken into account, comes close to this figure. It should be borne in mind that this survey is based on existing editions, which generally only indicate assonance change; a study of the placement of initials in their MSS might result in a lowering of the stanza lengths across the board.

Consulting the list of works upon which Appendix A is based, it becomes clear that the widely held idea that laisse length gradually increased from older to younger works does not prove to

[18] In the absence of any critical appraisal of this new edition, I am not yet entirely convinced that this editiorial step was justified. It seems to me that it is risky to ignore the scribe of a unique MS and instead posit a "correct" author ("nous ne tenons pas compte des graphies du copiste," Plouzeau, 89). On the other hand, when Rychner's criteria for the beginning of a laisse are applied to the eight *-é/-ié* shifts which are not accompanied by an initial, it becomes evident that a *timbre d'intonation* is created at each shift. The results of this intervention suggest that close scrutiny of *Parise* from a philological (as well as my paleographic) perspective may reveal this poem's versification to stand even closer to traditional expectations than the present study indicates.

be entirely accurate.[19] While the *Oxford Roland* does head the list as the oldest poem with the shortest average laisse length,[20] many much younger poems, such as the *Bâtard de Bouillon* and *Aye d'Avignon,* which are considered to be *chansons d'aventures,* place higher on the list than such older works as the *Prise d'Orange* and

[19] Some examples of this well-entrenched notion: in 1957, Angelo Monteverdi described: "... une dissolution graduelle du caractère primitif de la laisse, et ... la perte en même temps du sens des proportions..." ("La Laisse épique," *La Technique littéraire des chansons de geste,* 129); convinced by Monteverdi's arguments, Aurelio Roncaglia declared that: "Les laisses ... au commencement... sont assez brèves et le nombre de leurs vers ne varie qu'entre des limites assez étroites. Plus tard, peu à peu, la laisse s'allonge, et, dans les chansons de geste les plus récentes, on verra bientôt des laisses qui ne finissent jamais. Il y a là une évolution assez nette." ("L'Alexandre d'Albéric et la séparation entre chanson de geste et roman," *Chanson de Geste und Höfischer Roman, Heidelberger Kolloquium, 30 Januar, 1961* [Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1963] 55); speaking of *Hervis de Metz,* Marguerite Rossi comments: "Il faut voir dans cet usage de la laisse et dans cet allongement généralisé des traits communs à toute l'épopée romanesque ... " (133); finally, concerning *Girart de Vienne,* Wolfgang van Emden states: "La laisse a déjà perdu l'unité qu'elle montre dans nos premières épopées, et le nombre moyen assez élevé de vers par laisse—36,1—atteste le style plus narratif du XIIe siècle finissant. Cette moyenne ... fait contraste avec celle de la *Chanson de Roland* (13,4) ..."; this scholar then characterizes this perceived development as: "cette dégénérescence de la structure strophique ..." *(Girart de Vienne par Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube* [Paris : S.A.T.F., 1977] lxxiii).

[20] The Oxford *Roland's* place at the top of the list is, however, open to question as certain fragments, which I excluded, have average laisse lengths which are considerably shorter. For example, the two versions in laisses of the *Roman d'Alexandre* contain 105 lines in 15 laisses (average 10.2). In addition, it must be kept in mind that the figure of 13.8 for the *Roland* is an *average,* and that individual laisses vary between those with only five lines (XXVI, LI) and those with over thirty (LIV-34, CCXXVIII-33).

the *Couronnement de Louis.*[21] The group of poems featuring the very shortest average laisse lengths of less than 20 lines includes *Brun de la Montagne,* which has been referred to as a "roman d'aventure en forme d'une chanson de geste."[22] It is especially interesting to note that later, longer poems such as the *Entrée d'Espagne* and the *Enfances Renier* with 15,805 and 20,065 lines respectively, do contain enough laisses to bring their average length down to the norm for a twelfth-century epic. Even *Lion de Bourges* with its over 34,000 lines manages to include enough rhyme changes to reduce its average laisse length to below 50 lines, reinforcing the idea that this number represents a true boundary for the genre.

For the purposes of this study, these appendices demonstrate that over the centuries, a preoccupation with maintaining narrative groups of 50 lines or less continued to exist, despite a strong tendency to create longer and longer poems. The list further reveals that whether a poem rhymes or assonates appears to have little impact on its laisse length,[23] and that the evolution of the genre is more complex than the previously postulated double movement from canonical poems that feature short, assonating laisses, to works containing long, rhyming laisses.

It is in this context that the use of initials in *Aiol* and *Parise la Duchesse* to signal narrative division should be viewed; while the ear fails to detect a change, the reader's eye certainly does, and

[21] Just as several of the longer, younger poems reveal laisse lengths which are surprisingly short, so the *Couronnement de Louis*, an early work possessing so many canonical qualities, contains a surprisingly long average laisse length. Maurice Delbouille has advanced one explanation for this anomaly: "... l'allongement progressif des laisses plaide pour l'idée d'un même auteur de plus en plus fatigué (343)."

[22] John Robin Allen, *Index de la chanson de geste romane et textes apparentés du moyen âge*, Brouillon du 19 août 1984, §50.

[23] My thanks to Alice Colby-Hall for suggesting to check this relationship.

younger poems such as *Aiol* and *Parise* are generally believed to have been read either silently or to a group.[24] And in the case where the work was being read aloud, it would have been possible for a reader or singer to announce this fact to his or her listeners through a pause, a change of voice, or simply by announcing that a stopping point had been reached.

Many questions come to mind at this point which will remain outside the scope of this study. How widespread is the use of initials to mark narrative divisions, and to what extent has this phenomenon been acknowledged or ignored by editors? What does this use of initials tell us about the creation and reception situation of later epics? In general, even the most enthusiastic partisans of the theory of oral-formulaic composition concede the importance of the book in the later history of the epic,[25] so I think that it will be important to determine to what extent this represents a general development, or one confined to only a few later works. Direct examination of a wide range of MSS will be necessary to further this investigation.

Richard Hartman
Stillwater, Oklahoma

[24] "... sic nicht nur in eine neue 'Epoche' hincinzogen, sondern auch in eine gewandelte Kommunikations-situation—in die des Vorlesens und spater der einsamen Lektüre" (Joseph J. Duggan, "Die zwei 'Epochen' der Chansons de Geste," *Epochenschwellen und Epochenstrukturen im Diskurs derLiteratur—und Sprachhistorie* [Suhrkamp] 405); "Au fur et à mesure qu'on avançait dans le temps, on est pourtant venu, peu à peu, à lire les chansons de geste soit à haute voix, pour un public limité, soit même plus tard à les lire de l'oeil, pour soi-même, dans les grands recueils collectifs." (Delbouille, 338); "Novelistic reading has often been assumed for the late texts (and often tacitly, but it is not the only possibility ... The expected mode of presentation of late chansons de geste may have been individual reading in private, or reading aloud to small or large groups, or else traditional declamatory public recitation or even singing." (Robert Francis Cook, "Unity and Esthetics of the Late Chansons de geste," *Olifant* 11, 2, [Summer 1986] 111).

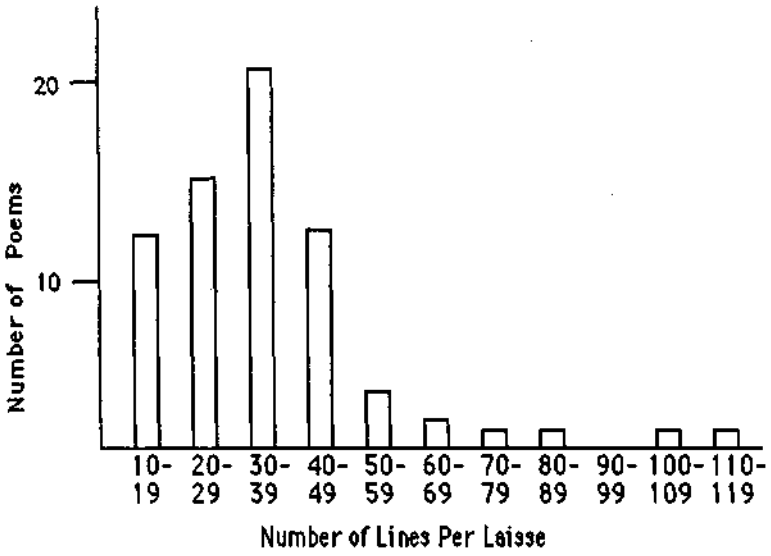
[25] "Die zweite 'Epoche' der Chansons de geste ist jene ihres zum Fossil werdenden Duplikats, nämlich der in Manuskripten fixierten Gattung, in der Variationen auf die Initiative oder die Nachlässigkeit der Kopisten zurückgeführt werden müssen... " (Duggan, 405).

Appendix A

Poem	Lines	Laisses	Lines/ Laisse	Versification
Roland-Oxford	4,002	291	14	A
Roland-Lyon	2,930	213	14	R
Girart de Roussillon (Hackett)	10,002	677	15	R
Chanson de Guillaume	3,354	224	15	A
Gui de Nanteuil	3,338	210	16	R
Roland-Cambridge	5,703	355	16	R
Roland- Venice 4	6,011	373	16	A
Voyage de Charlemagne	870	53	16	A
Brun de la Montagne	3,850	223	17	R
Roland-Chateauroux	8,200	452	18	R
Roi de Sicile	377	20	19	R
Voeux de l'Epervier	562	30	19	R
Ami et Amile	3,504	177	20	R
Aspremont	11,376	533	21	R
Roland- Venice 7	8,880	413	22	R
Béatrix	3,196	145	22	R
Entrée d'Espagne	15,805	680	23	R
Aye d'Avignon	4,132	179	23	A
Simon de Pouille (BNna 4780)	2,175	91	24	R
Berte aus grans piés	3,485	144	24	R
Raoul de Cambrai	8,726	344	25	R
Charroi de Nîmes	1,486	57	26	A
Jourdain de Blaye	4,245	165	26	A
Enfances Renier	20,065	744	27	R
Chanson des Saisnes	8,089	297	27	A/R
Galien li Restauré	4,911	177	28	R
Girart de Roussillon (Ham)	6,712	240	28	R
Gormont et Isembart	661	23	29	A
Moniage Guillaume (I)	934	32	29	A
Chétifs	4.101	139	30	R
Bâtard de Bouillon	6,546	221	30	R
Beuve de Commarchis	3,947	132	30	A
Prise d'Orange	1,888	62	30	R
Florence de Rome	6.410	208	31	R
Antioche	9,000	293	31	R
Gaydon	10,239	329	31	A

Enfances Garin	5,069	160	31	R
Elioxe	3,495	106	33	R
Narbonnais	8,000	235	34	R
Enfances Ogier (Adenet)	8,229	237	35	R
Guibert d'Andrenas	2,466	70	35	R
Orson de Beauvais	3,745	106	35	R
Otinel	2,133	60	35	R
Beuve de Hanstone (I)	16,391	452	36	R
Moniage de Rainouart	7,531	207	36	R
Siège de Barbastre	7,392	203	36	R
Girart de Vienne	6.934	190	36	R
Enfances Guillaume	3,425	93	37	A
Aiol	10,985	290	38	A
Aimeri de Narbonne	4,708	122	39	R
Floovant	2,533	64	39	R
Berte et Milon	476	12	40	R
Fierabras	6,219	150	41	R
Elie de Saint-Gille	2,761	68	41	A
Gui de Borgogne	4,304	100	43	A/R
Couronnement de Louis	2,688	63	43	A
Enfances Vivien (BNffr 1448)	4,090	94	44	A
Bataille Loquifer	4,222	94	45	R
Anseïs de Metz	14,598	324	45	R
Aubéron	2,468	51	48	R
Tristan de Nanteuil	23,361	480	49	R
Chevalerie Ogier	12,346	254	49	A
Lion de Bourges	34,298	694	49	R
Beuve de Hanstone (2)	10,610	208	51	R
Beuve de Hanstone (3)	19,127	370	52	R
Parise la Duchesse	3,106	58	53	A/R
Chrétienté Corbaran	1,464	25	59	R
Gaufrey	10,731	173	62	R
Moniage Guillaume (II)	6,629	105	63	A
Roland à Saragosse	1,410	18	78	A/R
Aliscans	8,510	99	86	A
Garin le Loheren (A)	16,617	166	100	A/R
Huon de Bordeaux	10,553	92	115	A

Appendix B


20
10
Number of Poems
10-19
20-29
30-39
40-49
50-59
60-69
70-79
80-89
90-99
100-109
110-119
Number of Lines Per Laisse

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Gazette du livre médiéval

Editions CEMI
B. P. 254
F-75227 Paris Cedex 05

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