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**François Suard, ed. *La Geste des Lorrains*. *Littérales* 10. Centre de
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Pp. 275.**

Scholars neglect certain texts or text groups for a variety of reasons: the texts exist only in the form of rare books in specific collections; the texts are very long or very difficult; the texts are not fashionable. Small wonder, then, that the Old French *geste des Lorrains* has for so many years remained the province of a small group of scholarly cognoscenti. After all, until most recently, the texts constituting the cycle existed only in the original manuscripts or in older, largely unavailable editions. Furthermore, they are long: most of the texts in the cycle run into the tens of thousands of verses in the extant manuscripts. And of course, the Old French epic, with the notable exception of the *Roland* and a few other well-known *chansons*, is relatively less popular in academic circles than, say, courtly literature or medieval theater. I therefore greet with enthusiasm—indeed with

glee—the appearance of the published acts, edited by François Suard, of the 1990 Nanterre colloquium on the *Lorrain* cycle.

The difficulties posed by length and access notwithstanding, the texts of the *Lorrain* cycle are well worth the closer look given them by this collection, if only by virtue of their medieval success: as Suard notes in his presentation to the essays, there are some fifty manuscripts plus later reworkings in verse and prose, a total which reflects the relative popularity of this group of *chansons*. These texts constitute a vast resource, precious to our understanding of the medieval mind and medieval textuality—a resource none the less valuable for being heretofore rarely exploited.

The collection of essays is divided into four parts, preceded by an introduction to the cycle as well as a general report on the structure and unity of the *geste*. The essays of the first part focus on historical questions, situating the cycle in space and time. The second section addresses the manuscript tradition and philological questions. The essay of the third part explore literary concerns: the comic register, the development of characters, the sources of feudal conflict. Finally, the collection includes a bibliography, current at publication, prepared by Bernard Guidot, with a list of full and partial editions of texts and fragments, translations, book-length studies and articles on the *Lorrain* cycle.

François Suard's presentation is brief: he quickly reviews the manuscript tradition, editions, scholarship and content of the *chansons* in the cycle, as well as outstanding themes (feudal violence, epic tragedy, the vendetta) and characters. This introduction is followed by Bernard Guidot's longer general report, which poses the question of cyclic unity. While Guidot notes a general cyclic continuity of narrative line, of thematics (war), of structure (the plurilinearity of narrative lines and the representation of space) and of meaning (the genealogical ordering of the universe), he also finds a notable lack of homogeneity of tone and style. He comments on the mediocrity of *Yon*, "fastidieux récit qui distille l'ennui," the awkward repetitiveness of *Anseÿs*, and the romanesque (rather than epic) qualities of *Hervis*. Insofar as the manuscript tradition is concerned, Guidot posits a deliberate effort to create a cycle only for the *Garin/Gerbert* group, as these two *chansons* are most often found together in manuscripts. In short, and perhaps as expected, the question of cyclic unity cannot be answered with uniformity. Although Guidot's aesthetic biases tend at times to cloud

his presentation of the issues, in the main he succeeds in giving a clear overview of the points of continuity and discontinuity in the *geste des Lorrains*.

The first group of essays focuses on history, both of the cycle and in relation to it. Michel Parisse ("Garin le Loherain dans l'histoire de son temps") reviews the role of history in the composition of *Garin*. Looking at geographical and cultural evidence, in the form of detailed references to Champagne coupled with a certain vagueness regarding Lorraine, Parisse concludes that the author must have been from Champagne. The long-standing tradition which conceived of the people of Lorraine as warlike and aggressive would seem to lend a certain logic to the selection of them as the protagonists of the narrative.

Moving from the question of the cycle's composition to that of its diffusion, Ben van der Have ("Les Lorrains néerlandais: continuation ou innovation?") examines the development of the *geste* in the Netherlands. He notes two *Lorreinen*, the first of these a relatively faithful translation of the *Garin/Gerbert* group. The second is a lengthy cyclic composition of some 144,000 to 150,000 verses. While this second text reproduces basic elements of the French *geste*, it recasts those elements in a mode more acceptable to the probable patron of the *Lorreinen* : doubtless one of the dukes of Brabant, who considered themselves part of the royal family of France, and who therefore would have appreciated the inclusion of a model emperor, such as Charlemagne, in the cycle.

To complete the section on history, Jean-Charles Herbin ("Le tournoi de Senlis dans *Hervis de Metz*") focuses on the problem of re-writing. He is most particularly interested in the episode of the tournament at Senlis in *Hervis*. Narrative logic leads Herbin to label the passage, written in alexandrines rather than decasyllables, as a rewrite rather than an addition. Historical evidence suggests that the tournament took place between 1211 and 1223; therefore the original *chanson* must have been composed at the latest in the second decade of the thirteenth century.

The second section of essays in the collection addresses questions of philology. Jean-Pierre Martin ("Lire *Garin le Loherain* hors du manuscrit A") makes a case for reading manuscripts other than the A manuscript of *Garin*, which, while serving as the basis for Vallerie's

1947 edition, is perhaps the least representative of the tradition in Martin's opinion. Comparing representative episodes in a wide variety of manuscripts, Martin finds that A tends to accentuate the negative qualities of the Bordelais, attenuate the oppositions structuring the Garin/Bégon couple, and mask lacunae. The reading of other manuscripts is therefore necessary to get a true picture of the tradition.

André Eskénazi ("Cheval' et 'destrier' dans *Gerbert de Metz*") examines a more specific philological issue, exploring the uses of two words, "destrier" and "cheval," in the narratives of the *Lorrain* cycle. Eskénazi concludes that "destrier" is by and large an intrinsic designation, a statement of value and identity largely separate from the animal's function in society. "Cheval," on the other hand, is most often an exteriorizing designation, associating the animal with an institutionalized human partner in a specific functional context.

Eskénazi's essay concludes the historico-linguistic sections of the collection; the third and largest group of articles examines issues of a more literary nature. Philippe Ménard's article ("Le rire et le sourire dans les premières chansons de la geste des *Lorrains* [*Garin le Loherain* et *Gerbert de Metz*]") opens this series with a look at the comic and the lighthearted in the earliest texts of the *Lorrain* cycle. While Ménard is careful to make a distinction between the reactions of a medieval and a twentieth-century audience, as well as to note the general sobriety of these earlier texts, he nevertheless finds elements of laughter or amusement in *Garin* and *Gerbert*. These elements fall into three categories: first, the joyous release of violent tendencies expressed in the generalized brawls and combats; second, the amusement generated by the incongruities and foibles of certain characters; and finally, stylistic elements, including picturesque images, familiar vocabulary and hyperbole, which lighten the text, and occasion a smile.

Following Ménard's more general article are three specific character studies. Micheline de Combarieu ("Bégon le guerrier") explores the heroism of Bégon. She remarks on the distinction between Bégon and his brother, Garin: Garin is the duke, the titular head of the clan; but Bégon is valiant, fearless beyond measure. Bégon's feats of prowess are numerous; nonetheless, he is a very human hero. He is neither a giant nor invincible; indeed he is wounded rather often. And although Bégon is a redoubtable fighter, he is not unwilling to negotiate. Notably, Bégon fights what are essentially defensive battles, to reconquer lands that theoretically belong to his family, or to

prevent others from taking over those lands. Finally, Bégon, while not demonstrating the excessive tendencies (*démésure*) of certain other epic heroes, incarnates the furor of the true warrior.

Jean Subrenat ("Bauche li cors comte, ermite et martyr") explores a very different kind of heroism, as personified by Bauche, the Bordelais count. Like Bégon, Bauche is a redoubtable warrior; however, he is distinguished by his spiritual qualities. Unlike Fromondin, the other major Bordelais knight who elects, however hypocritically, a monastic life, Bauche's vocation is genuine. An atypical character in *Anseÿs de Mes*, Bauche attempts to break the implacable cycle of war and vengeance that characterizes the *geste*. With the aid of God, he nearly succeeds, but for the unfortunate actions of the traitor Alori. In sum, if Bauche's spirituality underlines the absurdity of the ongoing feudal struggle, it also reinforces what Subrenat sees as the basic pessimism of the *Lorrains*.

Xavier Hugué ("La caractérisation des personnages secondaires dans *Gerbert de Metz*") compares the roles of two characters: Blanche fleur, Pépin's queen, and Girart, the king's messenger. The relatively minor roles of these two characters allow greater latitude for psychological development, since there is no need to conform to a grand plan of epic heroism. Both of these characters are practical, well-spoken, clever. Both are partisans of the Lorrains; both actively seek to promote their cause, the queen by vociferously reminding the king of what he owes them; the messenger by slanting or even altering his messages.

The last two articles in the third section deal with questions of structure, albeit in very different ways. Alain Labbé ("Le cadre architectural de *Garin le Loherain* : régression du modèle palatin et prédominance du décor castrai") explores the architectural context of *Garin le Loherain*. Labbé notes that, with the exception of churches, only two types of building are evoked: the *palais* and the *chastel*. The vaulted, marble, antique palace, reflecting images of Rome and royalty rather than any architectural reality, is a symbol of power and *translatio imperil*. The castle, on the other hand, is an integral part of the narration since it is the site of much of the action. As such, it evidences a concrete realism rooted in military functionality.

Finally, Isabelle Weill ("Les structures de parenté dans 'Garin' et 'Gerbert'") makes good use of Claude Lévi-Strauss's methods to study

the kinship structures in the *Lorrains*. She concludes that the Lorrain family tendency to genealogical isolation is the essential cause of the eternal way between the Lorrains and the Bordelais. The excessive cohesion of the smaller group, expressed as a dearth of intermarriages, is a fact destabilizing for the larger society. If Garin could have given Fromont one of his sisters in exchange for one of Fromont's, then perhaps there would have been no dispute.

Perhaps the only criticism one could advance with respect to this collection of essays would be its fragmentary nature: although all of the studies explore some facet of one or more of the texts of the *Lorrain* cycle, as a group, the essays are widely divergent, ranging from Eskénazi's study of the respective uses of "cheval" and "destrier," to Alain Labbé's architectural inquiries. While each of these essays has its place and interest, it may be difficult for a reader, even one well acquainted with the Old French *chanson de geste*, yet less familiar with the inaccessible *Lorrain* cycle, to get a sense of the whole. François Suard's excellent, but all too brief (seven pages) presentation, can only evoke the grandeur and depth of the whole without really exploring it; Bernard Guidot's introductory report, focusing essentially on questions of cyclical composition and unity, does not. The other essays are, of course, discrete studies, focusing on specific rather than general questions. One is nonetheless compelled to note, in defense of this collection of essays, that the very vastness of the *Lorrain* cycle, which makes it such a gold mine for researchers, also tends to defeat efforts to grasp it in its totality. Furthermore, this type of collection, representing a wide variety of opinions and approaches, has become a common, albeit problematic, vehicle for the expression of scholarship. Any criticism leveled at this collection of essays would therefore have to be made of much of the current round of scholarly publication. Certainly the importance of refocusing critical interest on the *geste des Lorrains*, not to mention the value of each of the essays taken individually, far outweighs any caveat that might be made regarding the coherence of the volume as a whole. In conclusion, then, this collection represents a most significant contribution to the study of the Old French epic in general and to the understanding of the *Lorrain* cycle in particular. Let us hope that it will inspire additional research in this area.