EPIC OUTLAWRY: *GIRART DE VIENNE* AND HOBSBAWM'S SOCIAL BANDITS

Klayton Tietjen
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Toward the end of the long twelfth century,[1] during the era of the third crusade, the rise of French king Philippe Augustus, and the late stages of the Angevin empire, Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube, a cleric of the county of Champagne, penned a curious epic poem: *Girart de Vienne.*[2] This tale was among, and possibly even the first of, a wave of new epic material whose swell brought experimentation to the established generic boundaries of the chansons de geste. It recounts how the baron Girart, along with his family, rebelled against Charlemagne and, after an interminable war, was ultimately reconciled to the emperor, winning himself the city of Vienne[3] in the process.

The themes of *Girart de Vienne* were influential on contemporary culture and subsequent epic material. Like most chansons de geste, the exact date of composition of Girart de Vienne is unknown, but the broadly accepted vintage of the poem is 1170-1224.[4] Unlike most chansons de geste, however, *Girart de Vienne* is not anonymous: the author identifies himself in the opening of the poem, making Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube one of only a handful of named authors of Old French epic. The poem was quite popular in the Middle Ages, its wide circulation evidenced by seven extant manuscripts: two located in the Bibliothèque Nationale Française, three in the British Library, one in the Saint Andrews University Library, and a fragmentary copy in the Bibliothèque Municipal Louis Garret.[5] An impressive wall painting depicting important scenes from the plot of *Girart de Vienne* is found in the Château de la Rive (Savoie, France). Dated to the fourteenth century, this artwork is a further testament of the poem's enduring medieval influence. Among other innovations, *Girart de Vienne* introduced the concept of "the three *gestes*," a schema that is still used today to organize the various works of Old French epic into cycles.[6] *Girart* stands as the founding tale in the largest of these cycles, that of Guillaume d'Orange. It also functions as a prequel to *The Song of Roland*, providing a backstory for the characters and events of that important early chanson de geste. By recasting them within new contexts such as rebellion, *Girart de Vienne* effectively altered the perceptions of established character personalities and epic themes thenceforward.[7]

---

[1] 1050-1215 CE; term coined in *European Transformations: The Long Twelfth Century*, ed. Thomas F. X. Noble and John Van Engen (University of Notre Dame Press, 2012).
[2] Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube, *Girart de Vienne*, ed. Wolfgang Van Emden (Paris: Société des Anciens Textes Français, 1977).
[3] Vienne is located on the Rhône River, south of Lyon on the northern edge of the Auvergne region.
[4] *Girart de Vienne*, xxxiv.
[5] At the Bibliothèque Nationale de France: B. N. Fr. 1448 (ff. 1r-40v) and 1374 (ff. 91r-12v). At the British Library: Royal MS 20.B.XIX, Royal MS 20.D.XI, and Harley MS 1321 (ff. 40r-38v). At St. Andrews University Library: msPQ1463.G78. At Vesoul, Bibliothèque Municipale Louis Garret: 232 (4 folios). I consulted the manuscripts at the Bibliothèque Nationale in person.
[6] A schema positing three main cycles of epic: songs about Charlemagne and his twelve peers, songs about barons in revolt, and songs about the line of Guillaume d'Orange; *Girart de Vienne,* laisses I-III.
[7] See, for example, the epic *Gaydon* (first quarter of the thirteenth century) which, as a sequel, explores the aftermath of the concluding duel of *The Song of Roland*; in *La Chanson de Doon de Nanteuil*, contemporary to

Klayton Tietjen, "Epic Outlawry: *Girart de Vienne* and Hobsbawm's Social Bandits." *The Bulletin of the International Association for Robin Hood Studies* 5 (2023): 73-96. DOI: 10.33043/BIARHS.5.1.73-96.

The attention of modern scholarship to this epic, however, does not reflect its medieval importance. Considered today among the "minor" (i.e., lesser-studied) chansons de geste, the poem has received fairly limited analysis since the nineteenth century.[8] Due partly to the sheer volume of extant chansons de geste (over 100), scholars have tended to prioritize (for better or worse) a limited number of medieval epic texts as stand-in models for the rest of the corpus. Thus, important aspects of *Girart de Vienne* that were salient to its original audience have remained unnoticed in modern scholarship. In this article, I aim to reveal one of these aspects: through isolating and reassembling paratactical elements embedded throughout this fascinating poem, I will show that, at its heart, *Girart de Vienne* is an outlaw tale. In seeking to right the injustices inflicted by political authorities, Girart and his family take up the tools of outlawry, finding invulnerability in the greenwood and earning the admiration and support of the people through just vengeance and robbing the rich to give to the poor. Since the rebellious outlawry in *Girart de Vienne* serves a higher ideal of justice, the protagonists eventually return to the community as pardoned heroes. I argue that these episodes form a "noble robber narrative" and as such represent an early entry in the medieval tradition of outlaw stories.

According to Thomas Ohlgren, most people think of Robin Hood when they hear "medieval outlaw," not realizing that "the basic ingredients of the Robin Hood story…are rooted in stories composed hundreds of years earlier."[9] Although unfamiliar to many modern readers, outlaw tales abounded in the High Middle Ages: *Hereward the Wake*, *Fouke Le Fitz Waryn*, and *Eustache the Monk*, to name a few. Maurice Keen proposed that these tales formed a coherent tradition, the "matter of the Greenwood," which had an important influence on the later and more famous Robin Hood tales.[10] Some of those outlaw stories can even be tied to real-life individuals, such as Eustache the Monk, an outlaw of northern France of the late twelfth century. As a young knight, Eustache entered a monastery for a time (hence the epithet of "the Monk") but renounced his vows in order to participate in an unsuccessful judicial duel over the wrongful death of his father. Then, after a time working as seneschal, Eustache fell afoul of his lord Renaud, the count of Boulogne, and thus began a career as an outlaw and, eventually, a pirate of the Channel. Stories about Eustache are found throughout chronicles of the thirteenth century, as well as in several fictionalized romances, like *Le Roman d'Eustache le Moine*.[11] Glyn Burgess noted that the exploits

---

Girart, the poet praises Bertrand's brilliance (v. 99); the fourteenth-century *Doon de Maience* evinces *Girart*'s enduring influence by creating a fantastical back story for the three epic *gestes* (vv. 162-163).

[8] Three critical editions, *Le Roman de Girard de Viane par Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube*, ed. P. Tarbé, (Reims: Collection des Poètes de Champagne Antérieurs au XVIe Siècle, 1850); *Girart de Vienne, Chanson de Geste Edited According to MS BXIX (Royal) of the British Museum*, ed. Frederic G. Yeandle (New York: Columbia University Press, 1930); Van Emden, *Girart de Vienne*, 1977; one English translation, *The Song of Girart of Vienne by Bertrand de Bar-Sur-Aube: A Twelfth-Century Chanson de Geste*, trans. Michael Newth, (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1999); and two French translations, *L'Épopée Carlovingienne, Girard de Vienne, Chanson de Geste d'Après le Trouvère Bertrand de Bar*, trans. Gaston Armelin (Paris: 1911); and *Girart de Vienne, Traduction en Français Moderne*, trans. Bernard Guidot (Paris: Champion, 2006). In addition, *Girart de Vienne* is occasionally consulted in conjunction with other chansons de geste in various monographs and articles.

[9] Thomas H. Ohlgren, "General Introduction," in *Medieval Outlaws: Ten Tales in Modern English*, ed. Thomas Ohlgren (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 1998), xv.

[10] Maurice Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 1-2. Keen's "matter of the Greenwood" places outlaw tales alongside those three other important medieval corpora: the matters of France, Britain, and Rome.

[11] *Le Roman d'Eustache le Moine*, ed. A. J. Holden and J. Monfrin (Louvain: Peeters, 2005).

of Eustache became famous and legendary, even within his own lifetime, and were likely influential on other tales about outlaws.[12] The possibility of such was suggested as early as 1834, when Francisque Michel called Eustache a "sort of Robin Hood of the Boulonnais" (espèce de Robin Hood Boulonnois).[13] More recently, Robin Hood scholars like James Holt have pointed to Eustache as being very likely one of the earliest influences on the actual Robin Hood legend.[14] Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren even showed evidence that the life of Eustache the Monk had direct influence on the Robin Hood ballads.[15] Moreover, it is even more likely that the tales about Eustache influenced other continental stories about rebels as well. It is not hard to imagine that the tale of Eustache the outlaw might have reached the county of Champagne and influenced Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube and *Girart de Vienne.* In any case, it is clear that the popularity of *Eustache the Monk* is a testament to High Medieval interest in stories about rebellious knights and outlaws. Because it shares many of the same elements that unite Keen's "matter of the Greenwood," this study takes the view that *Girart de Vienne* participates in the tradition of medieval outlaw tales. Episodes that echo *Hereward the Wake* and *Eustache the Monk* suggest that it was influenced by contemporary stories about noble outlaws and, in a way similar to those tales, had a possible influence on later works in the outlaw tradition. Although these tales differ in historical time, language, and setting, "they exhibit similarities in character types, storylines and mind-sets too close to be accounted for by coincidence or common tradition."[16]

The image of the rebel baron in the chansons de geste is a familiar one, but the rebel baron as a noble robber is largely unexplored. Many of the elements that will be identified in this essay are found elsewhere in the matter of France: for example, the forest plays a central role in the narrative of *Quatre Fils Aymon*; the central theme of *Gaydon* deals with righting wrongs; and the magical good thief (bon larron) character who appears in a number of epics (*Jehan de Lanson, Garin le Loheren, Quatre Fils Aymon*) has some aspects that resemble the noble robber.[17] However, these elements tend to appear in isolation and are ancillary to their respective narratives. It is in *Girart de Vienne* where they combine and form a coherent narrative. The similarity of this narrative to tales of the outlaw tradition has been overlooked. This study thus represents the first analysis of *Girart de Vienne,* or any chansons de geste for that matter, as a bandit hero tale. In this way, I argue that this specific narrative structure presents the rebellious actions and attitudes of the characters of the poem to the audience as justifiable and positive.

[12] Glyn Burgess, ed. and trans., *Two Medieval Outlaws: Eustace the Monk and Fouke Fitz Waryn* (Rochester: Boydell and Brewer, 1997), 4-6.
[13] Francisque Michel, *Roman d'Eustache le Moine* (Paris: Silvestre, 1834), iv.
[14] James C. Holt, *Robin Hood* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 62.
[15] Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, ed., *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 672-673.
[16] *Medieval Outlaws,* xvi.
[17] Micheline de Combarieu du Grès, "De l'Étrange au Merveilleux, ou le Recours aux Forêts dans *Renaut de Montauban*," *Senefiance* 25 (1988); Luke Sunderland, *Rebel Barons: Resisting Royal Power in Medieval Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2017); Wolfgang Van Emden, "What Constitutes a *Bon Larron*?" in *Guillaume d'Orange and the* Chansons de Geste, ed. Wolfgang Van Emden and Philip E. Bennett (Reading: Société Rencesvals, 1984); Philippe Verelst, "L'Enchanteur d'Épopée. Prolégomènes à une Étude de Maugis," *Romanica Gandensia* 16 (1976).

As other scholars of outlaw tales have done, I apply Eric Hobsbawm's theory of the "noble robber narrative" in order to reveal the outlaw tale structure within *Girart de Vienne*.[18] According to Hobsbawm, the songs, stories, and myths that turn bandit outlaws into heroes tend to follow a similar pattern.[19] The noble robber first becomes an outlaw when victimized by authorities for an act considered criminal by those in power. The noble robber then embarks on a swashbuckling career of righting wrongs and taking from the rich to give to the poor, killing only in self-defense or just revenge. He is admired and supported by the people, remains invulnerable, and can be invisible through disguises or affinity with the natural landscape. He is never the enemy of the fount of justice (king, emperor, or god), only other oppressors. He eventually returns to the community as an honorable member. His death is brought about invariably and only through betrayal. This essay shows step-by-step how the outlaw tale within *Girart de Vienne* follows this structure of the noble robber narrative.

NOBLE ROBBER AS A VICTIM OF INJUSTICE

A bandit hero is born when, faced with an act of injustice or persecution, instead of yielding to force or social superiority, the path of resistance and outlawry is chosen. This results in acts considered criminal by those in power, but not by the hero's own people.[20] In *The Deeds of Hereward*, the eponymous hero fights against the new invasive ruling class, the Normans.

> …at in Angliam statim profectus est, visitare paternam domum et patriam volens, externorum ditioni nunc subjectam et multorum exactionibus pene subversam, si forte ullo in loco aliqui amicorum vel propinquorum adhuc respirarent, ferre opem eis volens…
>
> […but he went immediately into England, wanting to visit his father's house and his homeland, now thrown under the dominion of foreigners and nearly ruined by the exactions of many men, wanting to bring help perhaps to any of the friends or neighbors in the place who might still be alive.][21]

Hereward's return to England leads to revenge killings, the gathering of a band of native English fighters, and a long, violent resistance to the Normans from his impenetrable base on the island of Ely. The tale was apparently written by a monk of Ely and circulated at least until the thirteenth century when the only surviving manuscript was copied.[22] It is unclear how far beyond England Hereward's story traveled, but it is not outside of the bounds of reason for Bertrand de Bar-sur-

[18] See, for example: John Chandler, "Batman and Robin Hood: Hobsbawm's Outlaw Heroes Past and Present," in *Robin Hood in Greenwood Stood: Alterity and Context in the English Outlaw Tradition*, ed. Stephen Knight, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011); Nicholas A. Curott and Alexander Fink, "Bandit Heroes: Social, Mythical, or Rational?" *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 72, no. 2 (2012); Graham Seal, "The Robin Hood Principle: Folklore, History, and the Social Bandit," *Journal of Folklore Research* 46, no. 1 (2009).
[19] See especially Chapter 4, "The Noble Robber," in Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (New York: New Press, 2000).
[20] Hobsbawm, *Bandits,* 12.
[21] *Gesta Herwardi* in *Lestorie des Engles Solum la Translacion Maistre Geffrei Gaimar*, ed. T. D. Hardy and C. T. Martin (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1888). This and all other translations are my own.
[22] See Michael Swanton, *The Deeds of Hereward*, in *Medieval Outlaws*, 13-14.

Aube to have been familiar with it, or at least the widely-traveled pilgrim who shared the stories that inspired him to write *Girart de Vienne*.[23]

In a manner similar to Hereward, Girart's outlaw career begins through violent resistance to acts of injustice. He enters the poem as a victim of persecution under the invasion of Saracen forces, when the armies of the emir Sinagon burn, devastate, and pillage the land, utterly impoverishing Girart's family. Nicholas Curott and Alexander Fink proposed that "when those in power are bandits themselves, ordinary bandits can become heroes."[24] Accordingly, Girart and his brothers resort to outlawry and become bandit heroes.

On Easter, despite a pitiful celebration with a scant meal, the irrepressible brothers Hernaut, Miles, Renier, and Girart romp out into the countryside and discover an opportunity to change their situation:

> Girart regarde devers soleil levant…
> entre .II. tertes, vers .I. bois verdoiant,
> et voit venir set païens mescreanz ;
> .XX. murs trosez amenoient devant.
> Cist mar vindrent d'Espagne.
>
> [Girart looks toward the rising sun…
> Between two hills, near a green wood,
> He sees seven immoral pagans approaching;
> They are leading twenty mules loaded full.
> Ill-timed is their arrival from Spain.] (vv.200-205)

Despite lacking proper weapons, the brothers determine to rob the wealth carried in this mule train. Stepping out from the trees, Hernaut reveals himself and calls:

> Fil a putain, gloton, estez arrier!
> Ci vos covient le paiage lessier!
> Le treüage vos covient a paier!
> De cest avoir que portent li somer
> veil la moitié, soit d'argent ou d'or mier,
> voire tot l'autre, sanz autre parçonnier.
> Tot nos leroiz, que que doie ennuier!
>
> [You sons of whores, scum, stop right there!
> You have to pay a toll here!
> You have to pay tribute!
> Of all this wealth that the pack mules carry
> I want half of it, whether silver or pure gold.
> In fact, all of the latter, without sharing the former.
> You will leave all of it to us, whomever I must trouble!] (vv.244-250)

[23] See *Girart de Vienne*, laisse III.
[24] Curott and Fink, "Bandit Heroes: Social, Mythical, or Rational?," 473.

The leader of the caravan warns that anyone who touches a single coin will find nowhere to hide from the wrath of the emir: "his very body…will be hung with no hope of escape" (son cors meïsmes…seroit panduz sanz autre recovrier, vv.257-258). Undeterred, Hernaut attacks with his fists, while Miles, Renier, and Girart rush the other merchants, summarily killing all seven armed men with their bare hands. In triumph, the brothers lead the stolen mule train with its riches back to their father Garin de Monglane. To the occupiers, this act is of course criminal, but to the Monglane family, it is a wholly justifiable reaction to persecution.

Later in the tale, Girart finds himself once again the victim of injustice, this time at the hands of Charlemagne. For his loyalty, the emperor had granted Girart the city of Vienne in fief, only to renege a few years afterward. Without warning, Charlemagne arrives with an army to confiscate Vienne, claiming that Girart has failed to render the military service required of his oath. From Girart's perspective, this is certainly an act of injustice, for Girart was unaware of the lapse in his responsibilities. Girart offers peace, pledging to make up for the unrendered service by following Charlemagne back to Reims with a thousand knights where he will voluntarily serve with pleasure (v. 4018). Charlemagne refuses, preferring instead the ultimate humiliation of his vassal:

> einz que m'en parte…
> ert si acquis dant Girart le Guerrier
> que devant moi vendra ajenoillier,
> nu piez, en lange, por la merci proier,
> la sele el col, qu'il tendra par l'estrier,
> d'un roncin gaste ou d'un povre somier
>
> [Before I leave this place…
> "Sir warrior"[25] Girart will be captured
> And made to come before me on his knees,
> Bare feet, in rags, to plead for mercy,
> Around his neck, held by the stirrups, a saddle
> From an emaciated nag or some weak mule.] (vv. 4026-4031)

Girart refuses and thus begins the long war over the city of Vienne. The theme of the "unjustly dispossessed" is rightly noted by Brian Levy and Lesley Coote as having an important place both in the stories of other medieval outlaws like *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, as well as in the "rebel cycle" of the chansons de geste.[26] Although *Girart* is technically part of the cycle of Guillaume d'Orange, by theme it is a de-facto epic of revolt. As a victim of unjust dispossession, faced with an intransigent overlord bent on his abasement and destruction, Girart chooses rebellion. Other

[25] The term "dant" (lord, sir, master) is used mockingly here.
[26] Brian J. Levy and Lesley Coote, "*Mouvance*, Greenwood, and Gender in *The Adventures of Robin Hood* and *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*," in *Robin Hood in Greenwood Stood*, ed. Stephen Knight (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 166.

contemporary epic heroes in similar situations also rebel, but the Monglane clan's rebellion fully embraces the path of outlawry.[27]

THE NOBLE ROBBER RIGHTS WRONGS

In another episode, Aymeri, Girart's nephew preparing to become a knight of the emperor, is at dinner with the court. The queen, "seeking to offend" the newcomer (a desrenier se prist, v.182), tells a story about the secret mockery she once made of his uncle: "Now listen, courageous knight, I will tell you something that I have never told before" (Ore entandez, franc chevalier gentil, si vos dirai ce c'onques mes ne dis, v. 1828). Years earlier, Girart and the queen, who was then merely the widowed duchess of Burgundy, had a failed betrothal, due mostly to Girart's misogynistic pride. The jilted duchess was snatched up and married instead by Charlemagne, who gave Vienne to Girart as consolation. In Girart's enthusiasm to take possession of his new fief, he readied to depart that very night, until other knights stopped him: "Go to his feet, Girart, noble knight; when the gift is great, one should show real appreciation" (Va l'an au pié, Girart, franc chevalier; granz est li dons, bien l'an doiz mercïer, vv. 1460-61). So, slinking into the royal bedroom where the fire had died to embers, Girart approached the sleeping emperor to kiss his foot, the customary ritual of gratitude between vassal and lord. But the new queen lay awake and seething. She slipped her own foot out of the bed before the kneeling Girart. In the low light, he mistook it for Charlemagne's and planted a kiss upon it. "Naked skin on naked skin," the narrator exclaims in horror, "this was a terrible predicament!" (Tout nu a nu, ce fu grant enconbrier!, v. 1470). Never the wiser, Girart departed for Vienne, fully believing that his kiss had been legitimate (laisses XXXV-XLI).

"And I am very well avenged by it!" the queen declares (Molt en sui bien venchiee!, v.1856). To which, a horrified Aymeri replies:

> "Dame…se ce feïtes dont je vos oi pledier,
> ce fu putage, a celer nel vos quier!
> Molt est preudom dant Girart le guerrier:
> de duel morrai se ne le puis vengier!"
>
> ["Lady… if you truly did this thing which I just heard you tell,
> Then it was a whoredom, to put it plainly!
> Lord Girart is a very honorable warrior:
> I will die from agony if I cannot avenge him!"] (vv. 1864-1868)

Then, in front of the entire court, hot-headed Aymeri flings a dagger at the queen. The knife would have pierced her heart had she not fallen backwards in panic. Instead, it embeds itself deep into a post behind her. As the room explodes in a furor, Aymeri fights his way through the angry crowd to reach his horse and escape into the night.

[27] A few examples: *Gaydon,* ed. Jean and Andrée Subrenat (Paris: Peeters, 2007); *Raoul de Cambrai*, ed. Sarah Kay and William Kibler (Paris: Lettres Gothiques, 1996); *La Chevalerie Ogier de Danemarche*, ed. Judith Belam (University of Reading Press, 1994).

Aymeri's attempted "reginacide" demonstrates the second point in the noble robber narrative, the righting of wrongs. When the queen tricked Girart into kissing her foot, the narrator calls it a wrong "engineered by the devil" (si com deables la voloit engingnier, v. 1469), inexcusable because it was the cause of so much carnage:

Deus! Puis en vint tel mortel enconbrier
dont il fu mort meint gentil chevalier.
Ele en dut estre ocise.

[God! Then such deadly tragedy ensued
Which brought about the deaths of so many noble knights.
She should be killed for it.] (vv. 1474-1476)

Aymeri attempts to answer that call for retribution when he learns of the trick. His shocked exclamation, "I will die from agony if I cannot avenge him!" (vv. 1868), shows that this wrong is so egregious that righting it is essential to his very survival. The noble robber as the righter of wrongs is embodied in Aymeri when he lets his dagger fly toward the queen's heart.

Aymeri brings news of the secret wrong back to Girart who is no less aggravated by the affront. Together, they send for the rest of Girart's family. Once assembled at Vienne, the entire clan takes up Aymeri's avenging cause, swearing with a unified voice:

Qui me donroit tot l'or de Romenie,
trive n'acorde n'en prendroie ge mie,
tant que sera la roïne honnie.

[Were someone to give me all of the gold in Greece[28]
I would still not accept peace or treaty
until the queen has been punished.] (vv.2240-2242).

Thus, righting this wrong becomes a primary motivating factor for the outlaw activities of Girart's clan.

KILLING ONLY FOR JUST REVENGE OR IN SELF-DEFENSE

In the pursuit of righting wrongs, the heroic outlaw often must kill, but there are unwritten rules about how it may occur: "there is just or legitimate killing and unjust, unnecessary and wanton murder; there are honorable and shameful acts…whatever the definition, the noble robber must seek to remain within it."[29] Often just revenge goes hand in hand with righting wrongs, as is the case in Aymeri's attempted reginacide. But just revenge also encompasses killing for another reason: in defense of honor and reputation.

Reputation is an important element in *Girart de Vienne*. Much of medieval society participated in a type of culture "in which what matters is a person's reputation, what others think

[28] "Romenie," medieval name of a wine-region of modern-day Greece per Albert Henry, *Contribution à l'Étude du Langage Œnologique en Langue d'Oïl (XII^e-XV^e s.)* (Académie Royale de Belgique, 1996).
[29] Hobsbawm, *Bandits,* 51-52.

of him."[30] George Jones identified this culture as "shame culture," an "other-directed" morality based on outward social esteem.[31] When young Renier and Girart arrive at Charlemagne's court, the task of first priority is to establish a good reputation. However, according to David Crouch, the more gifted a man was, the more likely he was to become a victim of envy and rumors.[32] *The Deeds of Hereward* illustrate this principle: early in his career, Hereward earned the respect of his lord and lady by killing a monstrous bear, but this only resulted in "deep hatred and jealousy" from the rest of the household.[33] Likewise, as the Monglane brothers are accepted into Charlemagne's service, some barons are welcoming, but not all: "Avidly, the valiant men praise and hold him dear, but the malicious ones become bothered" (Forment le loent li preudom et ont chier, mes corrocié en sont li losangier, v. 766). One such malicious baron tries to turn Charlemagne against the newcomers through a rumor intended to destroy their nascent reputation.

> Trop fetes ja ces danziaus sorhaucier...
> Garin lor père, qui les fist envoier,
> n'ot a repos onques .I. seul mengier…
> lors ert Garin bacheler prinsautier,
> Jeu vi a l'ague par mi la mer nagier;
> molt savoit bien pelerins espïer,
> et desrober et toz nuz despoillier
> prestres et moines, iglises et mostiers.
> Por ce l'en fist a grant honte chacier,
> et fors de France foïr et essillier.
>
> [You are exalting these young men too hastily…
> Garin, their father, who sent them,
> Hasn't even a scrap of food for feast days…
> When Garin was a rash young knight,
> I saw him swimming in the waters of the sea;
> He knew very well how to stalk pilgrims,
> and to strip naked priests and monks,
> and to rob churches and monasteries.
> For this he was hunted down in great shame,
> And put to flight out of France and banished.] (vv. 771-783)

The shameful poverty and untoward behavior of which Garin de Monglane is accused is a serious threat to Renier and Girart's reputation. In chivalric literature, rumors were "a challenge to all-important honor" that disordered the world and stained the individual and his kin.[34] Overhearing the challenge to his father's honor, Renier shouts "by this sword I will prove to this wicked

[30] F.R.P. Akehurst, "Good Name, Reputation and Notoriety in French Customary Law," in *Fama*, ed. Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail (Cornell University Press, 2003), 77.
[31] George Jones, *The Ethos of the Song of Roland* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1963), 97.
[32] David Crouch, *The Chivalric Turn* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 210.
[33] "Unde non miniam gratiam apud dominum et dominam suam promeruit, et grave odium et invidiam cum militibus et pueris domus," *Gesta Herwardi*, 344.
[34] Richard Kaeuper, "Vengeance and Mercy in Chivalric *Mentalité*," in *Kings, Knights, and Bankers* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 379.

scoundrel that without a doubt my father is an honest duke of noble birth" (a ceste espee… Proverai bien vers le felon gangnart que mon père est frans dus de bone part, vv. 812-814). With boiling blood, Renier dashes at one of the gossipy nobles, and:

> en la grant barbe li a ses poinz mellez,
> .XIIII. pas l'a aprés lui mené,
> corant, trotant, trestot estre son gré…
> Il vint au feu, si l'a dedanz bouté;
> art li la barbe, le grenon est brullé,
> ja fust tot ars et a sa fin alé.
>
> [Into his long beard (Renier) sinks his fists,
> drags him along fourteen steps,
> running, trotting, completely by force…
> He comes and shoves him into the fireplace;
> his beard is burnt, his mustache scorched,
> indeed, he would soon be burned and gone to his end.] (vv. 1068-1075)

Slander calls for vengeance, and "vengeance wipes the slate clean and reorders a disordered world."[35] Killing for just revenge, the defense of honor and reputation, is wholly justified in the noble robber narrative, and in this way, *Girart de Vienne* corresponds perfectly.

The outlaw figure may also kill in self-defense. In *Gesta Herwardi, Hereward the Wake is* "forewarned just in time" (pene tarde comperto, 344) by a sympathetic servant, defending himself with a preemptive spear thrust into the conspiring heart of an enemy.[36] In their attempts to gain access to the emperor's court, Girart and Renier are met with violent hostility that also necessitates self-defense. At the church where Charlemagne and his barons are attending mass, the guard at the door refuses them entry, insults their humble appearance, and strikes Renier in the head with his staff. In self-defense, Renier kicks the guard with such force that his eyeballs pop from their sockets (q'an .II. les euz li sont vole del vis, v.621) as he smashes backwards into the door, breaking it in half and falling to the ground dead (laisses XV-XVI).

In another episode, the tired, hungry, and thirsty brothers seek to resupply at the royal storehouse. But the well-dressed seneschal refuses and unleashes an insulting tirade: "Get out of here, you sons of a whore, shepherds, foreigners, nasty bedoins" (Estez en sus, fill a putain, bergier, nez d'autre terre, bedoïn losangier, vv. 492-493). Then he raises his staff to strike, but Renier is quicker, hitting the seneschal with a mighty punch to the throat. The seneschal crumples to the ground and the brothers cram his lifeless body into a corner of the storehouse (vv. 508-514). On the face of it, the killing of the seneschal was in self-defense and thus honorable according to the code of the outlaw hero. However, what the brothers do next in this episode is even more intriguing for the way it corresponds to the noble robber narrative.

ROBBING THE RICH TO GIVE TO THE POOR

[35] Kaeuper, "Vengeance," 379.
[36] *Gesta Herwardi*, 344.

With the disposal of the seneschal's body, Renier and Girart waste no time retrieving the much-needed supplies for themselves. Surprisingly, they also share the windfall with others:

> Lor prant la mine, si comence a huchier:
> "Or viengne avant qui d'aveinne a mestier,
> qui veut .I. res si en prengne .I. setier;
> Deus me confonde se ja en preng denier!"
> Qui qu'en ait pou, Girart s'en fist poier;
> ore en avront li mulet a menger:
> a son ostel en porta .I. setier.
>
> [Now (Girart) takes the mine, then starts to yell:
> "Come forward now, whoever needs oats,
> Whoever wants a res, take a whole setier;
> God confound me indeed if I accept a single coin!"
> Those who have little receive from Girart in quantity;
> Now the mules will have something to eat:
> Each carries home a setier.][37] (vv. 517-523)

Girart and Renier not only steal from the royal storehouse, but they redistribute the abundance to the less fortunate of the city. In other words, they *rob from the rich and give to the poor*.

This feature above all is perhaps the most well-known aspect of an outlaw tale. In the modern imagination, Robin Hood's raison d'être was to steal from the rich and give to the poor. Although this feature was established late in the Robin Hood tradition,[38] Hobsbawm identifies it as ubiquitous to other outlaw stories. Girart and Renier's act is, therefore, an early case of the narrative phenomenon. By transforming an act of thievery into one of benevolence, the act endears the noble robber to the audience. Stealing resources only to give them away "simultaneously challenges economic, social, and political order by challenging those who hold or lay claim to power, law, and control of resources."[39] This is the noble robber at his most heroic. When the brothers rob the merchants from Spain, it is equally benevolent. It is not motivated by a desire for plunder, revenge, or wanton violence, but concern for the poor:

> Girart li mendres en apela…
> "Frere," fet il…
> "moi est avis ci vienent li somier,
> qui sont chargiez et d'argent et d'or mier.
> Garin mon pere en avroit grant mestier,
> il et ma dame, qui n'ont mes que mengier.
> Hui vi mon pere plorer et lermoier:
> desoresmés li devons nos aidier,

[37] "Mine," "res," and "setier" are units of measure for grain and other dry products whose exact capacities are somewhat opaque and varied from region to region throughout the Middle Ages. In general, a mine was larger than a setier, which was in turn larger than a res. See Ronald Zupko, *French Weights and Measures Before the Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 111, 156-7, 165-8.
[38] Chandler, "Batman and Robin Hood," 191.
[39] Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 7.

et cest avoir conquerre et gaengnier."

[Girart the youngest calls out…
"Brothers," he says…
"It seems to me that the coming mule train
Is loaded up with silver and pure gold.
Garin my father is in great need,
He and my lady have no more to eat.
Today I saw my father crying and weeping:
From now on we must help him,
And this is by conquering and winning that wealth."] (vv. 208-216)

The poor in this case are the brothers' own father and mother, but this in no way makes the theft less selfless. Keeping none for themselves, the brothers give all of the silver and gold to Garin, thus enabling their father to continue to resist the forces occupying his land. The brothers refuse to profit from this act, using it instead as an opportunity to strike out into the wider world to seek their own fortunes.

One reason the "rob the rich to give to the poor" trope resonates so powerfully with audiences is that it draws the hero closer to the audience, erasing any would-be social or economic differences. The chivalric audience of *Girart de Vienne* fully understood the precarity of their own socio-economic position. As lesser nobles and unlanded knights, the humble-yet-noble origins of Girart and his brothers would have felt relatable. The appeal of the Robin Hood story type is not necessarily in the dream that a noble robber might bestow stolen riches upon you, but in the dream that you might have the necessary temerity to emulate the act, to oppose corrupt wealth and power. The noble robber is one with the audience; he is not one of the powerful. In both instances where Girart robs the rich for the sake of the poor, the social and economic difference between the brothers and the wealthy targets is distinct. *Girart de Vienne* takes a negative view of conspicuous wealth and arrogance in general:

Li cuers n'est pas ne el vair ne el gris,
einz est el ventre, la ou Deus l'a assis.
Teus est molt riches, qui est de cuer failliz;
et tieus est povres, qui est fiers et hardiz,
vasaus de cors et frans hom et gentis.

[The heart is not in ermine and miniver cloaks,
But in the chest, there where God placed it.
Such a man is very wealthy who is weak at heart;
And such a man is poor who is brave and courageous,
A vassal of the court and a free, noble man.] (vv. 607-611)

This speech could be placed on the lips of almost any noble outlaw figure. The brothers are only poor in circumstances, possessing the true wealth that lies in bravery and determination, even as victims of structures of authority. The noble robber "refuses to accept the normal roles of poverty and establishes his freedom by means of the only resources within reach of the poor—strength,

bravery, cunning and determination."[40] It will be remembered that the Monglane brothers successfully robbed the mule train with only their wits and their bare hands. Young knights who had few possessions beyond bodily strength and courage must have identified with this aspect of *Girart de Vienne,* just as many audiences have identified with the strength of heart displayed in other outlaw tales.

INVULNERABILITY AND INVISIBILITY

Characters that are notoriously hard to kill is a ubiquitous hallmark of the chansons de geste. Invincible knights performing impossible feats of arms and displays of excessive prowess populate every epic battlefield, and the knights of *Girart de Vienne* are, of course, no exception. However, there is another type of invulnerability featured in *Girart de Vienne* that corresponds instead with the noble robber narrative. For Hobsbawm, the "complex phenomenon" of invulnerability reflects a certain amount of security which the noble robber has "among their people and on their own ground."[41] Girart's clan derives their invulnerability in large part from their own ground, that is, Vienne, the wonderful city (Vïenne, la mirable cite, v. 3066).

In the wake of open hostilities, Charlemagne and his marauding army lay siege to Vienne, with devastating results to the countryside (vv. 3050-3057). Causing destruction to the countryside around castles was essential to denying provisions to the defenders, a pressure that quickly revealed the weakness of those inside the besieged castle.[42] In the tale, however, despite the scorched-earth tactics of the attacking army, Vienne somehow resists for seven years. In frustrated bewilderment, Charlemagne compares the seven foreign kingdoms he once conquered handily to this tenacious "duke from poor nobility within my own land" (duc de povre seignorie dedans ma terre, vv. 6182-6183). Girart is truly invulnerable inside Vienne. He owes this invulnerability not to the high and massive walls of the city, but to another feature: a secret tunnel leading to the nearby forest. This tunnel is the key to Girart's defiance of Charlemagne throughout the siege, enabling his clan to obtain resources from the outside world, imperceptible to the besiegers (vv. 6520-6526).

The tunnel is essential for the access it provides to the forest. The shade of the thick forests of the Middle Ages "was the natural setting for all sorts of unexpected adventure."[43] Analyzing the role of the forest in medieval literature, Albrecht Classen concluded that "certain things happen in the forest that would not happen outside of it."[44] Medieval poets and storytellers had perspectives on the forest that corresponded to their own needs, fears, understanding, and perception.[45] For many characters of medieval literature, the forest was an unknown world, a preserve of danger and mystery that existed beyond the reach of law and order. For outlaws,

[40] Hobsbawm, *Bandits,* 95.
[41] Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 57.
[42] Jim Bradbury, *The Medieval Siege* (Rochester: Boydell Press, 1992), 71-79.
[43] Keen, *Outlaws*, 1.
[44] Albrecht Classen, *The Forest in Medieval German Literature* (London: Lexington Books, 2015), 19.
[45] Classen, *The Forest*, 13.

however, the forest was essential, a sanctuary—outlaws belonged to the forest in a special way.[46] Being completely at home in the forest, the noble robber there finds invisibility, reinforcing his invulnerability.

As both a hero of the chansons de geste and an outlaw, Girart has a special relationship with the greenwood. It is noteworthy that the brothers stage their robbery of the mule train from the cover of "a green wood" (.I. bois verdoiant, v. 202). In another adventure, Girart's nephew Olivier (the same Olivier of *Song of Roland* fame, recast in *Girart de Vienne* as a rebel and member of the Monglane clan) finds himself alone and surrounded by Charlemagne's men, but Girart and the fighters of Vienne "suddenly emerge from the thick woods to protect him" (Cil de Vïenne issent del bois ramé por lui secorre, v.3317). Vienne is closely associated with the forest, its description often including the woods adjacent to the city walls: "below Vienne, that strong and well-supplied city…there is an ancient forest" (Desoz Vïenne, la fort cité garnie…Un bois i ot de grant encesorie, vv.4456-4458); "below Vienne, beside the leafy woods…" (Desoz Vïenne, lez le bosché foilli, v.4502). A knight calls the forest by name and emphasizes Girart's close relationship with it: "within Clermont, your great and vast forest" (Dedanz Clermont, vostre grant bois plenier, v. 6319).

The mouth of the secret tunnel opens within the forest, at the home of Berart, the forester who keeps watch over the greenwood. Berart prowls the forest, gaining intelligence about the enemy, standing ever ready to guide the knights of Vienne through the trees. The climax of *Girart de Vienne* comes about through the forest, for it is there that Berart makes the key discovery of Charlemagne alone and defenseless in the woods:

"Biau sire dus, ne soiez esperdu!
Le roi de France vos ai tant porseü
que je sai tot com li est avenu.
A la fontaine a le porc abatu,
la est toz seus desoz l'arbre foillu;
n'a avec lui ne juenne ne chenu,
car tuit si home l'ont par le bois perdu,
ne set nus d'aus que il est devenu.
Girart, frans dus, por coi demores tu?
Or le puez prendre sanz lance et sanz escu,
  s'en fera ta jotisse!"

["Good lord duke, do not be distraught!
I have stalked the king of France
Such that I know exactly where he is.
He has slain a boar at a spring,
He is there all alone beneath a leafy tree;
He has no knights, young or old, with him,
Because all of his men lost him in the woods,
None of them know what has happened to him.

[46] Keen, *Outlaws*, 1-2.

Girart, noble duke, what are you waiting for?
Now you can take him, (as he is) without lance and without shield,
and thus dispense your justice on him."] (vv. 6380-6395)

Girart's partnership with Berart enables him to operate within both the courtly realm of the knight and the forest realm of the outlaw. Charlemagne and his entourage, on the other hand, are completely out of their element in the forest, soon separated and lost within the trees. In the search for their missing king, Charlemagne's men admit how ill-suited to the forest environment they are:

"iceste terre soit hui la confondue!
Haut sont li pui et les roches agües,
et les valees enhermies et drues."

["May this land be cursed today!
The hills are high, and the rocks are sharp,
and the valleys are wild and overgrown."] (vv. 6587-6589)

Unlike these, Girart possesses the nature of knight and outlaw. This duality is essential to the climax and resolution of the story, the capture of Charlemagne.

Another element contributes to invisibility in *Girart de Vienne*: the disguise. Outlaw heroes are "always going about the countryside in impenetrable disguises…unrecognized by forces of authority until they reveal themselves…[they are] as good as invisible."[47] Disguises feature in other chansons de geste*,* typically as a "functional expedient" (espediente funzionale), as shown by Maurizio Mazzoni.[48] The disguise typically works only long enough to allow the hero to penetrate an otherwise inaccessible space. However, the use of disguise in *Girart de Vienne* differs from Mazzoni's functional expedient in that the disguise remains impenetrable; the hero is effectively invisible until he chooses to reveal himself. This corresponds to Valerie Hotchkiss' observation: "the dissolution of disguise is as important as the disguise itself."[49] During the long siege, Charlemagne erects a jousting quintain to keep his men entertained (laisse XCII). From among the knights crowding to be first, an unknown young man in the finest of helmet and armor bursts forth on his horse and strikes the quintain with such ferocity that Charles exclaims "All-powerful Father, by your mercy, never have I seen with my own eyes so powerful a hit!" (Pere puissant, par la teue merci, einz de mes euz si riche cop ne vi!*,* vv. 3216-3217). The men hurry out onto the field to congratulate the mystery knight. Instead of welcoming their clamoring praise, the knight begins to cut the unsuspecting men to pieces with his sword. "Vienne!" he cries, "God's help and Saint Maurice! It is I, Olivier, the nephew of Girart, and I am not your friend!" ("Vïenne!" escrie, "Deus, aidiez, seint Moris! C'est Olivier, qui n'est pas vostre amis! Niés sui Girart," vv. 3232-3233). Like a proper outlaw hero, Olivier's disguise keeps him invisible among the enemy's camp until the moment of his choosing to reveal himself.

Invisibility and invulnerability marked the reputations of other medieval outlaws. Eustace the Monk disguised himself as a shepherd, a carpenter, a potter, and even a prostitute to thwart his

[47] Hobsbawm, *Bandits,* 56-57.
[48] Maurizio Mazzoni, "Il Tema del Travestimento nella *Chanson de Geste* Analisi di Aspetti e Motivi nell'Epica Francese dei Secoli XII e XIII," *Neophilologus* 98, no. 3 (2014): 370.
[49] Valerie Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe* (New York: Garland, 1996), 128.

arch-nemesis, the count of Boulogne. Indeed, "Eustace…knew much about ruses" (Wistaces…mout sot d'abés).[50] At home in the countryside and the thick forests of northern France, Eustace struck his victims with terror and seemed to be invincible.[51] Likewise, the rebel barons of *Girart de Vienne* profit from disguises and a close relationship with the greenwood.

THE NOBLE ROBBER IS ADMIRED, HELPED, AND SUPPORTED BY HIS OWN PEOPLE

As shown above, Girart's clan joins together to right wrongs on each other's behalf. This is also an example of another feature of the noble robber tale, wherein the outlaw hero receives support from his own people. Other instances of this key narrative point occur in the early phases of *Girart de Vienne*. As wandering young men, newly separated from their father's house, Renier and Girart seek food and shelter along the road to Charlemagne's court. During their travels, they happen to stop in Vienne where they stay with one of the inhabitants who kindly gives them food and lodging (laisse XI). Although he does not yet know it, the inhabitants of Vienne are to become Girart's people, so it is only fitting that they should be among the first to help and support him. The brothers receive support from the people again when they reach Cluny Abbey. The abbot welcomes them with food, shelter, and new clothing (laisse XI-XII). The act of kindness from the abbot is not forgotten, for a few years later, Girart returns to Cluny with gifts of mules, silks, and silver. The abbot and all of the monks kneel in respect before Girart and thank him with deep gratitude (laisse XLII). Girart recognizes the people who have accepted him and supported his cause and repays those kindnesses in turn, gaining their admiration in the process.

Girart's clan receives support from the population of Vienne during the long years of siege. The people endure alongside their lord not out of obligation, but through sincere admiration. Such admiration is displayed when Girart first takes possession of the city as the inhabitants of the entire region gather to welcome their new lord with a holy procession and jovial festivities (vv. 1524-1535). The joy and exultation of the populace represent the support and admiration that become necessary components of the Monglane family's dual role as lords and outlaws. This echoes *The Deeds of Hereward* when the people of his land expressed their admiration as they "crowded to him, congratulating him for his return to the land and his father's inheritance" (ad eum confluebant, congratulantes ei in patriam et ad hereditatem paternam reversum).[52] Many of these supported him by joining his band of resistance fighters.

THE NOBLE ROBBER IS NEVER THE ENEMY OF THE FOUNT OF JUSTICE

Since the noble robber is quintessentially just, he cannot be in real conflict with the fount of justice, whether divine or human.[53] At first brush, this point in the noble robber narrative may seem to run

[50] *Le Roman d'Eustache le Moine,* ed. A.J. Holden and J. Monfrin (Louvain: Peeters, 2005), v. 432.
[51] Keene, *Outlaws,* 54-55.
[52] *Gesta Herwardi*, 367.
[53] Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 58.

counter to this study's argument for viewing *Girart de Vienne* as an outlaw tale. Girart's rebellion is unequivocally against the emperor Charlemagne, the very embodiment of God's law, order, and justice. However, a closer reading reveals a carefully nuanced situation where Girart's rebellion is only against the king insofar as his acts and the structure of his authority are unjust and oppressive. Girart seeks only to restore justice, not instill anarchy.

The morning after the murder of the seneschal and the theft of the storehouse, Girart realizes the gravity of these acts: "I am very afraid that we might be destroyed for it, because we have no friends in this land" (Je me criem molt que n'en soions honni, q'an cest païs n'avomes nul ami, vv.569-570). Renier points out, however, that their actions were not against Charlemagne per se, but rather against injustice at the hands of a lesser oppressor:

"Ne te chaut, frere…
trop a li rois teus garçons entor li.
S'il an pert .I., bien le sachiez de fi,
  qu'il an vendra .XIIII."

["Don't worry, brother…
The king has way too many lackeys around him.
Know this for certain, if he loses one of them,
  Fourteen more will take his place."] (vv. 571-574)

The corrupt bureaucracy of sycophants surrounding Charlemagne deforms the image of justice, tarnishing the king and creating oppression for those on the outside. The seneschal exercises power to oppress unjustly and therefore does not truly represent the "fount of justice." For Terry Jones, medieval outlaw tales presume honor in robbery and violence if performed boldly and openly: "in fact, it seems to be treated much like trial by ordeal: if God were not on the robber's side he would be defeated by his victim."[54] Thus, Girart and Renier are able to vanquish the seneschal because he represents petty forces of oppression working counter to the fount of justice.

Another nuanced image of justice emerges in response to angry and seditious words spoken by a member of Girart's family. When Renier proposes that they seek to depose Charlemagne and place Aymeri on the throne, Miles is quick to rebuke his rash words:

"Frere…ore avez mal parlé:
Deus si comende, le roi de majesté,
que l'en ne die orgueil ne foleté.
Preudom est Charles, ce savons de verté,
n'a meillor roi en la crestïenté."

["Brother…you have spoken poorly.
God, the king of majesty, so commands,
That one speak not in pride or madness.
Charles is an honorable man, we know this for truth,
There is not a better king in all of Christendom."] (vv. 2454-2458)

[54] Terry Jones, *Medieval Lives* (London: BBC Books, 2005), 64.

Appealing to both God and Christendom, Miles reminds the clan that the divine fount of justice resides in Charlemagne. They are only opposing the oppression inflicted upon them, not the king himself. Authority, therefore, becomes a structure of oppression quasi-independent from the person of the king, rendering the situation open to legitimate rebellion.

This is further demonstrated during an open battle below the walls of Vienne, when Charlemagne himself mounts a horse and joins the fray. Girart clashes with the newcomer, unaware of his identity, and strikes the emperor with a nearly fatal blow. Charlemagne marvels at Girart's singular ferocity, revealing his imperial identity in the process. "Gripped with fear in his heart" (au cuer en ot friçon, v. 4424), Girart dismounts straightaway and kneels before Charlemagne, taking and kissing his foot, crying out for mercy and forgiveness for "this misdeed" (icele mesprison, v. 4447-4448). Not only does Girart finally kiss the correct foot, but this scene also reinforces that, although an outlaw, Girart is unwilling to fight Charlemagne directly despite the latter's determination to confiscate Vienne and punish the rebels. The noble robber is never a *revolutionary*, in the sense of an agitator for the overthrow of society and the establishment of a new order.[55] Rebels like these "never imagined that the throne could just remain empty" (Ils n'imaginaient pas que le trône pût rester toujours vide).[56]

In the same way, when Girart and his entourage capture Charlemagne in the forest, instead of murdering the emperor, they all kneel as Girart says:

"Ne place Deu…
que rois de France soit ja par moi honniz!
Ses hom serai s'il a de moi merci,
de lui tendrai ma terre et mon païs."

["It would not please God…
If the king of France were thus harmed by me!
I will be his man if he will have mercy on me,
I will hold my lands and my territory from him."] (vv. 6421-6424)

The noble robber may fight with the king, but neither ever vanquishes the other because ultimately the time comes that they meet and the ruler recognizes the outlaw's virtue.[57] Charlemagne hears Girart's words and is moved to declare:

"Iceste guerre Girart le Vïennois
doutoie plus que nule riens qui soit.
Deus me confonde se jamés le guerroi!"

["This war with Girart of Vienne
I have dreaded more than anything else.
God confound me if I ever fight him again!"] (vv. 6435-6437)

And thus, peace between the outlaw and the king is made. William Calin proposed that, despite the general sympathy for rebellious vassals in the chansons de geste, rebellion is never allowed to succeed "due to the never-diminished aura of the royal ideal, the official philosophy of the Church,

[55] Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (New York: Praeger Inc., 1959), 10-11.
[56] Albert Camus, *L'Homme Révolté* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), 143.
[57] Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 59.

and a very real desire for order among the people."[58] Yet, Girart does succeed in the aims of his rebellion (peace, reconciliation, and the retention of his fief). Charlemagne is allowed to save face by appearing magnanimous, but Girart truly has him at his mercy. This reconciliation is, in effect, based on extortion. Luke Sunderland pushes against Calin's assumption as well: "the rebel baron chansons de geste teach the nobles not just to rebel, but how to rebel: they argue that particular types of rebellious action, under specific circumstances" are tolerable.[59] Indeed, *Girart de Vienne*'s particular style of rebellion meets the criteria of an outlaw story, for as an outlaw hero, his goal was never revolution.

Returning as an Honorable Member of the Community

It is common for the outlaw hero to regain legitimate status at the end of their tale. Hereward was "received into esteem by the king" (a rege gratiam susceptus) and held the lands of his inheritance for the rest of his days.[60] Likewise, in the falling action of *Girart de Vienne,* the former rebels return to the community as honorable barons. When Girart's entourage escort Charlemagne back to Vienne, a great feast is held in their honor. Girart and Charlemagne attend mass together afterwards, a symbolic showing of Girart's return to the Christian community as an honorable member (laisse CLXXXIV). Then the barons of Vienne parade out of the city with Charlemagne, back to his besieging army who have been waiting apprehensively for annihilation by the defenders after the loss of their king. Charlemagne declares his reconciliation with Girart:

> "Seignor…ne soiez esperdu!
> Cest ost avez por neant esmeü.
> La merci Deu, bien nos est avenu:
> ore avons ce c'avons tant atendu,
> moi et Girart somes ami et dru,
> s'est remesse la guerre."
>
> ["Lords…do not be distraught!
> You have roused these forces for nothing.
> By the mercy of God, good has come to us:
> Now we have that which we have been waiting for,
> Girart and I are friends and supporters,
> So the war is put aside."] (vv. 6722-6727)

And, with that, Girart is welcomed back to courtly society, an outlaw no more. Since the noble robber is not a true criminal,[61] he has no difficulty in rejoining the community as a respected member when he ceases to be an outlaw.

Death of the Noble Robber Through Betrayal

[58] William Calin, *The Old French Epic of Revolt* (Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1962), 227.
[59] Sunderland, *Rebel Barons*, 57.
[60] *Gesta Herwardi*, 404.
[61] Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 53.

The story of *Girart de Vienne* corresponds with the noble robber narrative in the manner of the death of the hero, that being invariably and only through betrayal. The deaths of the now-pardoned outlaws do not happen within the verses of *Girart de Vienne*, but they are foretold. The celebratory final laisses of *Girart de Vienne* give way to foreboding as messengers arrive from Spain with news of Saracen aggression in the south. Charlemagne and the Archbishop call the army to action and prepare to leave for war at once (laisses CLXXXVIII-CXCI). It is with a tone of sadness that the poet reminds the audience that this is the very start of the wars in Spain recounted in *The Song of Roland* where the heroes are destined to die through betrayal:

> bien en avez oïe la chançon,
> coment il furent trahi par Ganelon.
> Morz fu Rollans et li autre baron,
> et li .XX. mile.
>
> [You have certainly heard the song about it,
> How they were betrayed by Ganelon.
> Death came to Roland and the other barons,
> As well as twenty thousand knights.] (vv. 6924-6927)

So, the noble robber narrative of *Girart de Vienne* comes to a close with the reminder that the death of Girart and the other heroes is forthcoming but will only come about through betrayal.

CONCLUSIONS

By revealing the plot and characters of *Girart de Vienne* as corresponding to the strategic narrative structure of an outlaw tale, the study of medieval epic and the study of outlaw folklore are brought together. This approach is certainly informative insofar as what it indicates about the world of Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube and his audience. The turn of the thirteenth century was a time when social structures and expectations were rapidly changing, largely at the expense of the young nobles who made up much of the audience for both epic songs and outlaw stories. Chivalric culture was now under additional new pressures as fiefdoms became harder to obtain and the bloodshed of crusading became cyclical and inevitable. Hobsbawm showed that stories about noble robbers grow and "become epidemic" in times of social tension and upheaval.[62] Graham Seal posited that outlaw heroes appear whenever there are significant numbers of victims of injustice.[63] *Girart de Vienne* is evidence of the appetite that contemporary audiences had for narratives that reflected their own struggles in a changing world. For Kathryn Gravdal:

> Poetry, song, story, all can offer men and women the words to…describe… [painful or pleasurable] experiences that are difficult to comprehend…it is possible and even necessary to acknowledge that there is a direct relation between literary discourse and the world of deeds.[64]

In this same way, *Girart de Vienne* reworked the real-world dissatisfaction of young knights into an epic narrative about outlaw heroes who agitated for a return to the expectation of economic and

[62] Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 73.
[63] Seal, "The Robin Hood Principle," 83.
[64] Kathryn Gravdal, *Vilain et Courtois* (University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 193.

social stability of previous generations. Blurring, shifting, and even sometimes inverting "the boundaries between law and criminality, order and disorder, peace and violence, and lawlessness and civil conduct," [65] outlaw tales represent a "credible critic and intimate opponent of oppressive officialdom."[66] *Girart de Vienne* was not necessarily a call to become an outlaw, but a cathartic expression of longing for similar freedom to act recklessly in the pursuit of the future. The narrative of the noble robber provided a framework for exploring and even celebrating the concept of rebellion, functioning as an entertaining literary device that satisfied the desire for an alternative discourse about justice and social order.

[65] John C. Appleby and Paul Dalton, "Introduction," in *Outlaws in Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. John C. Appleby and Paul Dalton (London: Routledge, 2016), 1.
[66] Stephen Knight, "Introduction," in *Robin Hood in Greenwood Stood*, xi.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube. *Girart de Vienne*. Edited by Wolfgang Van Emden. Paris: Société des Anciens Textes Français, 1977.

Burgess, Glyn, ed. and trans. *Two Medieval Outlaws: Eustace the Monk and Fouke Fitz Waryn.* Rochester: Boydell and Brewer, 1997.

Doon de Maience. Edited by M. Guessard. Paris: Chez F. Vieweg, 1859.

L'Epopée Carlovingienne: Girard de Vienne, Chanson de Geste d'Après le Trouvère Bertrand de Bar. Translated by Gaston Armelin. Paris: 1911.

Garin le Loherain. Edited by Paulin Paris. Paris: Claye, 1833.

Gaydon. Edited by Jean and Andrée Subrenat. Paris: Peeters, 2007.

Gesta Herwardi. In *Lestorie des Engles Solum la Translacion Maistre Geffrei Gaimar.* Edited by T. D. Hardy and C. T. Martin. Rolls Series 91. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1888.

Girart de Vienne, Chanson de Geste Edited According to MS BXIX (Royal) of the British Museum. Edited by Frederic G. Yeandle. New York: Columbia University Press, 1930.

Girart de Vienne, Traduction en Français Moderne. Translated by Bernard Guidot. Paris: Champion, 2006.

Jehan de Lanson. Edited by John Myers. Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures 53. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965.

La Chanson de Doon de Nanteuil, Fragments Inédits. Edited by Paul Meyer. *Romania*, vol. 13 (1884): 1-26. Reprinted 1966, Johnson Reprint Corporation.

La Chevalerie Ogier de Danemarche. Edited by Judith Belam. Reading: University of Reading Press, 1994.

Le Roman de Girard de Viane par Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube. Edited by P. Tarbé. Reims: Collection des Poètes de Champagne Antérieurs au XVIe Siècle, 1850.

Le Roman d'Eustache le Moine. Edited by A. J. Holden and J. Monfrin. Louvain: Peeters, 2005.

Raoul de Cambrai. Edited by Sarah Kay and William Kibler. Paris: Lettres Gothiques, 1996.

Renaut de Montauban ou Chanson des Quatre Fils Aymon. Edited by Jacques Thomas. Geneva: Droz, 2023.

Knight, Stephen and Thomas Ohlgren, ed. *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales.* 2nd ed. TEAMS Middle English Texts Series. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000.

The Song of Girart of Vienne by Bertrand de Bar-Sur-Aube: A Twelfth-Century Chanson de Geste. Translated by Michael Newth. Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1999.

Swanton, Michael, trans. *The Deeds of Hereward.* In *Medieval Outlaws: Ten Tales in Modern English*, edited by Thomas Ohlgren, 12-60. Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 1998.

Secondary Sources

Akehurst, F. R. P. "Good Name, Reputation, and Notoriety in French Customary Law." In *Fama: The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe*, edited by Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail, 75-94. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003.

Appleby, John C. and Paul Dalton. "Introduction." In *Outlaws in Medieval and Early Modern England: Crime, Government and Society, c.1066-c.1600*, edited by John C. Appleby and Paul Dalton, 1-6. London: Routledge, 2016.

Bradbury, Jim. *The Medieval Siege*. Rochester: Boydell Press, 1992.

Calin, William. *The Old French Epic of Revolt.* Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1962.

Camus, Albert. *L'Homme Révolté.* Paris: Gallimard, 1951.

Chandler, John. "Batman and Robin Hood: Hobsbawm's Outlaw Heroes Past and Present." In *Robin Hood in Greenwood Stood: Alterity and Context in the English Outlaw Tradition*, edited by Stephen Knight, 187-206. Medieval Identities: Socio-Cultural Spaces 1. Turnhout: Brepols, 2011.

Classen, Albrecht. *The Forest in Medieval German Literature.* London: Lexington Books, 2015.

Combarieu du Grès, Micheline de. "De l'Etrange au Merveilleux, ou le Recours aux Forêts dans *Renaut de Montauban*." *Senefiance* 25 (1988): 127-155.

Crouch, David. *The Chivalric Turn: Conduct and Hegemony in Europe before 1300*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Curott, Nicholas A. and Alexander Fink. "Bandit Heroes: Social, Mythical, or Rational?" *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*. 72, no. 2 (2012): 470-97.

Gravdal, Kathryn. *Vilain et Courtois: Transgressive Parody in French Literature of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989.

Henry, Albert. *Contribution à l'Etude du Langage Œnologique en Langue d'Oïl (XII^{e}-XV^{e} s.).* Académie Royale de Belgique, 1996.

Hobsbawm, Eric. *Bandits*. New York: New Press, 2000.

———. *Primitive Rebels.* New York: Praeger Inc., 1959.

Holt, James C. *Robin Hood.* London: Thames and Hudson, 1982.

Hotchkiss, Valerie. *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe.* New York: Garland, 1996.

Jones, George. *The Ethos of the Song of Roland*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1963.

Jones, Terry. *Medieval Lives.* London: BBC Books, 2005.

Kaueper, Richard. "Vengeance and Mercy in Chivalric *Mentalité.*" In *Kings, Knights, and Bankers: The Collected Articles of Richard Kaeuper*, edited by Christopher Guyal, 377-88. Leiden: Brill, 2016.

Keen, Maurice. *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend.* New York: Routledge, 2000.

Knight, Stephen. "Introduction." In *Robin Hood in Greenwood Stood: Alterity and Context in the English Outlaw Tradition*, edited by Stephen Knight, xi-xviii. Medieval Identities: Socio-Cultural Spaces 1. Turnhout: Brepols, 2011.

Levy, Brian J. and Lesley Coote. "*Mouvance*, Greenwood, and Gender in *The Adventures of Robin Hood* and *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*." In *Robin Hood in Greenwood Stood*, edited by Stephen Knight, 165-86. Medieval Identities: Socio-Cultural Spaces 1. Turnhout: Brepols, 2011.

Mazzoni, Maurizio. "Il Tema del Travestimento nella *Chanson de Geste* Analisi di Aspetti e Motivi nell'Epica Francese dei Secoli XII e XIII." *Neophilologus* 98, no. 3 (2014): 369-384.

Michel, Francisque. *Roman d'Eustache le Moine.* Paris: Silvestre, 1834.

Noble, Thomas F. X. and John Van Engen, ed. *European Transformations: The Long Twelfth Century.* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012.

Ohlgren, Thomas H. "General Introduction." In *Medieval Outlaws: Ten Tales in Modern English*, xv-xxix, edited by Thomas H. Ohlgren. Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 1998.

Seal, Graham. "The Robin Hood Principle: Folklore, History, and the Social Bandit." *Journal of Folklore Research,* vol. 46, no. 1 (2009): 67-89.

Sunderland, Luke. *Rebel Barons: Resisting Royal Power in Medieval Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Van Emden, Wolfgang. "What Constitutes a *Bon Larron*?" In *Guillaume d'Orange and the* Chansons de Geste*: essays presented to Duncan McMillan*, edited by Wolfgang Van Emden and Philip E. Bennett, 197-218. Reading: Société Rencesvals, 1984.

Verelst, Philippe. "L'Enchanteur d'Épopée. Prolégomènes à une Étude de Maugis." *Romanica Gandensia* 16 (1976): 123-161.

Zupko, Ronald. *French Weights and Measures Before the Revolution*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978.