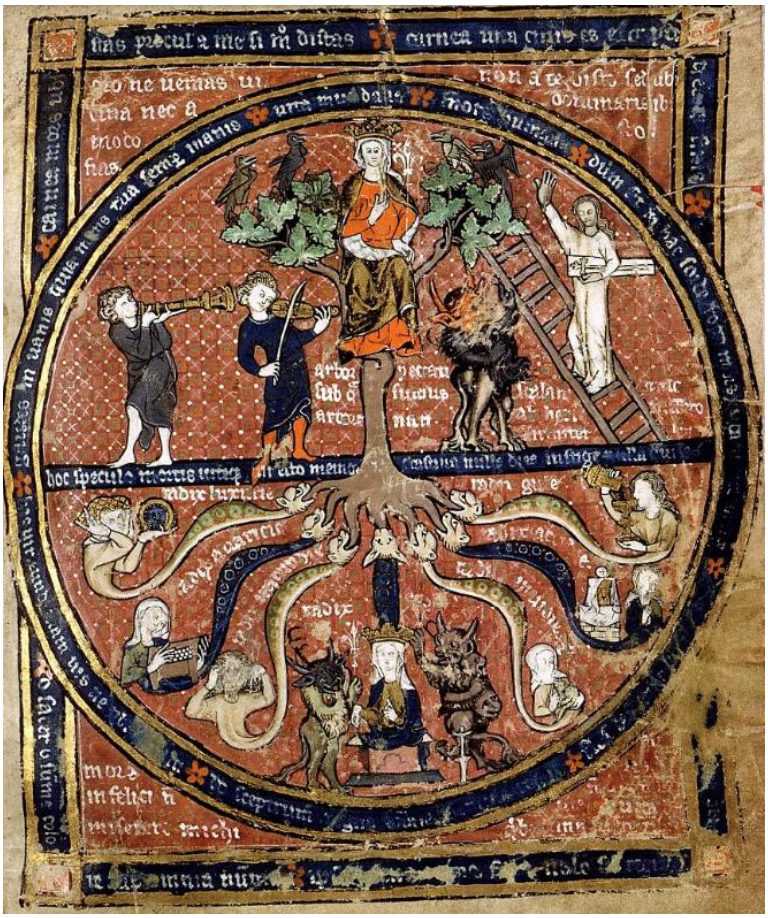
Heralds of Death: Narrative Representations of Death in Northern France, 1180-1280

Rabah Ramírez, Gabriel

HERALDS OF DEATH: NARRATIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF DEATH IN NORTHERN FRANCE, 1180-1280

Gabriel I. Rabah Ramírez



Mirror of life and death, ms.2200, fol.166, library of Sainte-Geneveive, 1277.

Thesis submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts

Universiteit Leiden

Faculty of Humanities

MA History: Europe 1000-1800

Supervisor: Marlisa den Hartog

2025

Index

INTRODUCTION 2

Objectives and Methodology 4

Source Work 6

CHAPTER I 12

DEATH PORTRAYED: ROLES, AND CONCEPTUALIZATIONS 12

Conceptual Death: Divinity, Reflection, and Legacy 12

Divinity 12

Reflection 14

Legacy 17

The Roles of Death: Teacher, Friend, and Advocate of Justice 19

Teacher 20

Friend 22

Social Justice Warrior 23

CHAPTER II 27

THE EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE OF DEATH: FEAR, GRIEF, AND REDEMPTION 27

The Unbearable Fear of Death 29

The Weight of Grief 33

The hope for Redemption 38

CONCLUSION 45

SOURCES 48

Primary Sources 48

Secondary Sources 48

See now what we have become, you will be the same,

And as you are now, we once were.

Bauduin de Condé, "Li troi mort et li troi vif"

Circa. 1240-1280

INTRODUCTION

It has become customary to perceive the medieval period as a unified and homogeneous landscape under the institution of the Christian Church. Christianity throughout Europe then becomes a monolith, where society is ruled under the Crown and the cross and its culture is perceived as religious in character. A tradition of life oriented to the Church, with times of the day reserved for prayer, holy days, sacraments, feasts and fasts, processions, from birth until death. The latter, however, requires special attention, because, according to Albrecht Classen, "the physical existence here on earth was [considered] only the transitory stage towards the other life, which mattered profoundly".[1] As Christian doctrine teaches, it is merely a passage from one place to another. The lives of the saints and the sermons during Mass often reminded the medieval people of this. This phenomenon has been described as "a medieval culture of death".[2] This culture of death will be the topic of the following work, and it will be defined as the study of everything that pertains to the cultural characteristics that surround death and dying in the Middle Ages.

The vast historiography on death has ranged from the monumental work of Philippe Ariés[3] on a long-term history of death, to the meticulous works of Paul Binski[4] and Ashby Kinch[5] and their visual studies of the medieval culture of death. Many authors have worked on medieval preparation for death, as "the fear of death, expected or sudden, influenced the attitudes and behavior of people, who wanted to ensure peace and salvation of the soul, as

[1] Classen, Albert. *Death in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: The Material and Spiritual Conditions of the Culture of Death*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2016.
[2] This term was coined by Paul Binski in 1996, and it will be explored further. For more on it, see: Binski, Paul. *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation*. London: British Museum Press, 1996.
[3] Ariès, Philippe. *The Hour of Our Death*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983.
[4] Binski, Paul. *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation*. London: British Museum Press, 1996.
[5] Kinch, Ashby. *Imago Mortis Mediating Images of Death in Late Medieval Culture*. Leiden; Brill, 2013.

well as remembrance after death." [6] There is also a primary focus on the afterlife and its future, such as the work of M. Heiduk.[7] Or the discomforts of living with the dead, and representing death through an idea of community, as P. Geary[8] points out. To be able to determine from the sources how attitudes changed or were maintained, or simply characterized, for the medieval actor is the goal of many. However, as Ariès states, "the fact that we keep meeting instances of the same general attitude toward death from Homer to Tolstoi does not mean we should assign it a structural permanence that is exempt from historical variations. Many other elements have overlaid this fundamental and ancient background. In a world subject to change, the traditional attitude toward death is like a bulwark of inertia and continuity."[9] Precisely this, is what makes the study of death such a fascinating field. The possibilities of different angles and nuisances, even in one single time period, are broad. [10]

As Philip Booth and Elizabeth Tingle state, "the scholarly study of dying, death, and remembrance in late medieval and early modern Europe has produced an enormous body of scholarship in the last thirty years and continues to be vigorous."[11] Specific research topics include theology, bodies and rituals, legalities (wills, judgments), works of art, funerals (gravestones, cemeteries), literature (heroic narratives, poems), deathbeds and nobility, the undead (revenants, ghosts), plague, ars moriendi, danse macabre, sudden death, seafaring and death, the afterlife (especially purgatory), and urbanism and death. It is a field that grows every year, either because of the different elements that are studied or because of the different angles. As Albrecht Classen: "the subject of death has been addressed already for many decades, and yet we recognize each time that there could be more aspects, more angles to

---

[6] Lahtinen, Anu, and Mia Korpiola, eds. *Dying Prepared in Medieval and Early Modern Northern Europe*. Leiden, Netherlands; Brill, 2018.

[7] Heiduk, Matthias. "Signs from the Afterlife: Consulting the Dead about the Future in Medieval Times". In *Dreams, Nature, and Practices as Signs of the Future in the Middle Ages*, Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2022.

[8] Geary, Patrick J. *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages*. 1st ed. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018.

[9] Ariès, Philippe. *The Hour of Our Death*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983, 28.

[10] Some of the different studied assertions given to death during the Middle Ages, such as scholastic theorization, artistic expressions, courtly funerary rites, economic shifts after widespread plagues, etc. On these topics: Mitre Fernández, Emilio. *La muerta vencida: imágenes e historia en el Occidente Medieval (1200-1348)*. Madrid: Encuentro, 1988, Perkinson, Stephen, and Noa Turel. *Picturing Death 1200-1600*. 1st ed. Vol. 321. Boston: BRILL, 2020, and Binski, Paul. *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation*. London: British Museum Press, 1996, among others.

[11] Idem.

consider, more features, more texts and works of art devoted to the subject, which all add intriguing and important information to the discourse on death in the past, which carries over into our own present."[12]

The study of death in the Middle Ages is a flourishing field of research. From the 1970s when it began and onwards, many angles concerning the historical culture of death have been covered by scholars from different specializations. However, a large part of such contributions tends to focus on the late medieval period. Especially since "historians traditionally saw the Black Death as a major rupture in the social and political history of Europe". [13] The number of works of art and literary products that were created during the era after the Black Death represented an obsession with death that surpassed that of previous centuries. Johan Huizinga[14] has been cited by most authors who have worked on the subject, for recognizing how death-oriented the medieval culture of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was.

Other periods, such as the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, have received much less scholarly attention. For this reason, this thesis will focus on one particular time and place: Northern France between 1180 and 1280. This period is particularly interesting because, during the thirteenth century the sources that will be studied were popularized, and some copied in style,[15] which reveals a clear preoccupation with death. Northern France also provided an interesting context, due to the fact that this was a cultural and literary hub as there was a rise in vernacular literature[16] in the region.

Objectives and Methodology

The goal of this thesis is to provide a study of a particular death culture through the lens of literary expressions of the time. The main research question guiding this investigation

---

[12] Classen, Albert. *Death in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: The Material and Spiritual Conditions of the Culture of Death*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2016, 6.
[13] Booth, Philip and Tingle, Elizabeth. *A Companion to Death, Burial, and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, C. 1300-1700*, Vol. 94. United States: BRILL, 2021, 8.
[14] Huizinga, Johan. *Autumntide of the Middle Ages: A Study of Forms of Life and Thought of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries in France and the Low Countries*. Edited by Graeme Small and Anton van der Lem. Translated by Diane Webb. Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2020.
[15] In the case of Helinand de Froidmont, other poets copied his death-poem style and stanzas during the thirteenth century. This is deepened later.
[16] Peters, Edward. "The Road to the World" in *Europe: The world of the Middle Ages*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1977, 434.

is: What were the main perceptions and emotions on death in Northern France between 1180-1280? It will examine representations of death in three different types of sources – a poem by a Cistercian monk ("Les Vers de la Mort"), a poem by a minstrel ("Li troi mort et li troi vif"), and a chanson de geste ("La Chanson d'Aliscans") – in order to identify similarities and differences. A special focus will be placed on identifying differences between clerical and secular perspectives since, according to Classen, "the official Church, whether Catholic or Protestant, viewed death very differently than the broad laity-"[17] Classen himself does not elaborate on that statement, but this thesis aims to test his hypothesis by zooming in on differences as well as similarities between "lay" and "clerical" perspectives. My hypothesis is that the representations of death in these sources act as mirrors of the distinct roles attributed to clergy, knights and the broader laity within medieval culture. Each source echoes the priorities of the social group of its author and audience. These representations collectively signify a shared preoccupation with mortality through the display of their perceptions and emotions. By studying different sources, I aim to show that dissimilar class groups present a different, while unified at the same time, perspective on death.

The methodology used was a comparative analysis of the sources through a close reading of them. This made for a structure of two chapters, the first one concerning the perception of death and the second one its emotional side. Particularly, for chapter two, the concept of "emotional communities"[18] by Barbara Rosenwein was borrowed to help shape the analysis through the lens of collectivity within an emotional framework in the studied context. According to her, emotions besides being part of a community, they belong to a predetermined context, which means that no emotional definition really stays the same all through history, "in fact we must interpret even our own feelings according to our own emotional communities norms and vocabularies."[19] Therefore, place and time matters greatly, so for this case, the extent of this analysis of feelings within the sources are extended only to northern France within 1180-1280.

[17] Booth, Philip and Tingle, Elizabeth. *A Companion to Death, Burial, and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, C. 1300-1700*, Vol. 94. United States: BRILL, 2021, 33.
[18] Rosenwein, Barbara H. *Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600-1700*. First edition. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2016, 3.
[19] Ibid, 5.

It should be noted that, following a cultural history framework, the main reason for the use of literary sources is that they have proven to be invaluable windows into the minds of people of the past centuries. As per S. B. Gaunt and S. Kay puts it: "Among medieval historians, those of the French Annales school have been the most successful at exploiting literary texts as sources, thanks to their recourse to the concept of the 'imaginary': the recognition that literary texts map a world of mental images (and not directly a set of material conditions) subscribed to by their authors and audiences."[20] Therefore, in this case, this thesis adheres to that conceptualization, as it ventured to explore the sources following in that historiographical tradition.

Source Work

"Les Vers de la Mort" by the Cistercian monk Helinand de Froidmont is an invaluable source that in essence comprises a full account of the *memento mori* topic in fifty stanzas. His lyrical style and intent would be so characteristic that it is often mentioned by other authors as "Helinand's stanza". It was written during the end of the twelfth century, approximately between 1194 and 1197.[21] During this time, Europe was going through a period of economic and urban growth, and the rise of new religious orders such as the Cistercians, known for their search for humility, repentance and solitude, became a beacon for Helinand, which is very much exposed in his *Vers*. The poem is a product of its time, surrounded by a culture preoccupied with death. It consists of fifty stanzas of alexandrine verse about the inevitability of dying, an urge to repent and change, and a dire social critique against noble and clerical powers. Thus, its value is twofold: a guide for spiritual preparation, and a critical comment on society.

In addition, going into the XIII century, poems of death were starting to be popularized. Robert le Clerc had a notable contribution with his own *Verses on Death* in 1269. It is a text significantly longer, and much more critical than lyrical."[22] According to

[20] An example of this is that "the most important of these medievalists, Jacques Le Goff and Georges Duby, have fruitfully explored the domains of feudalism, knighthood, love and marriage, religious belief, and many other topics, using literary texts in ways that are often of immediate value to literary scholars" See: Gaunt, S.B, and Sarah Kay. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009,14.
[21] Ibáñez Rodriguez, Miguel. "*Los Versos de la Muerte de Hélinand de Froidmont*" in Vertere Monográficos de la Revista Hermeneus, no. 5. 2003, 30.
[22] Ibid, 27.

Gerhild Scholz Williams, "the poem by le Clerc, suggest merely that the poem (by Helinand) enjoyed great popularity in the middle of the 13th century."[23] That popularity echoed and created an intellectual space for more works of the sort. Not necessarily critiques (on this le Clerc's is quite unique) but on the preparation of the soul. "In the middle of the 13th century that the Dominican, Vincent de Beauviais wrote the *Speculum maius*, the second part of which is dedicated to morals and contains reflections on how the Christian should prepare himself for a death that often comes unexpectedly and that we never know when it will arrive. For this reason, the need to prepare oneself is emphasized. [24] We are then presented with an idea that by 13th century northern France, there was room for that type of literature that existed in three ways. For one, the rise and popularity of vernacular works. Second, a preoccupation and fear of death that consisted not in a macabre obsession, but in a final reckoning that leads to judgement. Thirdly, a field for open criticism of ill behaviors and morals that lived within lay and clerical strata, which related directly to said fear of death and ominous judgement.

The known historiography of this particular source consists of works on Helinand as an author. While only some notable works refer to the *Vers*, many more study his life and other works, particularly his "Chronicon"[25] and "Sermons."[26] Nevertheless, in terms of his *Vers*, there are an appropriate number of translations and literature around it that have contributed to its study.[27] Such are the introduction and annotations by Miguel Ibáñez Rodríguez to his translation for "Los Versos de la Muerte". Although it will be developed

[23] Scholz Williams, Gerhild. *The Vision of Death: A study of the Memento Mori expressions in some Latin, German, and French didactic texts of the 11th and 12th centuries.* University of Washington, 1974, 91.
[24] Haindl, Ana Luisa. "La Muerte en la Edad Media." *Revista Electrónica Historias del Orbis Terrarum.* ISSN-e 0718-7246, Nº. 1, 2009, 104-206.
[25] Works such as: Saak, E. L., The Limits of Knowledge: Hélinand de Froidmont's *Chronicon*. In: Binkley, P. [ed.], *Pre-Modern Encyclopaedic Texts. Proceedings of the Second COMERS Congress, Groningen, 1-4 July 1996*, Leiden etc. 1997, 289-302 (Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 79), Kneepkens, C.H., The Odyssey of the Manuscripts of Helinand's *Chronicon*. *Sacris Erudiri* 52 (2013), 353-384., and Smits, E.R., Editing the "Chronicon" of Helinand of Froidmont: the Marginal Notes. *Sacris Erudiri* 32 (1991), 269-289.
[26] Fritz, J.-M., Voix de Dieu – voix du monde dans les sermons d´Hélinand de Froidmont. *PRIS-MA (Recherches sur la littérature d´imagination au Moyen Âge)* 20 (2004), 67-82, and Kienzle, B. M., Deed and Word. Hélinand's Toulouse Sermons I. Sommerfeldt, J. R. [ed.], *Erudition at God's Service. Studies in Medieval Cistercian History* vol. 11, [Kalamazoo] 1987, 267-276 (Cistercian Studies Series 98).
[27] Paden, W. D., The Verses on Death by Helinant de Froidmont. *Allegorica* 3 (1978), 62-103., Porter, J. Lind, *Hélinand of Froidmont: Verses on Death*, Introduction by William D. Paden. Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1999 (Cistercian Fathers Series). Reprint: Collegeville, MN, 2006, and Wulff, F., and Walberg, Em. [eds], *Les Vers de la Mort par Hélinant, moine de Froidmont*, Paris 1905.

later, the author already demonstrated one of the reasons for the use of this source, when he states that "it is a faithful reflection of its time. The religious environment, ideological currents, as well as the society and economic changes of his time are very well reflected in his verses."[28] Similarly, K. Beverly's work[29] on the Cistercian religious order and other religious and social events of the High Middle Ages is a necessary companion to fully understand the context of Helinand de Froidmont's period.[30] The analysis is also aided by the works of William Paden,[31] Gerhild Scholz Williams,[32] and Florence McCulloch,[33] whose contributions have elucidated the versatility of the poem along its northern French context and the peculiarities of the time. Although considering that their analysis was based explicitly in the poem itself, their conclusions are drawn from there only. In contrast, this study dedicates a comparative examination of the *Vers* along the other two sources, drafting conclusions in a combined way and a broader scale.

The second source used for this thesis, "Li troi mort et li troi vif" by Baudouin de Condé, is one of the first written expressions of the death culture motif *The three dead and the three living*. It served as a rampant *memento mori* for the living, while also presenting a moral background about the society of the time. Additionally, Baudouin existed in an environment where the world of minstrels and the art of minstrelsy was on a rise by the XIII century[34], and not only that, but the popularity of written minstrel work was also growing as well. As S. Hout puts it, "overall, it is possible to document a general shift of focus, in the later thirteenth-fourteenth centuries, from lyric performance to lyric composition, with the latter defined ever more insistently as an act of writing rather than one of song or

[28] Ibáñez Rodriguez, Miguel. "*Los Versos de la Muerte de Hélinand de Froidmont*" in Vertere Monográficos de la Revista Hermeneus, no. 5. 2003, 13.
[29] Kienzl, Beverly Mayne. *Cistercians, Heresy and Crusade in Occitania, 1145–1229: Preaching in the Lord's Vineyard*. Boydell & Brewer, 2001.
[30] Kienzle, Beverly Mayne. "Hélinand de Froidmont et la prédication cistercienne dans le Midi (1145-1229)." *Cahiers de Fanjeaux* 32, no. 1 1997: 37–67.
[31] Paden, William. *De monachis rithmos facientibus: Hélinant de Froidmont, Bertran de Born, and the Cistercian General Chapter of 1199.* Speculum, Oct., 1980, Vol. 55, No. 4 (Oct., 1980), pp. 669-685.
[32] Scholz Williams, Gerhild. *The Vision of Death: A study of the Memento Mori expressions in some Latin, German, and French didactic texts of the 11th and 12th centuries.* University of Washington, 1974
[33] McCulloch, Florence. *The Art of Persuasion in Helinant's Vers de la Mort*. Studies in Philology, 69. 1972, 38-54.
[34] To expand in minstrelsy work, courtly and public, and how poems and *chansons* were performed see: Daniels, Nathan. *From "Jongleur" to Minstrel: The Professionalization of Secular Musicians in Thirteenth- and Fourteenth- Century Paris.* The John Hopkins University, 2011.

declamation."[35] This gives the impression that just like in the case of the clerical death-poems, the written poem by Baudouin de Condé shows evidence of befitting that shift to "professionalism" in a way. Whether the poem was illuminated into the manuscript by Baudouin himself it is not known, but by the time of production fitting within the minstrel's work-life, it would make an acceptable assertion. Thus, it can be interpreted that Baudouin falls into the category of a well-educated, courtly minstrel, enjoying a professional career with the methods to write down his work.[36]

The poem represents a representation of death, which, coming from a layman differs in essence from a clerical view, while also finding common ground. It is a motif that has been repeated throughout the High Middle Ages to the late Middle Ages and into the early modern period. It can be found as "The three dead and the three living", "The three dead kings" and others. Original versions of the poem exist in Italian, German, English and Spanish, as well as visual representations of it such as the fresco in the Campo Santo cemetery in Pisa, but also within illuminated manuscripts or books of hours. Glixelli establishes that Baudouin de Condé was a minstrel at the court of Margueritte II, Countess of Flanders (1244-1280).[37] Additionally, that this particular motif of pairing three dead characters with three living ones is a well-known legend that survived and was reproduced through the written work mainly thanks to minstrels like Baudouin. In this case, the poem exists in six different manuscripts, but two from the late 13th century being the oldest, Paris BnF fr.378 and fr.25566. In the case of the latter, it is accompanied by a miniature of the scene that is one of the first visual representations of it.[38] Ultimately, an examination of the context and the troubadour of the period allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the culture of death during the 13th century. And while the historiography on this Baudouin's poem is not extensive, the edition of the poem used for this work demonstrates a thorough analysis that aids the research providing perspective.

The third source used for this thesis stems from the genre of chivalric and heroic epic that flourished especially during the twelfth century. In this genre, death plays an important

[35] Huot, Sylvia. *From Song to Book The Poetics of Writing in Old French Lyric and Lyrical Narrative Poetry*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987, 4.
[36] The oldest manuscript with this work illuminated is of the last decades of the thirteenth century.
[37] Glixelli, Stefan, Les cinq poemes des trois morts et des trois vifs. E. Champion, Paris, 1914, 14.
[38] This image is analyzed in chapter 2.

part – one only needs to think of the famous "Chanson de Roland". As A. Classen points out, "death, it seems, is the hero's reward".[39] This research will be concerned with the study of "La Chanson d'Aliscans" written in the late twelfth century in the region of northern France.[40] It is contemporary to Helinand's work, yet just as his *Vers* it will gain fame by the thirteenth century. This source survives in different manuscripts. The main ones are Paris BnF fr. 774 and fr. 1449, both from the late 12th century, which puts them at a date of 1185-1200 according to J. Ferrante. "The epics are the outcome of several centuries of oral composition, probably beginning not long after the time of the heroes and events they describe but written down for the first time in the twelfth century."[41] Made during the twelfth and into the thirteenth century, while carrying over a degree of fame and coveted renown. As according to S. Kinoshita, there was a narrative space that the chivalric epic came to fill. While these legends, loosely based on real events, were transmitted orally, by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries we can observe a need to read these in manuscripts. [42] Further claims regarding patronage, or any other indication concerning the trace of the origin of the sources have not been made yet, and it may have to do with the fact that most of the epics have no known author.[43] This in turn leads to some suggestions, for example that the authors were not men of the cloth, for the clerical writings are usually signed. In a similar way, the same happens with minstrels and clerks and overall lay scholars identifying their work, not always, but frequently enough. In the case of the *chansons*, the majority are unclaimed.

The epics will share the same common element as the poems we have revised, it's the mutual angle of all three sources: it's vernacular language. "The very decision to write in a vernacular tongue grants that tongue a status that bears at least some analogy to that of Latin

---

[39] Classen, Albert. *Death in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: The Material and Spiritual Conditions of the Culture of Death*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2016, 11.
[40] Some authors claim the region of Champagne, see: Gaunt, S.B, and Sarah Kay. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
[41] Ferrante, Joan. *Guillaume d'Orange: Four Twelfth Century Epics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991, 3.
[42] This is due to a well-established chivalric class in society by the time. See: Abulafia, David, ed. "Social changes in the thirteenth century" in: *The New Cambridge Medieval History, vol. V c. 1198-c. 1300.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, 14.
[43] Of course, not all of them. J. Benton and T. Bisson explore the broad literary world of the Court of Champagne in: Benton, John F, and Thomas N Bisson. "The Court of Champagne as a Literary Center." In *Culture, Power and Personality in Medieval France*. United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2003. Considering Champagne was a main literary hub in Northern France, it is feasible to consider it the place of origin for *Aliscans* as well.

.... It reflects a perception of the social and communicative importance of the tongue and inevitably raises issues of hegemony of one tongue over others."[44] This is fundamental for the *chansons* because it continues the tradition of the orality of the legends. If they were transmitted in old French, then they would be written in old French as well. Again, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries this caused provocation in the eyes of the Church. However, it suited rulers and the nobility better, especially concerning patronage. If the objective was to please its patron, writing in vernacular accomplished that objective.

The *Song of Aliscans* is part of the Cycle of Guillaume d'Orange, son of Aymeri, who fought along Charlemagne in Roncevaux. The epic tells of a battle against a Saracen army, which the army of Guillaume ultimately loses. It is a tragedy just like the *Chanson de Roland*; thus, its pages are filled with death, bravery, and grief. The value of this particular epic lies in the way it portrays death through heroic and chivalric values. Through the work of S. Kinoshita,[45] the limits of French medieval literature and all that is in it, one can understand the context of *Aliscans*, as well as the dynamic between love and death by the hand of S. Gaunt.[46] These two go hand in hand to understand what lies behind the hero's values. In an effort to comprehend his views on death, and how he also served as an example for medieval society to follow: fearless in the face of death, but God-fearing as well.

In its structure, the chapters of this thesis addresses the two main arguments. The first one is an analysis of the perceptions of medieval society on death, developing the idea of a conceptualization of death, and an idea of personification and main roles attributed to it. The second one is an analysis of the emotional landscape represented in the sources, expanding on the idea that three main emotions govern how people feel about death: fear, grief, and redemption.

---

[44] Kinoshita, Sharon. *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature*. 1st ed. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006, 4.
[45] Kinoshita, Sharon. *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature*. 1st ed. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.
[46] Gaunt, Simon. *Love and Death in Medieval French and Occitan Courtly Literature: Martyrs to Love*. Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2006.

CHAPTER I

DEATH PORTRAYED: ROLES, AND CONCEPTUALIZATIONS

Conceptual Death: Divinity, Reflection, and Legacy

In the world of medieval literature, to portray death was more than just fairly depicting one's final hour. It went beyond and into ideas that touched upon divinity, self-examination, and memory. Thus, creating the first notions of death portrayal as being of a conceptual nature. Death was understood as an entity that pursued change in whatever way possible, and so, each text studied delivers a different (while sometimes similar) message. If for Helinand death was a divine instrument -one made by God to inspire repentance and commit spiritual preparation to eventually lead them into salvation-, for Baudouin it was a macabre reflective device. The figure of death encouraged the living to weigh their choices and ultimately choose righteousness. Whereas in *Aliscans¸* death meant legacy for the chivalrous knight, this way transforming its sacrifice as a hero into a means of immortalizing their chivalric ideals like loyalty and valor.

Divinity

Helinand belonged to the Cistercian Order. An Order that was characterized by its emphasis on austerity, solitude, the contempt of the world, and a simple life of prayer and labor, in order to reflect the ideal of the "Naked Christ."[47] The idea of a rejection of the world, while also visible in the author, is part of a bigger intellectual context ever since *De Contemptu Mundi* from about 1045[48] by Bernard of Cluny. As such, in *Les Vers de la Mort*, the main principle that guides the hand of the author is the conviction of *memento mori*, and more specifically "the danger of spiritual unpreparedness for death."[49] He equates the fear of

[47] The idea of the humble Christ, without the need for material values. Friend of the poor and broken. Beverly, Sarah. *Cistercians, Heresy and Crusade in Occitania*. In: "Cistercians, Heresy, and Crusade, 1145±1229: Preaching in the Lord's Vineyard", Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2001.
[48] Engelhard, George. *The De contemptu mundi of Bernardus Morvalensis, Part One: A Study in Common place*
[49] McCulloch, Florence. *The Art of Persuasion in Helinant's Vers de la Mort*. Studies in Philology, 69. 1972, 38-54.

God to the fear of death, for death comes first and cannot be bargained with, thus, rendering death a divine instrument.

A first perception of this can be found when Helinand reminds us of the original sin: "Death, who from apple bite have come, / That Eve and Adam might succumb, / You hammer on a curtain frail. / Now hail the Seat of Christendom! / (Rome gnaws and nibbles, tooth and gum / That's how she got her name)—All hail! / She weaves for simony a veil / So cardinal and pope walk hale"[50] It starts as a clear reminder on how God's first punishment is the gift of mortality outside the Garden. Death will come no matter what for the original sin is every living creature's imprint. But then drastically, as is Helinand's style throughout his poem, he connects it to his own context attacking how the institution protects with a veil those who commit sin. The author emits a message to those that walk without care in the name of God while acting against his rule that divine intervention is around the corner, and death it's the name.

However, he claims that death being of divine provenance, attends to divine law. In other words, for Helinand, those who live legitimately in the way of God are already practically saved, rendering death but a mere gateway to said salvation.

> "Death over holy soul and sweet,
> Lean or fat of the body's meat,
> With little power wields his rod:
> Her parting brings a full receipt.
> Therefore it's wise to clear the sheet
> Before death puts us in the sod,
> For soul that has no faith in God
> And lets the body lawless plod,
> Death makes his favorite retreat.
> Now let self-mercy each man prod,

[50] Helinand de Froidmont, *Les Vers de la Mort*, trans. Jenny Lind Porter. Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1999, XII. 1-8. (From now on "*Vers"*).

Since who goes so lazy-shod

May have a sudden Death to meet.[51]

Without this aspect, a pious life and repentance is of no worth, leaving death to be but a fatal equalizer for the one that lives in excess and in ungodly ways, as for the religiously devout and morally centered. Helinand is clear to state that death befits divine punishment for the first, but rewards freedom for the second, for a soul that's holy and sweet. In exchange, death is not personified for the author but conceptualized as an entity wielded by God itself. It reads as a tool that follows divine command. This commits an intent to pursue a change of heart in people through the recognition of said divinity. Death must be feared not only because it ends life, but because it is God's will, and God's fear is a maxim for the medieval Christian world.

Reflection

On the other hand, Baudouin de Condé while seeking to accomplish a similar goal: to change wicked ways, he employs a much harsher depiction, that of decay. In *Li troi mort,* the author presents a portrayal of death personified as rotting flesh: "That there were three dead, eaten by worms, / Ugly and disfigured in body. (…) The three living men saw the three dead, / Twice bitten by harsh decay / First by death, and then by worms."[52] For Baudouin, decay plays the most important role in the tale, it is the vivid aspect that pushes forward the lesson he's trying to impart. With the objective of shocking the reader, he creates the most gruesome and detailed descriptions of these living corpses in several moments of the poem, so that the image that is left is one of dread.

It can be interpreted that the minstrel sought to convey a macabre allegory, where death is personified as living rot, with the objective of generating an instance of introspection. However, this is played with a double meaning: on one hand, as a figurative idea of looking onwards to reflect upon our life and actions. On the other, a literal idea where the living flesh of the dead men represents that very notion of introspection: a literal open body, a forced and

[51] *Vers,* XXVI.

[52] Glixelli, Stefan. "Li troi mort et li troi vif" by Baudouin de Condé in: *Les cinq poemes des trois morts et des trois vifs*. E. Champion, Paris, 1914, I. 12-13, 19-21. (From now on "*Li troi mort…"*).

horrific self-examination of the flesh, one that dies and rots, for the living men to see and reflect upon.

Thus, the hands of the living men are forced the moment their eyes met these hideous figures, for they have choices to make. The fact that it's always three on these tales is thought out, because each living man reacts in a different way, chooses differently, so the author can showcase in a broader way the behavior of nobility. The first one would state "I cannot find the courage in myself to look at them: / They are too ugly, let's continue on our way, / For fear almost kills me."[53] Sentencing the first reaction to avert their eyes, to flee in fear, to avoid, at any cost, whatever may come after such a shocking meeting. On the other hand, the second living man turns to faith to explain what his eyes see: "Companion, I see / Such a mirror, and I will not avoid it; / Endure it, for God shows it to you."[54] He acknowledges this to be a divine test and "To reflect upon ourselves, we will gaze into it."[55] Not only accepting the task but strongly compelling his companions to join it. He looks at the corpses and recognizes God, so instead of fearing and attempting to flee, he embraces it. Finally, the third man takes it a step further as a sort of combination of both. "The decay has taken from them their feet, /legs, arms, hands (…) Death and worms have done the worst / They could; it is clear to the eyes (…) No man born of woman / Could see them and not be horrified. (…) Here, one can surely learn to do good."[56] The third living man speaks the most because at the sight of horror and pity he embarks on an emotional but coherent description of what he's seeing. And logically, concludes with a sensible take, the lesson of committing to good after seeing so much bad.

The third man's response seems to be a reaction to the profound emotional impact of the visceral shock from the image presented before them, which forced a mere description and acceptance of what's happening. But there's more to acceptance only, the third dead noble goes a step further than the second one, understanding that this is meant as an opportunity for self-improvement, learning how to do good. Nevertheless, all three reactions and choices of what to do, reveal what I interpret as three main aspects of Christian belief

[53] Ibid, II. 6-8.
[54] Ibid, III. 1-3.
[55] Idem, 6.
[56] Ibid, IV. 7-8, 10-11, 16-17, 20.

based on the source: fear, devotion, and acceptance. They seem odd because they are separated, but together they become the acceptance of the fear of God, which in turns leads to the devoted follow of his rule.

Furthermore, each response is also tied to a different aspect of noble identity during this period. The first one being the fragility of those consumed by fear, incapable to confront mortality. While the second one exemplifies devout and holy righteousness, looking at death through divine providence and facing it as a sacred trial. The third one symbolizes acceptance through reflection, one that seeks to comprehend and derive significance from the experience, shaping it into a moral lesson. Through the exhibition of these reactions, Baudouin de Condé paints a picture of nobility where fear, faith, and rationality highlight the intricacies of mortality as a social, spiritual, and moral force within the noble context of the 13th century. This is achieved through a portrayal of death personified that violently compels said reactions through macabre imagery.

A note should be made on the characters depicted on the tale. Why three noblemen? Why couldn't it be three farmers, or artisans, or any of the rising professions of the 13th century such as merchants, scholars, moneylenders, etc.[57] I believe it is because young nobility reflects that image of high rank privilege and vanity. This in turn reflects a social and moral concern of the time, were the only solution to it appears to be by the hand of the equalizer death. It is a reminder of the moral obligations and responsibilities of the ruling class.

However, Ashby Kinch states regarding the representations that "these objects are thus never reducible to their didactic meaning but rather channel didactic meaning toward the generation of affect that is then attached to representations of artists and patrons. Generating visual fascination through attention to the dead body serves to enact the promise of an identity beyond death offered by socio political institutions."[58] This perspective suggests that the three noblemen are more than messengers of warn, they are also symbols that represent continuity after death, according to the medieval social order. Their

[57] Le Goff, Jacques. *Time, Work, & Culture in the Middle Ages*. Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1980.
[58] Kinch, Ashby. *Imago Mortis Mediating Images of Death in Late Medieval Culture*. Leiden; Brill, 2013, 111.

confrontation with death then becomes about reinforcing their place within a system that extends beyond life itself. While the fixation on the decayed corpse goes beyond moral instruction and forces a reflection on how noble identity is preserved or transformed in death. This renders death as a public and political reality that ties them to responsibilities of their rank.

Legacy

Now in a similar way, the image of gruesome death provided by vivid descriptions can be found in *Aliscans*. While it is not Baudouin's way of portraying death, as it is not a personification at all, the author of this *chanson* does employ the horrors of battlefield and dying through horrific descriptions of it, in order to convey a landscape that underlines how ruthless the world of knights was. "Vivien is in the midst of the Archant / and his guts are slipping out of his body. / With both hands he tries to hold them in"[59] and "Many Saracens had their heads crushed / and lay dead and bloody, their mouth opened."[60] The necessity to address combat in the most shocking and dreadful way is a common place for *chansons de geste*, and while it could be considered that it's the way chivalric heroes understood death, I believe it is not however the exact portrayal of it, rather a fundamental characteristic of it.

Furthermore, during battles knights usually accomplish extraordinary feats that usually come from impossible displays of strength, to exemplify this: "But Rainoart grabs his arm with such fury, / that he tears one of them from his trunk."[61] This superhuman exploits, as they add to legend itself, also make up for a better legacy, which will be the most important aspect for chivalric epic. This is because the image of the knight must be outstanding in every way, therefore if he will have a shattering gruesome death, it is because prior to that he sent their enemies to a most horrific death in turn.

The notion of dreadful battle with their vivid descriptions of dismembering, blood-soaked fields and guts, and vicious final blows, sets the stage for what really matters in chivalric epic: legacy. The more tribulations the hero goes through, the more death he encounters (and sends people to) the better his legacy will be sedimented, thus, death is

[59] Ferrante, Joan M. "Aliscans" in: *Guillaume D'Orange: Four Twelfth-Century Epics.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1991. IV, 61-63.
[60] Ibid, LXXXIV, 3985-3986
[61] Ibid, CCXXVII. 6088-6089.

portrayed as a significant milestone in chivalric epic, albeit a noble and essential one. It is much more than just life's end, but a key moment that marks a knight's worth and solidifies his place in collective memory. In the *chansons de geste*, death is understood as a measure of value, to witness courage, and as a badge of steadfast loyalty to their cause. The knight's readiness to confront death, whether as the agent, or the receiver, indicates the chivalric values of honor and sacrifice. Thus, we can interpret that there is a preoccupation with knightly death in these tales as a way of solidifying these ideals of chivalry and heroism. When put into context, we are laid with a scenario where putting these oral traditions into writing could've translated into a need for educating the literate about the values of chivalry. While at the same time, showing that even upon death, knights live by said code of conduct, where honor is held in the highest regard leaving no room for cowardice. It was a form of entertainment,[62] yes, but it was also a way to push for knightly ideals in society.

What's more, these values are not exempt from holiness, in fact, their righteousness befits divine intervention. At the beginning of the song as we follow Vivien's events, the hero's demise comes to a climactic point where he rejoices with angels. In order:

> "And (pierces) into his chest as far as his lungs. / Vivien falls, deserving or not. (…) The count makes his way through the midst of the dead. / Finally stops in front of the child, / he cannot speak, for the sorrow he feels. (…) He holds Vivien resting in his lap / and gently begins to caress him. / [Vivien revives long enough to confess himself to William and to receive the eucharist from him] 'Nephew,' says William, 'there's no need to fear.' / With these words, he has him take the bread for the honor of God, and bow his head. / His soul departs, it can no longer stay. / In Paradise, God gives him dwelling, / He places him besides His angels. / When William sees it, he begins to weep."[63]

This is a straightforward connection to Helinand's divine conception of death. The episode of Vivien's final moments is a clear notion that God accompanies and rewards

[62] Kinoshita, Sharon. *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature*. 1st ed. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006 and Gaunt, Simon. *Love and Death in Medieval French and Occitan Courtly Literature: Martyrs to Love*. Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2006.
[63] Ibid, XXIX.

knights, especially those who demonstrate immense valor. The author here is trying to advocate for a message where chivalric values befit God's favor at death. In fact, the extraordinary feat where Vivien comes back to life for a few minutes after dying, just to receive the last words of his companion and the eucharist, speaks volumes in terms of the importance of Christian dogma, but also regarding the relevance of their companion and that ultimate test of loyalty, meeting death in his defense with his last sign of approval.

This is the very reason why the concept of sudden death is a knight's biggest fear. Examples of this are to die asleep, poisoned, or any matter that grants a sort of surprise. Chivalric death must be announced, must be met, and must be accepted with courage. On this, P. Ariés argued that "(sudden death) is not favored and not honorable, unlike certain death that are known beforehand, for characters such as Roland. There is an element of sacrifice at play, of a rational choice of it."[64] That sacrificial element is of utmost importance, it's eventually what deems Vivien that angelical visit. Those are the actions worthy of a knight, and the ones that create legacy to live forever in the collective memory of the people, transmitted orally for generations.

It is evident that the *chansons* are embellished, but they are done so with that very objective in mind.[65] To make chivalric behavior and morals fashionable by excelling the mind with exacerbated narratives of their extraordinary deeds. As a cause of this, death is ultimately portrayed not as an end to fear but as an essential part of attaining eternal renown. Thus, elevating the hero/knight and his story to one of timeless importance within the culture of the period and beyond.

The Roles of Death: Teacher, Friend, and Advocate of Justice

Having considered that death is at first a conceptual entity, the studied authors also gave death dynamic roles as if it were a part of society. These are also forms of portraying it that ultimately play the same objective: to create a change in the person. Thus, death would

[64] Ariès, Philippe. *The Hour of Our Death*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983.
[65] Gaunt, S.B, and Sarah Kay. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

develop into an actor that should influence moral, social and even emotional realities.[66] As a teacher, death imparts life-changing lessons by confronting people with their mortality. While as an advocate for justice within society, it acts as a leveler, a sort of judge, jury and executioner, that knocks down the social pyramid of medieval rank. However, death can also present itself as a friend, a companion that has been patiently waiting, to walk with them to the afterlife after laying down the path to salvation. These multilayered dynamics highlight the importance that death has as a cultural aspect within medieval imagination. Hence why these roles are fundamental to analyze, for they reveal how collective lives and values within society were molded by death.

Teacher

In Helinand's *Vers* we find the clearest signs of death as the figure of a teacher, mainly because of its didactic notions. *Les Vers de la Mort* is in its most essential sense, an educational poem that urges for change and how to accomplish it.

> "Death, hie to those who sing love's chaunt
> And who vainglories vainly flaunt
> And teach them how to sing as they
> Who for bewitching you are wont
> To take themselves from worldly haunt
> In shelter from your rude away."[67]

Helinand even employs the word "teach" in the matter of imparting the lessons that truly matter. If they are to sing, let them sing of God's love, of appraise and worship, not of the vanities of life and their riches acquired in it. This excerpt elucidates a pedagogical notion, for if one were to break it down it comes to a simple equation: the sinful, the faithful, and salvation. To reach the latter you must abandon the sinful ways and commit to faith. This example that the author gives is one from many where he takes from his surrounding realities and converts them into moral lessons.

> "Death, in whose mirror soul may peer
> When separate from fleshly gear

[66] This emotional aspect is explored in the following chapter.
[67] *Vers,* II.

And in your book see plainly writ
How for God's sake we should revere
That life which may the worst appear
Sans worldly pleasure exquisite."[68]

I believe the author pursues an idea where death as a teacher holds a mirror so that humanity can peer. In the precise moment of death, when the soul is torn from the body, it will peer into said mirror and realize that the path of God was the correct one, a sort of look and learn. Therefore, death while final, must be a daily reminder to follow the righteous way, avoiding physical desires. It is the path that's hardest, but the one that leads to paradise nevertheless, and in following it one is attaining to the lessons that death imparts.

Now in a similar way, Baudouin also puts forth an idea of death as a teacher, but one of great impact. It is didactic but visceral, because the rotten corpses are to give a shocking lesson on vanity and on the fleeting nature of worldly desires. Furthermore, the corpses speak directly to them with the sole purpose of imparting a lesson: "Lords, look at our bodies; we, who once possessed / Wealth, see now what we have become, / You will be the same, and as you are now, / We once were, the hour has already passed."[69] The first dead man urges them to look properly at the fate that awaits the living nobles. It reminds them that without exception, without a care for their rank because they were the same, they shall also become a corpse.

In contrast to Helinand, this teacher is by far much more fatalist, and while it suggests change, it emphasizes the idea of equalizing further, without leaving much room for a "reward". This blunt confrontation with mortality breaks the illusion of longevity that wealth and rank provide, because it forces the living to face the reality of decay and everything that's material. The visceral image of rot in addition to how candid the deceased speak, makes it impossible for the nobles to disregard how universal death is, that it can even reach them. I believe that this serves as evidence to underscore how well-lived nobility was. Consequently, we are left with a grim and strict, pedagogical death that imparts more than just moral lessons (unlike Helinand's) but presents a much deeper existential fact: no achievement nor

[68] *Vers,* XI.
[69] *Li troi mort,* V. 2-6.

possession in this world can save you from the force of mortality. This way, it is not just didactic, it carries an acute and unforgettable reminder that life is plainly transient.

Friend

However, regarding *Aliscans*, death does not seem to be entirely depicted as a teacher, as it is as a friend. In fact, the hero's death is so cherished and glorified that it's closely linked to God's favor. This is shown as acts of divine intervention where death is one of God's envoys to release the suffering of his subject and lead him on to paradise guided by angels. As shown by this description of Guillaume's deeds: "He took great pains to serve God always, / to sing his psalms and to keep his law; (…) Our lord wishes to preserve him now / and send a holy angel when he dies, / and so it is good that you hear this song; / for he is holy, God has blessed him / and in glory has placed and set him / with his angels, to serve and adore."[70] Just as it shown with Vivien's death, the knightly ideal of living in God's honor and serving his law, earns them no trouble nor worry upon facing death. Because they know that having abided by their code in life, they will enjoy the divine reward in the afterlife. Thus, death becomes not something to fear but almost a cheerful moment —besides the pain of suffering a gruesome battlefield demise, which they power-through sheltering in their faith and the grace of God. They pray, they perform the eucharist or the last rites and finally commend themselves fully to their god. In an act where they greet death with open arms, followed by the divine intervention of angels leading them to paradise. This narrative that the *chansons* follow, famously visible in the death of Roland,[71] employs a tactic of healthy desire, emphasizing the goodness. Which I believe is done in a way of convincing the audience that the grace of God can be earned through a life of serving him as a righteous knight. It did not seek to convey a message that anyone can be a knight, but at least to follow their valor and strength figuratively and live under God's rule. This in turn, surely helped popularize chivalry and chivalric literature all together.

[70] Ferrante, Joan M. "Aliscans" in: *Guillaume D'Orange: Four Twelfth-Century Epics.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1991. XXI, 639-644.

[71] Anonymous, *The Song of Roland.* Translated by Dorothy L. Sayers. England: Penguin Classics, 1957, v.176. The similarities between *Roland* and *Aliscans* are many and have been noted by J. Ferrante. In this case, the scenes of an angel taking up the fallen hero and guiding him to paradise are almost identical, save from the fact that in *Roland*, the angels are mentioned by name as Michael and Gabriel.

Returning to Helinand, he also employs the "friend" rhetoric but in a different way. He aligns death with the love of a friend, interpreting it as a sign of friendship.

> "Death, to my friends now go for me,
> Not as it were to enemy
> Nor as persons whom I hate,
> For I pray God (who set me free
> To keep my promise faithfully)
> Long life He give them and sweet fate
> Of righteous living, long and late."[72]

Here the author states that since God's greatest gift is his love and friendship, Helinand sends his friends to death out of love, depicting death as another friend in the narrative. One that introduces the author's companions to the afterlife, graceful under God. Because sending a companion off to death as a friend, or out of friendship, is drastically different than it would be out of antagonism or as an enemy. In *Aliscans* the pages are filled with descriptions of the type, where the heroes send their enemies to meet death as infidels, as the biggest punishment according to their God. In contrast, Guillaume sends Vivien to death in the dearest way possible not only as his closest friend, but for him to meet death as a friend. He sends Vivien in peace, grieving and broken, but reconciled that his friend is now also among friends and God's love. This was the way that Helinand and the author of *Aliscans* explored a "friendly" death in their texts, through the action of a third, sending or advocating out of love their friend's death

Social Justice Warrior

For the case of Baudouin and his grim depictions, death served another purpose, that of a social justice warrior. In *Le troi vif…*, we have seen how death becomes this (un)natural rotten corpse which is living-dead, with a memory of their past and their actions, and accomplished lives. They were noblemen that rejoiced in good living until death took them from their material world and made them walk the earth as symbols of decay, living-warnings to men that partake on such livings as they once did. It is an utterly direct message as it states: "Look at us now, I was once a duke, / A noble man of courage and reputation, / This count

[72] *Vers,* IV.

and this other marquis. / Now is our pride humbled, / Which once we had, and the envy / We felt toward our peers in life. (…) Where pride holds sway through power, / God has shown us to you / So that we might set you on the right path / Of goodness and may God lead you."[73]

The passage first evidences the category of men that these corpses were, where high rank and status are its main characteristics. But then it shows how death, in a humbling action, changed their fates upside down. One should pay attention to the fact that it is pride that is humbled, and being a cardinal sin, along envy (also mentioned) and greed (inferred) are assigned to the nobility not only by Baudouin, but also by Helinand. This equates the life that the nobles carry to one of sin, and since they hold enough power to be almost untouchable in life, death will be the one to tilt the scales. Therefore, death becomes this idea of a social justice warrior, not necessarily fighting for the poor/lower strata (as it is suggested in Helinand)[74] but by striking down the wealthy and opulent from their high places because they live a life of sin. Thus, the depiction of a rotten body becomes a metaphor where the physical rot reflects their rotten life, corrupted by ill-living, and strayed from God's path. Additionally, as we have seen in Baudouin's depiction, we can also find a lesson in death, a most grim teacher that imparts the education of reformed morals in the most ruthless way: you either change your life and abandon sin or become this.

Following that social function, Helinand exposes death to kings a total of six times in his poem. After death, and along the clergy and the synonyms he uses for them, it is the third most repeated character. This is essential because the power death exerts over kings, can be interpreted as payback for theirs and nobility's actions over the disfavored. It is that gist of class struggle that one could gather from Helinand when he states that "Death, you avenge what plain folk see."[75] I believe he clearly recognizes the oppression suffered by the low strata of society by the hand of the rich and powerful. It is a simple, yet keen and severe

[73] *Li troi mort*, V. 13-17, 21-22.
[74] In Helinand's *Vers*, there is a reiterative motif where death is a champion of the lower strata against the wealthy. "Death you avenge the low against the high" v.XII, or "Death makes a free man of a slave" v.XXXI, among other examples. I believe this conveys an idea that one could read Helinand through a lens of class struggle, as the author constantly denotes the oppressors of the lower class. This comes from the notion where Marxism is viewed as a moral/philosophical theory of exploitation, in which case it could be applied to this particular case and backed by such palpable evidence. See: Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History" In: Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. New York: Shocken Books, 1968.
[75] *Vers*, XII, 7.

observation made by the author, in terms of recognizing a pattern in how the exploited live harshly under the hands of those who exploit them. "(…) those princely vultures try to flee, / Their necks stretched upwards, by they lose."[76] Consequently, since Helinand holds nobility and clergy to severe account, he is absolutely non apologetic when it comes to accusing the elites of society, especially ecclesiastical figures. And as he harshly holds them accountable for their way of living, he sets them to the side of evil, claiming a clear notion of good and bad.

To conclude, the union of these sources come from a common shared element: the insistence of death as a powerful transformative agent. I believe that the idea behind portraying death in different ways is to give it not only a relevance that befits the 13th century, but an urgency of making sense of their own mortality. Whether it was a spiritual, moral, or heroic take on death, the portrayals while different in shape, point towards a same objective in essence: changing the hearts of people. Naturally, this understanding of death lives within the cultural framework of the time, it belongs to the northern French society that produced its authors as we saw in the introduction. This background provided the necessary tools that developed into a discourse where death evolves from a natural part of life to an active historiographical subject. The study of this subject in its literary form is part of a medieval culture of death that plagues the Middle Ages. While also, in this particular case, becomes the cornerstone of a society that finds the need to portray and personify death as a means to comprehend itself.

A deeper analysis of these sources revealed that these portrayals offered much more than simply reflecting cultural values on death of medieval society. It showed that writing about death had an active audience, critical of the spiritual preparation of all souls, and their deeds in life, because death is divine. It exhibited that the *memento mori* trope was needed to constantly remind nobility that they are also expendable. And finally, it revealed that creating an image/idea of righteous values personified in chivalry helped spread the Christian moral and God's path, one that is brave and at peace upon death. Thus, this language of death exists in a collective imagination that actively thought about their demise, seeking to navigate their

[76] Ibid, XII,11-12.

identities, aspirations and emotions. The latter is of such importance that it's the topic of the next chapter: exploring the emotional language on death within the studied sources.

CHAPTER II

THE EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE OF DEATH: FEAR, GRIEF, AND REDEMPTION

Fig. 1: Miniature "Li troi vif et li troi mort", BNF Français .378, fol.1.

As we have seen, death, being an unstoppable force, reigned in medieval culture as an active subject with the power to change the realities of life. Naturally, and as a consequence of this, its second most essential quality is the capacity to provoke diverse reactions that alter human emotions. Among their most palpable emotional responses in the sources, we find fear as the number one feeling that plagues their thoughts. It is followed by grief as a way of processing sadness, and redemption as a manifestation of hope. In general, the work of emotions in the sources is never quite explicit, except in certain passages, however, they can be very well interpreted and inferred through close reading. This is the aim of the chapter: to identify and analyze what emotions were in the minds of medieval society through the representations offered by these three sources. In this way, it deepens the knowledge of the medieval culture of death through the understanding of the emotional language of the works studied.

For the task at hand, it is important to understand the theoretical contributions of the history of emotions, in an effort to give more substance to the analysis of said emotions in these texts. As developed in the introduction, B. Rosenwein's vision of "emotional communities"[77] is used to understand that the emotions expressed in the sources studied exist inside a cultural community that shapes the way of feeling. In this way, the analysis of emotions, such as fear or grief, in each source becomes a contextual exercise that connects with the background of writing about death during the 13th century in northern France.

The top image in *Fig.1* represents that application. The miniature is an illumination accompanying Baudouin's poem *Li troi mort*…. It is a representation of the story told by the minstrel, with the aim of producing a visual impact so that the reader does not rely solely on his imagination. The image presents two clear sides, that of the living on the left, and that of the dead on the right. The vibrant colors of the background immediately jump out: the red tone represents the warmth of a living body, while, in contrast, the blue signifies the cold, dead body. I think this duality represents a question: which side do you want to be on? Although we know that all living things must die, the fact that this image is presented in this way may give the reader a point of hope for making the right choice. Unfortunately, due to the passage of time, the illumination lost many fascinating details, but we can recognize at least two main ones. The first is the costumes, their colors and lack of them. Those of the living have vibrant colors like orange and blue, and look like fine threads, all indications of nobility I would dare say. In addition, one of the nobles carries a falcon, which was used for hunting in falconry, one of the most aristocratic sports of the time. While the side of the dead barely wears rags, which do not cover the whole body, and is completely devoid of color, which reinforces the image of deterioration. The second and perhaps the most interesting element are the faces. Although only one of the faces of the dead can really be recognized, it shows a lot. It is a face that speaks clearly, as its two hands also gesticulate, and by lacking eyes it conveys a message that sticks in the soul. Evidently, it would have contributed much to the analysis if the nobles had kept their faces, to see the contrast of emotions represented in their expressions.

[77] Rosenwein, Barbara H. *Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600–1700*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

I think this illustration not only connects the text to the image, but also reinforces an interpretation of what the living and the dead might be feeling. I think the clearest face of the dead bodies expresses a feeling of trust. In a way, it pursues its argument through trust in what the living man can see: three corpses neither living nor dead, in a state of decomposition and putrefaction, as if to say, "trust your eyes." Likewise, the more decomposed the face is, the less expression it has, until it is only bones. This, in turn, suggests a question to the reader about his or her own feelings about the poem. It seeks to engage the reader in an emotional reflection on death, how one would feel if forced into this situation, and sequentially, what one would do.

The Unbearable Fear of Death

Possibly the first thought that comes to mind when thinking about death is fear. It is what has been fueling narratives since ancient times, measuring the valor of people, or cowering before it. During the High Middle Ages this fear was intensified through religious teachings that stressed divine judgement, especially the notion of a "God-fearing Christian." Regarding this, author J. Delumeau stated that the cult of fear did not rise by chance, but was in fact instated deliberately as a tool by Christianity in order to imprint a constant awareness of sin and the threat of divine reckoning.[78] This state of mind echoed in the mentalities of the medieval people, and so corresponds with how the authors perceived the fear of death in their writings. As a result of this, we can extrapolate that dreading death was fundamental within an emotional community that is supervised by the imminent threat of God's judgement.

During this period, the fear of death is composed by at least two main factors. On one hand, the visceral pain of dying, and on the other, the uncertainty of God's resolution and the afterlife. While the first one comes from a natural aversion to pain, the second one originates from a Christian foundation based on teachings. The importance of understanding why

[78] Delumeau, Jean. *Sin and Fear: the emergence of a Western guilt culture, 13th-18th centuries.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.

medieval society feared death is directly connected to the fear of God.[79] This is the fear that is ultimately seen in Helinand at many times, but especially in the first verse:

> "Death you are feared by every sage,
> Yet each advances to that wage,
> Rambles or races, both will do.
> Myself a change of heart engage
> I've left all play and badinage,
> Shivering and soaked with undried drew."[80]

The author puts forth an idea that the wise men fear death because their experience compels them to, unlike the youth that is usually associated to recklessness. But it is also referencing himself because in his youth he was a trouble-free minstrel[81] until he joined the Cistercian Order and began correcting his life under the guidance of the monastic life. In a way, Helinand grew to fear death and I believe that this fear, plus fearing for the souls of others, was the reason why he embarked on the creation of the poem. Yet, he states how everyone still heads to their demise and unless you have a change of heart your fate will be ill. Hence, for Helinand, fear carries a didactic purpose as we have well seen in other matters he explores.

Helinand avidly reminds us that the fear of death shall be felt at all times for it is the main element that keeps us grounded under God's presence. Most importantly he scorns those who only care for it when it threatens actively: "The young man, wavering out of bound, / Who though in sacred health begun, / Starts praying when it can't be found. / He's all unbuckled and unbound / Who fears but when His thunders stun."[82] According to the author, it is a profound error to fear death only when one's life is threatened by it, because it is by that very reason that death hurries along. As we've seen earlier, death comes fast for the unsuspecting ones or the ones that take life for granted without reflecting upon it.

---

[79] Ibid.
[80] *Vers,* I.
[81] Paden, Willam D. "Introduction" in Helinand de Froidmont, *Les Vers de la Mort,* trans. Jenny Lind Porter. Cistercian Publications, Michigan, 1999, 24.

[82] *Vers,* VI.

Furthermore, Helinand accentuates that the more you are pleased and find yourself comfortable in life, the worse death will seek you. I believe this idea was inspired by two different factors. One, the doctrine of the contempt of the world, a major piece of inspiration for Helinand. The second, his choice of monastic life, which having lived to seventy years old,[83] we can interpret as one he did not regret.

> "He who, not fearing Death, will climb,
> It's he who rouses Death to crime;
> He is the first one death will tease.
> Fat paunches and the skin's soft prime,
> He coats with fire and worms and slime
> The most contented, most he sees."[84]

For the author, the solution to the world's troubles is the fear of death. It is what keeps people morally upright, centered, and following God's ways. Thus, it becomes more than just a paralyzing terror, but a primordial, corrective force. In his eyes, the apprehension of death conveys a sense of disciplined humility, guaranteeing that one stays aware of the transience of life and the consequences of sin. The latter being of the utmost importance as he has shown before in the poem when he states that death is a punishment for the sinners. Helinand's own monastic life, marked by the deliberate choice to embrace asceticism and the doctrine of contempt for worldly vanities, underscores his conviction that a life punctuated by the fear of death is the only antidote to moral decay. By internalizing this fear, individuals are urged to pursue repentance, self-discipline, and ultimately, spiritual salvation.

Fear for Baudouin is of the same nature, however, he shows a visceral death that Helinand does not have. This leads to a fear that comes from the confrontation with visual horror first, and then from the certainty of loss of their earthly achievements and possessions. This is clear when the first living man exclaims "I cannot find the courage in myself to look at them: / they are too ugly; let's continue on our way, / for fear almost kills me."[85] The image that precedes the exclamation is so dreadful that the living man claims he almost died by fear

---

[83] Paden, Willam D. "Introduction" in Helinand de Froidmont, *Les Vers de la Mort*, trans. Jenny Lind Porter. Cistercian Publications, Michigan, 1999, 9.

[84] Vers, XXIX.

[85] Baudouin de Condé, *Li troi mort et li troi vif*, II. 7-8.

alone. In this way, Baudouin forwards a message that the image of death is nothing to trifle with, the scare and fear it produces should be enough reason to rethink all of one's actions and life choices. Eventually, I believe this is what set the ground for the apparition of macabre art and poetry in the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries. The preceding aspects of the poem by Baudouin and later poets that created the tradition of the "dead men meeting living men".

However, it is the second aspect of fear that resounds the most for the noble living men: the certainty of loss. There is an indirect fear of death for it comes to take away everything they have, from their belongings to their bodies: "but death has taken from us this treasure, / that cannot be measured in coin."[86] This is why the portrayal must be visceral, to remind them that those who were once noble like them, are now in grotesque decay, laid bare in front of their eyes assuring them that this is their inexorable fate. Hence, the fear that is evoked does not only concern ending life, but it most importantly attains the loss of identity and rank. It becomes a fear that disrupts complacency and commands a moral reckoning. Therefore, Baudouin also aligns with the tradition of a Christian fear narrative, where it serves as both a warning and a means for repentance and transformation, while doing it in its own macabre way.

In regards of the heroes in the epics, fear is frowned upon, because it means the absolute opposite of valor and courage, a knight's most fundamental traits. But in spite of this, we can find certain key moments of fear in *Aliscans* that come from two places. The first is from a place adjacent to valor, like the fear of failing to help someone, and the guilt that comes after that. This scene shows it: "Count William sees his men dying; / it troubles him that he cannot defend them. / He looks for Vivien but, does not see him. / When he can't find him, he thinks he'll go mad."[87] While fear in this passage is implicit, I believe it conveys a sense of urgency and terror that is very visible in William. The horrors of battle trigger an emotional reaction in him that originates from the helplessness of being able to do anything, a growing sense of despair due to his inability to protect them. This is an indirect but very powerful manifestation of fear because it places him, the hero, in a position where he is not in control, and that goes against his identity built on strength and leadership. The second

[86] Ibid, V. 8-9.
[87] Ferrante, Joan M. "Aliscans" in: *Guillaume D'Orange: Four Twelfth-Century Epics.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1991. III, 40-44.

source of fear can be seen as the situation escalates when William fails to find Vivien, because his mind escapes to wonder at the same time he frantically searches for him. Yet, this only suggests growing panic and dread for what he might discover –or what he may never confirm—it's a fear of uncertainty. The climax of this paranoia reaches when he exclaims that he will go mad over it. I believe this is not adjacent to grief, but instead about this fear of uncertainty, not of his own death (for heroes are too selfless for that) but over the death of his beloved companion. In this case, we can read fear as the most agitated response of all the source, (element that is shared with the other sources as well) inducing feelings of madness and despair, that conclude in a call to action by the hero. This is what ultimately separates him from the rest, the ability to take heed against the worst odds, psychological included.

The Weight of Grief

Unlike fear, grief is the number one emotional response that the heroes in the *chansons de geste* profusely radiate. It became one of the key elements and has been very well studied[88] in *Roland*: as the passion and strength in which Charlemagne lament and grieves the death of his nephew. This aspect has been well studied in many other chivalric epics, because it is a shared component. Just as heroes must die, they must also grieve, it is part of the narrative. Ultimately, it is how death in the *chansons* is written, via sacrifice and grief.

However, grief is not unproblematic, as pointed out in the works of Megan Moore and Bonnie Wheeler. The first indication is the gender division in grief: how it is normally encapsuled by women but problematized in the *chansons* for men and their status.[89] Notwithstanding, the most important common ground remains that "endless (re)iteration ties warring men to the emotions of death, namely grief and rage. As such, the proliferation of

[88] See: Zachary, Lindsey. "When Men Cry: Male Demonstrations of Grief in 'Beowulf', 'The Song of Roland', and 'Sir Orfeo.'" ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, 2011, and Moore, Megan. "Masculinity, Mourning, and Epic Sacrifice." In *The Erotics of Grief*, 90–118. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021.
[89] Wheeler, Bonnie. "Grief in Avalon: Sir Palomydes' Psychic Pain," in *Grief and Gender: 700–1700*, ed. Lynne Dickson Bruckner and Jennifer Vaught, New York: Palgrave, 2003.

battlefield encounters in texts like *La chanson de Roland*, *La mort le roi Artu*, *Girart de Roussillon*, *Le roman de Rou*, and countless other medieval epics transcends the mere mechanics of battle to provide a space to figure and foreground men's feelings."[90] In this passage Moore's insight is valuable, for not only does she study the designation of "feelings of death", which becomes a perfect concept to capture how emotions linked to death are represented, but she also recognizes the major importance that grief shares within the *chansons*. A relevance that, to an extent I dare state, becomes at times the protagonist of the narrative.

The first example of this in *Aliscans* is found when William is forced to leave the lifeless body of Vivien covered with shields, because he has no way of carrying it with him, and thus, with this decision, his grief commences. "Then when he tries to mount his horse, / his heart fails him and he faints again. / When he recovers, he berates himself: / "By God, William, you used to be praised / throughout the land, you were called Fierebrace. / But now I have proved myself a coward, / by deserting him whom I ought to carry."[91] The first feeling of grief that William experiences is paralyzing. It is a force so strong that renders him incompetent, punishing himself for his faltering, and questioning his values as a knight. M. Moore's take on the idea of grief being frowned upon for men as it is better fit for "women"[92], can be entertained by this notion were the hero (William in this case) is failing by associating with this feeling. He must overcome this negative emotion in order to continue. Therefore, grief becomes an obstacle, a counter-value to the knights' principles.

However, grief can also be understood the other way around within the *chansons*, as a necessary element for the narrative of the hero. This way, William must grief because he is the protagonist of the song. The text communicates that notion when the count tells his wife at Orange of his failures, tormented by them, as he exhibits his own maimed body as proof. "Noble countess, there's no use hiding it; / all my companions are now dead, / at Aliscans they were all destroyed. / There is not one whose head was not cut off. / I fled from it, I could

[90] Moore, Megan. "Masculinity, Mourning, and Epic Sacrifice." In *The Erotics of Grief*, 90–118. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021, 98.
[91] Ferrante, Joan M. "Aliscans" in: *Guillaume D'Orange: Four Twelfth-Century Epics.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1991. XXIX, 873-879.
[92] Op cit, 95.

not remain; / the Turks pursued me almost the whole day."[93] At this point William is already mourning. The loss of his army, his comrades, and most importantly the loss of Vivien. He is consumed by it, and everywhere he goes when retelling the story, the effect of grief falls on others. "Sir Bernard of Brubant weeps for Bertrand / and Bueves weeps for his son Gerard."[94] In Orange, or at Louis's court, knights that had sons, brothers or friends killed at Aliscans now wallow in grief after the news brought by William. Thus, creating a landscape of sorrow that extends all along the narrative in *Aliscans*. It is in truth, a story of both misfortune and valor, where the first holds such a critical effect that it renders the valor held by the hero almost unfeasible.

In consequence, grief in this epic transcends the personal emotion expressed by the hero because it becomes one with the narrative, extending it to most of William's encounters and relations.[95] Plus every obstacle that he must overcome (as part of the epic narrative) he does so with a heavy heart, one in a state of grievance. Yet, these constant events of catharsis in a way deepen his understanding of duty, honor, and the transience of life and glory. Therefore, agreeing with M. Moore, in the *chansons* grief is not a sign of masculine weakness but an essential act that sharpens the protagonist's moral conduct, and by extension the audience, tying grief to the emotional community of the chivalric social group. As William lays bare his wounds and losses, confessing his failures, his grief serves as a public testament of the chivalric ideals and its costs. This function of grief reinforces the main character's humanity in an effort to resonate with its readers, while at the same time establishing a commitment to redemption and courage. Ultimately, this underlines that the path to heroism is paved with the acknowledgement of loss and the resolve to overcome it.[96]

In the case of Helinand's *Vers*, grief is also a major feeling when reading it as the sentiment that the author emits in his poem, and not as direct content from the stanzas. Unlike *Aliscans*, there is no straightforward passage that refers to grieving. However, it is possible to extract a feeling of grief that the author has for his audience, for those that have died

[93] Ferrante, Joan M. "Aliscans" in: *Guillaume D'Orange: Four Twelfth-Century Epics.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1991. LI, 1825-1835.
[94] Ibid, LXIX, 2695-2696.
[95] Examples of these are the loss of Orange to the siege, LVI and the retelling to Louis and Aymeri, LXVI, LXIX.
[96] As also seen in: Moore, Megan. "Masculinity, Mourning, and Epic Sacrifice." In *The Erotics of Grief,* 90–118. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021

without taking heed of what he's saying. Still, Helinand is very clear: he laments those that should and could be saved, but he doesn't show much pity for the ones he feels deserve such ending.[97]

The author makes his position very clear throughout the poem. He is not just presenting a manual in lyrical form or writing from the outside taking objective distance from what he's suggesting. As we have seen before, he tries to convince his audience of the mistake of not replacing a lifestyle of sin with one of virtue before death. In this very exercise, a tone of lamentation can be read. A notion where Helinand seems to be grieving over the loss of people that did not change their ways. "Death, Death, salute for me Bernard, / My comrade, whom God keep and guard, / For whom my sighs and tears recur: / Tell him he must all fear discard / And choose what seem to him so hard, / To change completely or to err."[98] This lament is explicit and directed to his friend Bernard who is unsettled by the monastic life he chose.[99] This response is deeply emotional and suggests both sorrow and longing, but not for the death of his friend, but for his choices that may lead to it. Helinand proves himself a highly emotional poet, from anger to grief in a couple of verses distance. His perception of grief is tied to a greater context of loss, the loss of spirituality or the loss of one's soul, rendering death to a much bigger spectrum than the other authors expressed.

This notion where grief shelters much more than a lament for physical death, can be found when Helinand speaks of the inevitable doom of the untamed youth, which in their error walk to meet an early death:

> "You take the new young resident
> With thirty years of age unspent,
> When all the waiting hours bloom.
> Despite his trappings and perfume,
> You soon have pricked him to a doom
> Tarantula could not invent.

[97] In particular, when Helinand accuses those in power and wealth that oppress those that don't. As seen in stanzas X, XII, XIX, XXXVII, XL, XLI, XLVII.
[98] *Vers*, VII.
[99] Paden, Willam D. "Introduction" in Helinand de Froidmont, *Les Vers de la Mort*, trans. Jenny Lind Porter. Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1999, 29.

Some caution must our lives illume,

For he who dances to the tomb

Can make the parting soul lament."[100]

In this case, grief becomes more than just a personal wail, it becomes universal for it is structured as a collective address to the lives of all who have enjoyed their early stages without a worry for the spiritual matters. In fact, it insists that no matter how well adorned and "perfumed" they are, they won't shy away death. This is why Helinand is so adamant in trying to inspire caution lest the soul will suffer on its parting moment. This is a grief for the souls that are gone having not reflected and changed their misbehavior. He creates a double lamentation: one expressed from the author, and another one by the "parting soul" itself, suffering from heavy regret but unable to do anything about it.

In comparison, grief is barely as important for Baudouin, as it is in *Aliscans*, or even for Helinand. This is due to fear followed by redemption being the prominent emotional responses in the macabre tale. Nonetheless, grief remains an adjacent feeling to the other emotions, and Baudouin's poem is not an exception. A minor expression of it can be read in *Li troi mort…* when one of the dead men attests that "Since death strikes such people with its dart, / And one must become / What we are now. Truly, coming / Into life, from what I hear, / I do not wish it, for there is more sorrow than joy."[101] There is a constant lamentation expressed by the three dead men when they speak. They did not wish for what happened to them, to exist in this state of living where death haunts them, and so they remain in constant grief for themselves. The quoted passage is the clearest example of it: they not only fear death's strike, but also lament when it acts, even when knowing that it's an end that all must face. This is because since they serve as grim reminders of a sinful life, they know that death brings only sorrow as a result. This is who they grieve for: the nobles that they have in front. They are not only inducing macabre fear upon them, but they are also lamenting in advance what will happen to them if they do not heed the warning. But most importantly, they are

[100] *Vers,* XXV.
[101] *Li troi mort et li troi vif,* VII. 19-23.

grieving for themselves, because they are in a state of punishment. They have ultimately become a portrait of death itself, embodying its message in a constant grieving condition.[102]

The hope for Redemption

According to C.M. Thomas, it was during the post classical period that the word redemption was attributed Christian meanings.[103] While the word can be used in many contexts, the definition that attains characteristics of Christianity such as the sacrifice of Christ and atonement for one's sins, among others, is the one that correlates most with the sources. In all three sources a change of heart is presented as an elemental part of the sacrificial element that redemption requires. Without it, one will not redeem oneself or be awarded salvation.

However, redemption of honor and other morally guided values is also relevant, especially for the chivalric society that is portrayed in *Aliscans*. There is less focus on redemption understood religiously, and more as a social norm attained to knights. Still, even that notion is bound to a religious code, especially given the context that the epic concerns battles against the Muslim expansion in Frankish territories, as part of a war against religious infidelity. Thus, in *Aliscans*, we find redemption characterized by these two aspects, a combination of a morally guided change of heart (a need to do the right thing), with a religious backbone provided by context that ultimately steers the person towards the right path.

While redemption is an emotion, and a powerful one, it is perhaps also the only one that is not easily achieved because it demands a cost beforehand. This takes us back to the

[102] The importance of the periodization of grief, such as public and private times for mourning were highly relevant for medieval society. More on: Lansing, Carol. *Passion and Order: Restraint of Grief in the Medieval Italian Communes*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008, and Templeton, Lee, ed. *Grief, Gender, and Identity in the Middle Ages: Knowing Sorrow*. First edition. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2022.
[103] Thomas, Carla Maria. "Finding Redemption in Early Medieval English Literature." Order No. 10139615, New York University, 2016, 5.

notion of a compromise. In the *chanson*, the cost of redemption usually comes after needing to right a wrong. This scene that concerns Vivien is a particular example:

> "He turns the head of his charger around. / He has not fled the thrust of a lance / when he sees before him a running stream / but well he knows that he's failed in his vow. / The noble count stops immediately / and begins to confess his sins to God. / With his right hand he beats his chest: 'God, forgive me, for fleeing this way. / I have not fled in my life before / but I'll make the pagans pay for it now. (…) Vivien turns and fights furiously."[104]

The character knows that he broke a sacred oath, the chivalric code of never backing down from a fight, even if it comes at a life-threatening cost. Given that, a chance for redemption appears, he must correct his wrongdoing by choosing what he avoided out of fear. This connects both emotions in a short period of time, first by feeling terror of what's ahead of him, then by deciding to overcome said fear for a chance at redeeming his behavior and picking the chivalric way. Furthermore, he knows that his momentary withdrawal was an offense to God as well, so in that way, his chance of achieving the feeling of redemption comes also from a place of religious belief, and in turn, he will be compensated with salvation for he chose to do 'the right thing'. Which in this case signifies keeping true to his chivalric code and Christian morality.

Just as redemption may come from fear, it can also come from grief. In an act of consolation, William's wife, the countess Guiborc, persuades him to cease his deep grieving[105] for it brings nothing back. "William weeps and Guiborc comforts him: / 'Noble count, sire, do not be distressed! / He who has lost will win it again. / and he who is poor will some day be rich. / Who laughs in the morning will weep at night; / a man of good health should not complain."[106] She uses a narrative that in a way refers to the cyclic duality of life: day to night, happiness to sadness, and all over again, and how that is impossible to change. However, she also confronts him into taking measures for his actions. "It has endured much (the world) and it will endure more; / many have died and many will die still; / not one of us

[104] Ferrante, Joan M. "Aliscans" in: *Guillaume D'Orange: Four Twelfth-Century Epics.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1991. IV, 83-93.
[105] Ibid, CXCVII.
[106] Ibid. CXCVIII, 7391-7397.

can escape from death. / But as long as one remains in this world, / he must carry on as best he can. / If he serves God, his end will be good."[107] With a fashionable *memento mori* statement, Guiborc encourages William to accept the transience of life and the fate that everyone shares but not without pleading for a change first. It's an argument that forces him to abandon his grief and make a change, to try and redeem all the losses he had. Guiborc knows how devastating the defeat at Aliscans was, the loss of Orange, the army he lost, and most importantly the parting of Vivien, yet still she prays that William will right those wrongs by taking action in choosing a godly life, and by restoring Orange to its former glory.

Ultimately, this is the redemptive arc of any hero in the *chansons*. They are famed not only for their triumphs, but because of their ability to acknowledge defeat and transform loss into a means for renewal. Guiborc does not only reprimand William, but there is also a heartfelt call to rise above grief towards a life of divine purpose. It becomes a plea to transform personal and communal sorrow into determined action because restoring Orange means also restoring his honor. The moment he accepts the inevitability of death and worldly things being transient, he reclaims a moral high ground. Thus, he's in a position of channeling despair into a quest for redemption, paving the fundamentals of a chivalric journey.

What Guiborc exclaimed above "if he serves God, his end will be good", immediately resonates with Helinand's view towards death: to serve God is to redeem oneself. In a most dogmatic way, the monastic author implies in his poem an order which follows as: repentance > redemption > salvation. In other words, only through redemption of the soul, one finds salvation in the afterlife, revoking death from its punishing qualities. This same idea is visible throughout all of the *Vers de la Mort* in a subtle way, because the poet enforces clarity in denouncing a life of sin and underlining the need to change for the better towards the path of God. However, in this narrative we also find redemption to be inferred as a change that demands sacrifice as part of the compromise.

> "Death, in whose mirror soul may peer
> When separate from fleshly gear,
> And in your book see plainly writ

[107] Ibid, 8403-8408.

How for God's sake we should revere
That life which may the worst appear
Sans worldly pleasures exquisite,
Tell all my friends the chosen flit
To paradise where beds outfit
Them after martyrdoms severe.
Now let them show they can commit,
For soul which lies to God is quit.
To talk is not to act—that's clear."[108]

This verse was used in the previous chapter to indicate how death is a most avid teacher for Helinand. Now for this case, the allegory of a mirror is to reflect that the soul aches to choose the way of God. This suggests the need for a conscious redemptive decision when facing death's door. Even though the life Helinand chose, and the one he urges his audience to choose, is the worst according to worldly delights, thus seemingly unappealing, it is this earthly austerity that takes a person on the path to paradise. Just like William in *Aliscans*, a person must right his wrong in order to redeem itself. In this case, a life of sin must be corrected by pursuing a life of ascetism.

Helinand asserts that there must be a show of commitment: redemption is an act, not just the talk of it. It is not an easy feat either, and he knows it because he uses himself as an example.[109] Said difficulty is implied when he states in the concluding lines of the passage that a soul that lies is condemned. This further stresses that redemption is achieved by those who are sincere in their repentance and adherence to God's will. Ultimately, the idea is reinforced as an ultimatum in stanza XLIX. The way it's the second-to-last verse gives it a sense of reiterative urgency that the author puts forth.

"For all a common fate must loom,
First death and then the day of doom:
Against them we have one resort—
We must repent before the tomb

[108] *Vers*, XI.
[109] As displayed in stanza I.

And purity again resume
And purge what conscience may report.
Who waits until his life's cut short
Will wrongly with his grief consort
When summoned to the judgement room.
Before the vessel sails from port,
If you have caulked her, she will thwart
The waves from bringing her to gloom."[110]

As seen before, the insistence of Helinand on the inescapability and universality of death and divine judgement is constant. This is always his opening to underline, in this case, that the only way to avoid punishment is to repent and renew one's piety before death, arguing that redemption is only achieved through practical moral cleansing. However, in the eyes of Helinand doing this too late, when "life's cut short", is not enough because it doesn't exhibit enough effort.

The former suggests that Helinand is against the idea of last-minute repentance, mainly because it goes against everything he has written in the poem. There is no redemption by repenting at one's final moments, only grief and regret for not having acted before. This is why he often uses metaphors like "caulking a ship" as a way to describe preparing one's spirit, so that it can withstand the tumultuous "waves" of judgement that would otherwise sink it into "gloom." The image serves as both warning and urgent call to action. If one embraces a proper behavioral change that faithfully follows God's way before it's too late, one can prevent divine retribution and instead secure salvation.

Interestingly, in contrast with the depiction of grief in the *Vers de la Mort*, which the author states he experiences as well, here the author takes a distance and speaks from a place of moral authority. He himself does not need to follow the path to redemption because he already did, the moment he converted to monastic life.[111] What we can understand from Helinand on an emotional level concerning a feeling of redemption is that he does not look

[110] *Vers*, XLIX.
[111] Paden, Willam D. "Introduction" in Helinand de Froidmont, *Les Vers de la Mort*, trans. Jenny Lind Porter. Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1999, 8.

for it, because he is already walking the path God laid for him. One of ascetic, introspected life that led him to write a poem such as this. Thus, redemption is not an emotional response shared by the author, but one he persuades his audience to look for.

The latter is of contrast with Baudouin and what he depicts in his poem. In general, because just as he expresses an undertone of grief in *Li troi mort…*, he also communicates a feeling of sought redemption that seems like a personal experience for him. It by no means dominates the emotional nature of the poem, as committing to a sense of fear does, but a subtle lay initiative towards redemption that differs from Helinand's poem can still be found. This "lay" notion comes solely from the fact that the author is a minstrel, giving him distance from a speech originated in religious doctrine. Still, the message is similar: "There is only one comfort against death, / and that is to hold oneself, evening and morning / in good works, and to maintain / one's self, so that for all days, living or / dying soon, one does not remain so daring / as to linger in sin for even an hour."[112] One must renounce sin and embrace a life of upright morals. Baudouin doesn't need to dabble in spiritual preparation as Helinand does, because from a lay perspective, atoning for sin is enough. This pragmatic view does not bother with doctrinal hardships but comes from a foundation that's available to all: the practice of good works through a transformative way of life.

Because the three dead figures are the minstrel's main attraction to cause shock, every emotional response is tied to them. Fear was greatly expanded because it was the main feeling that connected to such shock in the source. Grief is part of the background that the dead men present: an eternity of sorrow for them that will find no rest. Redemption, finally, is presented as the alternative. Baudouin's poem becomes an emotional bifurcation where fear presents a path to grief (the three dead men), or a path to redemption (salvation). In another way, the poet is announcing: if you achieve redemption, you will not become one of them, a living-corpse doomed for eternity.

Ultimately, although the emotions shown by the authors are not balanced (meaning that some are more prominent than others in the sources), the fact that fear, grief and redemption appear in diverse contexts attests to a common ground that harkens back to B. Rosenwein's historiography on emotions and emotional communities. We can interpret that,

[112] *Li troi mort et li troi vif*, VII. 27-32.

within the era, the reception of these sources represented an emotional community concerned with how death is felt and not just how it is perceived. Of course, these emotions are also deeply tied to a Christian background that plays a key role in understanding where they come from, the most evident example being the fear of God.[113] The religious circumstance is then coupled with the emotional response to such a cathartic experience as death.

It should be noted that there are other emotions that were not analyzed, such as anger, love or joy. This is because even though they are represented in some of the sources, such as anger in *Aliscans* or love in the *Vers*, they were not present in all three sources together. That is why the three emotions studied were key, because they became a created framework shared by the authors separately. This turns the emotional landscapes of the sources into an interwoven scheme in which each shape reinforces the others within this medieval conception of death. Fear is shown as the initial and most visceral response, shocking as we recognize the mortality of the self and the weight of our actions. While grief, whether personal or joint, follows closely as the ultimate expression of loss when death occurs. This mourning can be reflective, leading to change, or destructive, leading into despair. Lastly, redemption is seen as an achievement, an effort to be made before death, following the example of Christ. However, Baudouin is the only one that directly displays it as a choice that can be made from fear, aligned with grief as the alternative. Finally, the emotions represented in the sources can be seen as mirrors of the social and cultural communities which produced them, provided the introductory argument that the authors within their context create from such communities as well.

[113] Delumeau, Jean. *Sin and Fear: the emergence of a Western guilt culture, 13th-18th centuries.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.

CONCLUSION

The Middle Ages were marked by death in every possible way. While this made for a widespread historiography on death during the era, it also shows the great importance given to death and dying by medieval society. This is the reason why authors have used the general concept of "medieval culture of death" to encompass all possible aspects related to death: how it was seen, understood, felt and its consequences for society. This meant that, unlike modern secular perspectives, medieval society saw death as an omnipresent force that was part of everyday life. Constantly reinforced by religion and all that produced it: war, famine, disease, and so on.

As seen in this study, the medieval culture of death is subject to the Christian world, where death was supervised by the Church because mortality is the fundamental punishment of the original sin. It was established that life is but a passage to the afterlife due to Christ's sacrifice. But to reach paradise, one must first purify the soul: to live a life without sin and in penance for those sins committed. This is what led to the interpretation, ritualization and emotional responses of death. Which in turn led to diverse ways of representing death, many of which survived through textual material. Considering that, this study sought to explore the representations made by different social strata actors (clergy, knights and the broader laity) through literary sources, specifically how death was perceived and felt.

Consequently, medieval death culture became a written experience, rendering these works as both reflections of social beliefs and active tools that reinforced cultural models and religious lessons. These narratives created in verse, prose, and even performed (such is the case of minstrelsy), reproduced the view of medieval authors of how death was perceived and felt by their social class. The three sources studied (Les Vers de la Mort, Li troi vif et li troi mort, and Le Chanson d'Aliscans) share a common preoccupation with mortality, the first two being their main theme. This is what led to the research question that fueled this thesis: what were the main perceptions and emotions about death in northern France between 1180-1280? Its answer lies in the examination of these sources, where it was discovered, on the one hand, the literary strategies used to represent death, such as conceptualizations and

representations of the role, and, on the other, the broader attitudes, aspirations, and feelings that defined medieval society with respect to death.

In terms of these literary strategies and the broader representation of death, either as an abstract concept or as a personified role, the analysis that constructed chapter one revealed a three-part structure, which is aligned with the clergy, the chivalry, and the broader laity's views. One where death is a divine instrument, this was particular to Helinand de Froidmont, as he constructed a narrative where the power of God is behind death and is used as a way to discipline the soul and ensure moral improvement. The second was a reflective power formed by shock, in the verses of the minstrel Baudouin de Condé. Death became an unsettling mirror that forced the living to confront their inevitable demise and the vanity of material wealth and rank. The final part is a notion of heroic passage, a narrative in which death is the chivalric hero's most loyal companion. Here death is framed as a necessity for the character, to continue his legacy and show his worth in spite of it. All these varied perspectives highlight a fundamental imperative, a medieval cultural need to give meaning to death, where it becomes more than just the end, but a transformative power with social and spiritual consequences.

These consequences are manifested through people's feelings, which is why chapter two focused on the analysis of three emotions, namely fear, grief and redemption, which were strongly represented in the sources. Thus, the joint comparison of the three texts in terms of one emotion resulted in an overall understanding of the emotional responses displayed by each social stratum. This is because each source echoed a particular way of how emotions were felt through their narratives, thus, representing a distinct emotional community per social group in tune with each feeling.

Fear is the most valuable emotion adjacent to death; it is primitive and visceral. It can be an abstract fear of divinity, according to Helinand, or a very physical terror, according to Baudouin. Whereas in the case of the *Aliscans*, it manifests itself through failure and uncertainty. In different shades, the reactions to fear end up being one and the same: a morally corrective force that leads people to act, whether for good or for evil. Next, grief is presented as an obstacle and an end, a moment to reflect on and overcome, or one in which to sulk. Grief permeates all the sources because it is a very common element in medieval society and

was much depicted especially in chivalric epics. Thus, *Aliscans* showed how the values of the knight are reinforced and deepened through scenes of grieving. Finally, redemption emerged from the sources as an imperative resolution and spiritual necessity. It is an achievement, a transaction in which a price must be paid beforehand. In Helinand's view, through penance and moral correction. Similarly, for Baudouin's, with the added element of shock, and ultimately as a quest for the restoration of honor and glory attainable according to the chivalric narrative. Redemption is last because –as Baudouin's poem explicitly states— it is the right choice to make when facing fear, or even when mourning. It is a way of transforming those "negative" emotions into moral restitution.

This study is intended as a contribution to a broader understanding of the medieval culture of death, through the demonstration of representations in literature concerning death. These reflections were inspired by social beliefs, but also influenced emotions and moral behaviors. The sources analyzed illustrate how death was written about as an active tool of persuasion and guidance. However, there are still research gaps that could benefit the field. Primarily, further research could be done in the period before the Black Death. Especially the 12th and 11th centuries could be particularly interesting from a literary perspective, with the emergence of chivalric epics all over Europe. On the other hand, one could also delve into a broader sense of death from a political perspective, as shown by other poems on death written in the 13th century. Finally, an evolutionary study from the appearance of the "three living and the three dead" to the "danse macabre" could be very interesting, following the development of macabre imagery.

Death haunted the medieval imagination in such a way that its expression in different forms has given rise to valuable resources for study today. In particular, the society of northern France from 1180 to 1280 provided an excellent example of such expressions through literary products. These are our heralds of death, these written representations became a reflection of the class stratum that produced them, perceiving and feeling death in their own way. Whether as a rigid monastic vision on the part of the clergy, as a dreadful moralism on the part of the broader laity, or as heroic fatalism by chivalric standards. In any case, death remained the pivot on which medieval life was structured.

SOURCES

Primary Sources

- Ferrante, Joan M. "Aliscans" in: *Guillaume D'Orange: Four Twelfth-Century Epics.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.
- Glixelli, Stefan. "Li troi mort et li troi vif" by Baudouin de Condé in: *Les cinq poemes des trois morts et des trois vifs*. Paris: E. Champion, 1914.
- Helinand de Froidmont, *Les Vers de la Mort*, trans. Jenny Lind Porter. Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1999.

Secondary Sources

- Abulafia, David, ed. "Social changes in the thirteenth century" in: *The New Cambridge Medieval History, vol. V c. 1198-c. 1300.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Ariès, Philippe. *The Hour of Our Death*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983.
- Ariès, Philippe, and Patricia M Ranum. *Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present*. Baltimore; Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.
- Benton, John F, and Thomas N Bisson. "The Court of Champagne as a Literary Center." In *Culture, Power and Personality in Medieval France*. United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2003.
- Binski, Paul. *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation*. London: British Museum Press, 1996.
- Booth, Philip and Tingle, Elizabeth. *A Companion to Death, Burial, and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, C. 1300-1700*, Vol. 94. United States: BRILL, 2021.
- Classen, Albert. *Death in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: The Material and Spiritual Conditions of the Culture of Death*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2016.

- Daniels, Nathan. *From "Jongleur" to Minstrel: The Professionalization of Secular Musicians in Thirteenth- and Fourteenth- Century Paris.* The John Hopkins University, 2011.
- Delumeau, Jean. *Sin and Fear: the emergence of a Western guilt culture, 13th-18th centuries.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.
- Fritz, J.-M., Voix de Dieu – voix du monde dans les sermons d´Hélinand de Froidmont. *PRIS-MA (Recherches sur la littérature d´imagination au Moyen Âge)* 20 (2004), 67-82.
- Gaunt, S.B, and Sarah Kay. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Geary, Patrick J. *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages*. 1st ed. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018.
- Haindl, Ana Luisa. "La Muerte en la Edad Media." *Revista Electrónica Historias del Orbis Terrarum.* ISSN-e 0718-7246, Nº. 1, 2009, 104-206.
- Heiduk, Matthias. "Signs from the Afterlife: Consulting the Dead about the Future in Medieval Times". In *Dreams, Nature, and Practices as Signs of the Future in the Middle Ages*, Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2022.
- Huizinga, Johan. *Autumntide of the Middle Ages: A Study of Forms of Life and Thought of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries in France and the Low Countries*. Edited by Graeme Small and Anton van der Lem. Translated by Diane Webb. Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2020.
- Huot, Sylvia. *From Song to Book The Poetics of Writing in Old French Lyric and Lyrical Narrative Poetry*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987.
- Ibáñez Rodriguez, Miguel. "*Los Versos de la Muerte de Hélinand de Froidmont*" in Vertere Monográficos de la Revista Hermeneus, no. 5. 2003.
- Kienzl, Beverly Mayne. *Cistercians, Heresy and Crusade in Occitania, 1145–1229: Preaching in the Lord's Vineyard*. Boydell & Brewer, 2001.
- Kienzle, Beverly Mayne. "Hélinand de Froidmont et la prédication cistercienne dans le Midi (1145-1229)." *Cahiers de Fanjeaux* 32, no. 1 1997: 37–67.
- Kienzle, B. M., Deed and Word. Hélinand's Toulouse Sermons I. Sommerfeldt, J. R. [ed.], *Erudition at God's Service. Studies in Medieval Cistercian History* vol. 11, [Kalamazoo] 1987, 267-276.

- Kinch, Ashby. *Imago Mortis Mediating Images of Death in Late Medieval Culture*. Leiden; Brill, 2013
- Kinoshita, Sharon. *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature*. 1st ed. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006
- Lahtinen, Anu, and Mia Korpiola, eds. *Dying Prepared in Medieval and Early Modern Northern Europe*. Leiden, Netherlands; Brill, 2018.
- Le Goff, Jacques. *Time, Work, & Culture in the Middle Ages*. Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- McCulloch, Florence. *The Art of Persuasion in Helinant's Vers de la Mort*. Studies in Philology, 69. 1972, 38-54.
- Mitre Fernández, Emilio. *La muerta vencida: imágenes e historia en el Occidente Medieval (1200-1348)*. Madrid: Encuentro, 1988.
- Moore, Megan. "Masculinity, Mourning, and Epic Sacrifice." In *The Erotics of Grief*, 90–118. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021.
- Paden, W. D., The Verses on Death by Helinant de Froidmont. *Allegorica* 3 (1978), 62-103.
- Paden, William. *De monachis rithmos facientibus: Hélinant de Froidmont, Bertran de Born, and the Cistercian General Chapter of 1199.* Speculum, Oct., 1980, Vol. 55, No. 4 (Oct., 1980), pp. 669-685.
- Perkinson, Stephen, and Noa Turel. *Picturing Death 1200-1600*. 1st ed. Vol. 321. Boston: BRILL, 2020.
- Peters, Edward. "The Road to the World" in *Europe: The world of the Middle Ages*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1977.
- Rosenwein, Barbara H. *Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600-1700*. First edition. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2016
- Scholz Williams, Gerhild. *The Vision of Death: A study of the Memento Mori expressions in some Latin, German, and French didactic texts of the 11th and 12th centuries.* University of Washington, 1974, 91.
- Templeton, Lee, ed. *Grief, Gender, and Identity in the Middle Ages: Knowing Sorrow*. First edition. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2022.

- Thomas, Carla Maria. "Finding Redemption in Early Medieval English Literature." Order No. 10139615, New York University, 2016.
- Wulff, F., and Walberg, Em. [eds], *Les Vers de la Mort par Hélinant, moine de Froidmont*, Paris 1905.
- Wheeler, Bonnie. "Grief in Avalon: Sir Palomydes' Psychic Pain," in *Grief and Gender: 700–1700*, ed. Lynne Dickson Bruckner and Jennifer Vaught, New York: Palgrave, 2003.
- Zachary, Lindsey. "When Men Cry: Male Demonstrations of Grief in 'Beowulf', 'The Song of Roland', and 'Sir Orfeo.'" ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, 2011.