

# Dreams, History and the Hero in the *Chansons de Geste*

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She dreamed a dream which came only too true. She saw her valiant son Raoul returning from battle clad in a green tunic all slashed asunder by Bernier. Fear caused her to awake.<sup>1</sup>

O God, who endured suffering and death for us, protect my wife and my son Doon! In a dream this morning I saw a great big mongrel dog, black and hairy, of very ferocious appearance, who was pulling the liver and lungs from their bodies; then he threw my poor children into the sea, abandoning them to the waves, and locked their mother in a black prison.<sup>2</sup>

The day before the king died, he dreamed that he was let blood by a surgeon; and that the stream, reaching to heaven, clouded the light, and intercepted the day. Calling on St. Mary for protection, he suddenly awoke, commanded a light to be brought, and forbade his attendants to leave him.<sup>3</sup>

The queen dreamed that she was in a richly hung tent in a great forest. Towards her came two lions who wanted to devour her. She wanted to call for mercy but the lions, both famished, each took her by the hand. In her fear Yseut cried out and woke up.<sup>4</sup>

The first two dreams are from *chansons*, the third from a history and the fourth from a romance. The mother dreams of what is happening to her son at that time, the father of what has already happened to his family, and the king of what will happen to him the next day. All three dreams

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1 *Raoul de Cambrai* (trans.) J. Crossland (New York, 1966) p.110.

2 Translated by the author from *Doon de Mayence* (trans.) J. Maucière (Paris, 1937) p.57.

3 William of Malmesbury *History of the Kings of Britain* (trans.) J.A. Giles (London, 1847) p.344.

4 *The Romance of Tristan by Béroul* (trans.) A.S. Fedrick (London, 1970) p.94.

truthfully if symbolically inform the dreamer of something removed in time or space. Queen Yseut's dream is less directly related to reality. It expresses her feelings about her situation - nostalgia for the regal life she has abandoned for love, and fear of the powerful warriors competing for possession of her.

The predictive dreams and divine revelations in which epics and histories abound contrast with the dreams of personal desire to be found in the romances. For the twelfth century epic poetry was a form of history. Like history it was permeated with a religious world-view. Whereas the romance dream tends to express the fundamental theme of the romance, namely the alienation of the individual from the social group, epic and historical dreams function to situate the individual in a social and religious context.

The *chansons* were written in vernacular poetry and the histories in Latin prose and verse but they shared a common subject matter in the exploits of famous kings and warriors, and they were subject to the same influences and examples. Following the classical view of history as rhetoric, medieval historians sought to glorify nations and their rulers, while hopefully entertaining their readers<sup>5</sup>. Dreams served to demonstrate the exceptional nature of the protagonists, their providential mission and moral status, and like digressions in general, to provide a relief from an accumulation of details which historians feared would prove tedious. Epic poetry formed part of this approach to history. Virgil's *Aeneid* provided the model by which the rising barbarian nations could be endowed, like Rome, with a noble Trojan descent. Geoffrey of Monmouth was to be the twelfth-century's most notable practitioner of this technique which Suger applied to the Capetians and Ekkehard to Henry V.

The emphasis on moral edification in classical historiography helped make it acceptable to Christianity, which in any case is a religion with a strong historical consciousness. The Bible gives history meaning as the progressive unfolding of God's plan for his chosen people, their national defeats and victories being interpreted as punishments and rewards for their sins and virtues in a continuing process of purification. The visions of prophets such as Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel provided Jewish history with its theological significance. The Gospels detailed the fulfillment of Judaic prophecies in Christ and the New Testament culminated in the apocalyptic *Revelations of St. John the Divine*.

Epic poetry was pagan in origin and in many of its sentiments. The French *chansons de geste* are epic poems describing the heroic exploits of

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5 On the rhetorical approach to history see R.W.Southern "Aspects of the European Tradition of Historical Writing: 1) The Classical Tradition from Einhard to Geoffrey of Monmouth" *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 20 (1970) 173-196.

warriors, especially those associated with Charlemagne and other defenders of Christendom against the infidel. Although we know their texts essentially from manuscripts of the twelfth and later centuries, many of the *chansons* appear to have been developed as oral compositions long before they were set down in writing<sup>6</sup>. However the *chansons'* themes of military expansion and feudal warfare were to remain relevant to European society for a long time to come<sup>7</sup>. The *Chanson d'Aspremont*, part of the Charlemagne cycle, was written in Sicily or Calabria at the time of the preparations for the Third Crusade. The *Chanson de la Croisade Albigeoise* and the *Chanson d'Antioche* were composed in the early thirteenth century.

The early *chansons* were recorded by monks who imposed a Christian framework on works whose initial impulse was frankly pagan. *Waltharius* and *Ruodlieb*, pre-twelfth century Latin epics from Germany, demonstrate that the process of assimilation was undertaken at both linguistic levels. On the one hand, the *chansons'* fatalism, their animal dreams and their celebration of the deeds of warriors in a kin-based society seem to derive from oral Germanic traditions. On the other hand, religious sentiment pervades the *chansons*, particularly the early ones. The enemies of society are the enemies of God. In *Roland*, Charlemagne functions as God's representative on earth. Communication between God and the social leader is maintained through dreams. It is a black and white world epitomised by the famous declaration: "Paynims are wrong and Christians are right."<sup>8</sup> Turoldus' *Roland* is one of the earliest *chansons*, dating from the eleventh century. It combines Christian symbolism with a pagan warrior morality<sup>9</sup>. The German version composed by Konrad in the 1170's is far more consistently Christian, in its treatment of dreams as in its ethics. In the *Rolandlied* Charlemagne solicits his visions by praying to God and

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6 J.Duggan *The Song of Roland - formulaic style and poetic craft* (Berkeley, 1973), A.Lord *The Singer of Tales* (Harvard, 1960), S.Nichols "The Interaction of Life and Literature in the *Peregrinations ad Loca Sancta* and the *Chansons de Geste*" *Speculum* XLIV (1969) 51-77. Given their oral form Keller's suggestion that they were originally composed in Latin seems improbable, though the monastic connection is clear, H.-E.Keller "Changes in Old French Epic Poetry and Changes in the Taste of its Audience" in H.Scholler (ed.) *The Epic in Medieval Society* (Tubingen, 1976) 150-177.

7 The greater age of the *chansons* and their markedly different character as compared to the romances has led some scholars to see them as succeeding each other in time and indicating a chronological shift in mentalities, see R.W.Southern *The Making of the Middle Ages* (London, 1953) Ch.V; R.W.Hanning "The Social Significance of Twelfth Century Chivalric Romance" *Medievalia et Humanistica* 3 (1972) 3-29. Other scholars stress the continued popularity of the *chansons*, see P.Gold *Image and Reality: Women in Twelfth Century France* (PhD, Stanford, 1977) & P.Gold *The Lady and the Virgin: Image, Attitude and Experience in Twelfth Century France* (Chicago U.P., 1985).

8 *The Song of Roland* (trans.) G.J.Brault (Pennsylvania U.P., 1978) line 1015: "Paien unt tort e chrestiens unt dreit".

9 G.Jones *The Ethos of the Song of Roland* (Baltimore, 1963, 1969).

meditates upon them afterwards<sup>10</sup>.

The chansons were presented as history<sup>11</sup> and in their treatment of dreams they resemble the monastic genres of history and hagiography. During the twelfth century the *chansons* were influenced by the growing popularity of the romances, so the later *chansons* are increasingly sprinkled with the non-religious supernatural, such as fairies, magicians, marvellous castles and objects<sup>12</sup>. These reflect Western fantasies of the technological superiority of the Arabs. The marvellous is part of an exotic world awaiting conquest<sup>13</sup>. However even in the later *chansons*, dreams belong firmly to the religious supernatural rather than the marvellous. Later *chansons* also show a greater concern with psychological motivation and dreams are used to express this<sup>14</sup>. Nevertheless the dream remains a true prediction, for the *chanson* hero is not alienated from his world as is the romance hero. His dreams connect him to his world rather than separating him from it.

There is no possibility in the *chansons* of confusing the dream with other aspects of the reality of the poem. The boundaries are clear. Dreams are allegorical interludes, conventionally introduced by the information that it is night and the dreamer is alone, sleeping, and dreaming. The dream terminates with the dreamer waking up, commending himself to God, and telling his friends. The dream is a message from a higher reality. Its source is never in question - the dream always comes from God and so is always true. "Dream" and "vision" are used interchangeably, and indeed paratactically (*sonjer un songe, veoir une (a)vision*). The form of the experience is not considered important. Despite this indifference, the dreams fall into two types: verbal instructions possibly accompanied by an angelic apparition (*oraculum*), and symbolic images (*somnium*). Symbolic dreams are far more frequent than oracles but both are assumed to be transmitted by angels. In *Roland*, for example, a dream of attack by wild animals, monsters, devils and fiery storms is described as being told to Charlemagne by the Archangel Gabriel who stands at Charlemagne's head<sup>15</sup>, just as the dream figures do in Homer's pagan epics. Angelic apparitions perform a different dramatic function from symbolic dreams.

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10 Jones 1963,1969 pp.160-170, S.R.Fischer *The Dream in the Middle High German Epic* (Frankfurt, 1978), pp.45-60. The text is summarised by W.Werner *Das Rolandslied* (Wiesbaden, 1977), for dreams pp.37-39, 74-76.

11 G.Pollack *The Medieval French Chanson de Geste as Popular History* (BA Thesis, Melbourne, 1982).

12 A.J.Dickman *Le rôle du surnaturel dans les chansons de geste* (Iowa City,1925) pp.75-76, H.Braet *Le Songe dans la Chanson de Geste au XII<sup>e</sup> Siècle* (Ghent, 1975) p.58.

13 D.Poirion *Le merveilleux dans la littérature française du moyen âge* (Paris, 1982) p.25.

14 Keller 1976 p.169, R.H.Bloch *A Study of the Dream Motif in the Old French Narrative* (Ph.D., Stanford,1970) p.85.

15 *Roland* laisse 185.

They are direct divine interventions intended to lead to immediate action. They tell the dreamer what to do, a matter on which allegorical dreams often leave him lamentably ignorant. Usually angels exhort the dreamer to obtain salvation by fighting the infidel or going on pilgrimage.

Most of the *chanson* dreams are allegorical. They are usually bad, foretelling impending disaster or bringing news of the unhappy plight or death of loved ones. They may be easily understood, but more frequently they require interpretation. Often they are so enigmatic that neither the dreamer nor the audience understands them fully until they have been fulfilled. The dreamer might pray for an interpretation, or consult his entourage. Occasionally a professional is called in, a holy and learned man who may possess a book to help him. According to the Bible, the ability to interpret dreams was a gift of God. In the *chansons* only devout Christians are able to do it. In the few instances of pagans receiving dreams, they are obliged to call on Christians for their interpretation. Dreams in the *chansons* are a privileged means of knowledge granted only to high status persons. Kings, heroes and their associated women dream. Ordinary knights do not dream, nor do villains. There are only five instances of pagans receiving dreams in the *chansons* and all five are kings<sup>16</sup>. Their dreams do not procure them any advantage but merely announce their imminent defeat at the hands of the forces of God and good.

The *chansons* show a liking for animal symbolism which is a characteristic feature of dreams in Norse literature. In pagan belief, the soul was thought to leave the body in sleep and to appear in dreams disguised as an animal whose nature reflected either its human personality or its attitude to the dreamer. Such dreams were predictive since what happened to the dream-soul, or fetch, would subsequently be realised in the waking world. Animal symbolism however is not confined to Germanic epics<sup>17</sup>. Christianisation seems to have reduced the relative importance of dreams<sup>18</sup>, changed them from adventures of the soul to divine messages and altered their symbolism. Alongside the bears, wolves and dogs of the northern tradition, the *chansons* place the lions, leopards, elephants and griffons of the classical epics and the Bible. Indeed there is a preference for animals which figure in the Bible, and biblical symbolism is common, for example white robes signify innocence, lilies chastity, roses

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16 Braet 1975 p.74.

17 A.H.Krappe "The Dreams of Charlemagne in the *Chanson de Roland*" *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 36 (1921) 134-141.

18 There are 530 dreams in the Old Norse literature recorded in the XIIth century [G.D.Kelchner *Dreams in Old Norse Literature and their Affinities in Folklore* (Cambridge U.P.,1935) p.3], compared to 57 in 32 French *chansons* (Dickman 1925 pp.183, 200-201) and 63 in some 50 German epics (Fischer 1978 pp.150-155, but Fischer's definition of the epic is very wide and includes works that would normally be classified as romances).

martyrdom<sup>19</sup>. Daniel's vision of the four beasts occurs in several German epics<sup>20</sup>.

The ambiguity of dream messages performs an important function in the plot which would not be possible were the messages immediately comprehensible. In the dream the outcome of events is often left unclear. In one of Charlemagne's dreams<sup>21</sup>, for example:

A hound comes running out of the palace,  
It attacks the biggest among them  
On the green grass, away from his companions.  
The King saw a fearsome struggle in his dream,  
But he does not know who is triumphing and who is not.  
The angel of God shows this to the brave man.  
Charles sleeps until the next day, bright and early.

As in so many real dreams, the dreamer sees himself beset by perils, but awakes before discovering if he will die or escape. So the dreams, while foretelling the future, do not preempt free will, though the overall tone is fatalistic. Dreams also set the action in a cosmic context and emphasise its importance. And they create suspense. By suggesting exciting future events without defining them they excite in the audience a desire to know what happens, what it all means.

In both epics and historiography we find the idea of divine purpose, of God working through history. Monastic annals routinely recorded dreams and signs. They take their place in a universe whose interconnectedness is implicitly assumed even when it is not clearly evident. Hence the juxtaposition of apparently unrelated elements and the inclusion of signs whose meaning remains obscure. Similarly in the *chanson*, the paratactic style assumes an underlying meaning<sup>22</sup>.

History and epic come closest in accounts of the First Crusade. Obviously this divinely inspired military expedition could not be without its dreams and visions. Orderic Vitalis tells how the wavering Franks were strengthened in their mission when a priest had a vision of the inhabitants of heaven complaining of the Crusaders' immorality. Further encouragement is provided by visions leading to the location of the Holy Lance. An angelic army is seen to accompany the Franks in battle<sup>23</sup>. For

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19 Braet 1975 pp.120-121.

20 C.Gellinek "Daniel's Vision of Four Beasts in Twelfth-Century German Literature" *Germanic Review* 41 (1966) 5-26.

21 *Roland* laisse 186: "De sun paleis uns veltres i acurt./ Entre les altres asaillit le greignur/ Sur l'erbe verte, ultre ses cumpaignuns./ La vit li reis si merveilleus estur./ Mais ço ne set liquels veint ne quels nun./ Li angles Deu ço ad mustret al barun./ Carles se dort tresqu'al demain, al cler jur."

22 E.Auerbach *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (trans.) W.Trask (New York, 1946, 1957) pp.61-66, 86-106.

23 Orderic Vitalis *Ecclesiastical History* (ed. & trans.) M.Chibnall (Oxford, 1973) Bk.IX pp.99-

the participants visions inspired courage and determination, but they were also used in disputes over the leadership of the enterprise. The contemporary Albert of Aix attributed the initiative for the crusade to Peter the Hermit, who while sleeping in the Holy Sepulchre had a vision of Christ ordering him to bring his countrymen to liberate their fellow Christians. William of Tyre, Anna Comnena, and the *Chanson d'Antioche* give slightly different versions of this vision, but other historians ignore it, instead making Urban's speech at Clermont the starting point. Caffaro claims the idea belonged to Godefroy of Bouillon and was endorsed by a vision of the angel Gabriel to a certain Bartholomew, probably the Holy Lance visionary. The discovery of the Holy Lance was itself part of a leadership struggle, but the opposition succeeded in appropriating the vision's prestige. The tendentious nature of some of these visions may explain why they were initially received with a degree of scepticism. Bartholomew eventually died of burns received in a trial by ordeal. Peter the Hermit was far more fortunate, but historians have generally preferred to downplay the role of this popular leader in favour of the nobility and the papacy<sup>24</sup>.

In both histories and epics dreams are used to connect the human and superhuman realms, to endow the events with an overarching moral significance. In both histories and epics dreams are always true, the guarantee of social and religious absolutes. Like the epics, histories favour dreams by important people, especially kings, but histories, being written by monks, also show a liking for dreams by religious specialists. Thus moralising visions of the torments of Hell are included as well as the political dreams of rulers. Even clearly political visions are often attributed to religious figures rather than to the secular leaders most closely concerned.

Orderic summed up his view of the rule of Duke Robert of Normandy in the form of a lengthy revelation by "a certain good and holy hermit" to Robert's mother, Queen Matilda. The revelation takes the form of a dawn vision procured through prayers and fasting and interpreted by the hermit himself<sup>25</sup>. Like his brother, William Rufus, Robert was regarded as particularly unsatisfactory by historians. The desire to express moral condemnation was a major force motivating the employment of visionary

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103, 113-115.

<sup>24</sup> First Crusade visions are extensively dealt with by H.Hagenmeyer *Le vrai et le faux sur Pierre l'Hermitte* (Paris, 1883) especially pp.75-112; for Peter's vision see Albert of Aix *Historia* Bk.I Ch.IV in *Recueils des Historiens des Croisades: Historiens Occidentaux* (Paris, 1879) Vol.4, No.3. For a detailed comparison of contemporary crusade histories with particular emphasis on the rhetorical enhancement of the clerical contribution see J.O.Ward "Some Principles of Rhetorical Historiography in the Twelfth Century" in E.Breisach (ed.) *Classical Rhetoric and Medieval Historiography* (Kalamazoo, 1985).

<sup>25</sup> Orderic/Chibnall Bk.V pp.105-109.

language. Heaven too is seen to condemn the evil ruler and the cosmic order is outraged.

The task of placing events in a meaningful framework was obviously more difficult for the historian than for the epic poet. The righteousness of the epic hero, or the villainy of the traitor, was inherent in the story, whereas the historian was obliged to make sense of a mass of arbitrary facts. While the poet might choose to heighten suspense with an obscure dream, the historian was usually more concerned to express a judgement with a powerful but easily understood one.

Gerald of Wales structured his history of Henry II, *De Principis Instructione*, as the rise and fall of a tyrant. By having Henry ignore numerous warning visions Gerald deepens his moral turpitude while praising God's mercy. Some of the dreams look forward to the triumph of Philip Augustus over the Angevins. Most denounce Henry's oppression of the church and warn of his impending doom. The dreams associated with the death of William Rufus parallel those for Henry and assert the inherent tyranny of the English kings<sup>26</sup>.

William of Malmesbury used signs to express a view of the king as the embodiment of the nation. An evil king perverts the natural order. The most awful of the signs attending the reign and death of William Rufus was the appearance of the devil throughout the country. William attributes to the Conqueror's mother a prophetic dream of her son's greatness, similar to the pregnancy dreams found in classical history and in the *chansons de geste*. He records the founding visions of Constantinople, the political otherworld vision of Charles the Bald, a vision by King Edgar on the realm under his successors, and the visions of the last English king, Edward the Confessor<sup>27</sup>.

Standing in striking contrast to these attempts to give history a Christian meaning is Geoffrey of Monmouth's masterpiece, *Historia Regum Britanniae*. With his original blend of classical models and Celtic material, Geoffrey marks the high point of the rhetorical approach to

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26 Gerald of Wales *Concerning the Instruction of Princes* (trans.) J.Stevenson in *The Church Historians of England* (London, 1858) pp.180-181, 219, 228-229, 232.

27 William of Malmesbury *De Gestis Regum Anglorum* (ed) W.Stubbs (Rolls Series 90, London, 1889) IV p.376, III p.285, IV pp.410-411; II pp.112-116, II pp.174-176, on Edward II pp.272, 274-277, IV p.418. *History of the Kings of Britain* (trans.) J.A.Giles (London, 1847) on Rufus p.343; on William p.259, on the ancestry of this dream see A.H.Krappe "Le songe de la mère de Guillaume le Conquérant" *Zeitschrift für Französische Sprache und Litteratur* 61 (1937-38) 198-204, and on mothers' dreams in medieval literature see F.Lanzoni "Il sogno presago della madre incinta nella letteratura medievale e antica" *Analecta Bollandiana* XLV (1927) 225-261. William's version has intestines instead of the more usual tree or vine; on Constantinople pp.372-373; on Charles the Bald pp.102-105; on Edgar p.156-160; on William's treatment of the Edward visions see F.Barlow "The *Vita Aedwardi* (Book II): The Seven Sleepers: Some Further Evidence and Reflections" *Speculum* XL (1965) 385-397.



history and the beginning of the romance<sup>28</sup>. He combines a secular and cyclical view of history with an awareness of a tension between the demands of the individual and society. The lack of religious feeling in the *Historia* may be one reason why its influence was greatest in the fields of fiction and prophecy rather than historiography. Conventional references to God's will occur side by side with rhetorical allusions to Fortune's Wheel. One is reminded of the *chansons* in which pagan fatalism is placed within a Christian framework, without any consciousness of the philosophical difficulties this involved.

Following Virgil, Geoffrey starts his history by giving his people a noble descent from the Trojans. The nation's foundation and right to their land is endorsed by a vision. The founding hero, Brut, sacrifices to Diana, Mercury and Jove, and receives a dream visit from Diana who orders him to colonise Britain and foretells the future greatness of his descendants<sup>29</sup>. The history ends with an unsolicited Christian oracle, an angelic voice which orders the British king to renounce plans to reconquer his land and to go instead to Rome to die a holy death, for the time of British triumph is not yet come<sup>30</sup>. The final cataclysm is prefigured by a symbolic dream of Arthur's in which a bear is defeated by a dragon. Arthur's followers think this refers to Arthur's forthcoming victory over the giant of Mont Saint Michel, whereas Arthur sees it as referring to his combat with the Roman emperor. Geoffrey never indicates which interpretation is to be preferred, though since Arth means bear and Mordraig means sea dragon, it seems that it should refer to Arthur's betrayal and defeat by Mordred<sup>31</sup>. Clearly the dream is fulfilled on any of these interpretations, though only the latter would be correct.

There are very few dreams in Geoffrey, compared to contemporary historians, but they are strategically located. Rather than serving as entertaining or moralising digressions, they are central to the structure of the work. The final Christian renunciation balances the initial pagan inspiration, while the symbolic dream counters these divine/demonic messages with an overarching principle of impersonal fate. The central section of the history is devoted to the prophecies of Merlin, the offspring of a beautiful nun and her dream lover (incubus)<sup>32</sup>. The prophecies

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28 On Geoffrey as the culmination of the classical tradition see Southern 1970; on Geoffrey as the culmination of Anglo-Norman secularism see R.W.Hanning *The Vision of History in Early Britain* (Columbia U.P., 1966) p. 121f.

29 Geoffrey of Monmouth *The History of the Kings of Britain* (trans.) L.Thorpe (London, 1966,1971) pp.46-47.

30 Geoffrey/Thorpe pp.256-257.

31 Geoffrey/Thorpe p.213, see E.C.Southward "Arthur's Dream" *Speculum* 18 (1943) 249-251 for the interpretation.

32 Geoffrey/Thorpe on incubus pp.145-147, on prophecies pp.148-162, on Merlin's possessing spirit pp.172, 177.

comprise an account of contemporary history in symbolic and visionary language which was so popular that it was published separately before the completion of the *Historia*. It inspired imitators and went on to found a tradition of political prophecy in areas influenced by the Normans<sup>33</sup>. The *Historia* itself was translated within a few years from Geoffrey's Latin prose into the vernacular poetry of Wace's *Roman de Brut*.

The first romances appear in the early twelfth century. The earliest ones were inspired by the classical epics. The romances differed from the *chansons* in poetic form and were addressed to an aristocratic elite rather than to the general public of the *chansons*. Although both antique and Celtic romances possessed historical settings, they were not regarded as truly historical. Like the historical novel or science fiction, they treated contemporary themes by removing them to another world. The most important characteristic of this other world was its indifference to Christianity. Both antique and Celtic romances drew on pagan sources<sup>34</sup>.

The earliest known romance, *Alexandre*, appeared around 1130 and was soon followed by *Thèbes*, *Brut*, *Rou*, *Enéas* and *Troie*. Although ostensibly historical, the antique romances are from the first notable for their concentration on psychological and amorous themes. The *Aeneid* rewrite<sup>35</sup> omits most of the dream visits by pagan dieties but includes the descent to Hell with its comments on the gates of dreams. Christian otherworld journeys were a popular subject of religious literature and the pagan Celtic version played an important role in the romance. In moving from the epic to the romantic, the *Enéas* expanded the role of Lavinia, who is shown torn between Turnus (Reason) and Aeneas (Love). Both the French and German versions of the poem elaborate Dido's erotic *insomnium* and the emotions it expresses<sup>36</sup>. *Brut* reproduces the oracular and incubus dreams of its source, Geoffrey's *Historia*. An incubus dream also figures in the Alexander stories, where paternity is attributed to an evil magician, Nectanebus, who rapes Olympia in a dream he has induced, and sends a further dream to deceive her husband<sup>37</sup>. As secular heroes, both Merlin and Alexander were attributed an impressive paternity that

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33 On this tradition see P.Zumthor *Merlin le Prophète* (Geneva, 1973).

34 J.Le Goff "Naissance du roman historique au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle" *La Nouvelle Revue Française* 238 (1972) 163-173, on romance and science fiction see L.Braswell "The Visionary Voyage in Science Fiction and Medieval Allegory" *Mosaic* 14 (1981) 125-142.

35 *Enéas* (ed) J.Salverda de Grave (Halle, 1891), R.J.Cormier *One Heart, One Mind: The Rebirth of Virgil's Hero in Medieval French Romance* (Mississippi U.P., 1973), J.-C.Payen "Genèse et finalités de la pensée allégorique au moyen âge" *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 78 (1973) 466-479 at p.471.

36 Fischer 1978 p.87, Braet 1977 p.111, W.Schmitz *Traum und Vision in der erzählenden Dichtung des deutschen Mittelalters* (Münster, 1934 ) pp.56-62.

37 For the Latin source see L.Thorndike *A History of Magic and Experimental Science* (New York, 1929) Ch.2, for German versions Fischer 1978 pp.38-45 & Schmitz 1934 pp.50-52, 91-92.

was demonic since it could not be divine. The infant Alexander was further enabled to foresee his future as a philosophic world conqueror in a dream of a serpent which circled his bed three times before returning to its shell and dying. Aristotle interpreted the shell as the world and the snake as Alexander<sup>38</sup>. Walter of Châtillon's Latin epic, *Alexandreid*, omits these irreligious visions, including instead an inspiring dream visit by the Jewish high priest which is closer to the angelic announcements of the epic tradition<sup>39</sup>. In the German *Troja*, both Priam and Andromache dream of Hector's death. In *Thèbes*, Ysmaine is warned in dream of her lover's death in battle<sup>40</sup>. In some respects transitional between the *chanson* and the Celtic romance, the antique romance exhibits a tension between the love interest and its historical framework. It includes psychological, sexual and deceptive dreams as well as true dreams of future disaster.

In the Celtic romance, dreams express the desires of the dreamer, desires which are frequently at odds with the dreamer's social reality. Whereas both *chansons* and romances are concerned exclusively with the nobility, the religious ethic of the *chansons* gave them a claim to general social relevance. The protagonists are presented as the representatives of society, and their concerns, war against the infidel and the maintenance of social order, can be seen to concern society as a whole. In the romances, despite a superficial ethic of protecting the weak, the fundamental concern is the individual knight and his problems of psychic, emotional and social integration. Apart from the friendly hermit who helps the distraught lovers, the role of religion is confined to social ritual. The contrasting status of dreams in the *chansons* and romances is a function of the contrasting realities they present - the clearly socially defined world of the *chansons* in which the protagonists are archetypes exemplifying the ideals, negative and positive, of the group, and the ill-defined and alienated world of the romances in which the protagonist is an Everyman striving to reconcile conflicting demands and to achieve integration<sup>41</sup>. Dreams are more common in the romances than in the *chansons*. Indeed the romances of Chrétien de Troyes are renowned for their pervasive dream-like quality which undermines any consistent notion of reality. In the *chansons* dreams are clearly defined and invariably true. They are supernatural revelations with a meaning not only for the dreamer but for all those associated with him. This is not so in the romances.

Scepticism towards dreams is rare in the *chansons*, and usually

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38 Poirion 1982 p.28

39 *The Alexandreid of Walter of Châtillon: A Translation and Commentary* by W.Jolly (PhD, Tulane, 1968) pp.58-59.

40 Fischer 1978 p.92, Hanning 1972 p.6, Schmitz 1934 pp.53-56, 89-90.

41 On individualism in the romance see Hanning 1972 & R.W.Hanning *The Individual and Society in Twelfth Century Romance* (Yale U.P., 1977), Southern 1953.

confined to the misguided infidel. Only once does a Christian hero dismiss his wife's dream as a feminine fantasy. His companions are shocked and his individualistic *démessure* is punished with death when the dream is fulfilled<sup>42</sup>. In the romances, on the other hand, dreams are often associated with delusion. Chrétien is particularly fond of the *songe/mensonge* topos<sup>43</sup>. Dreamers themselves question the nature of their own perceptions, and lament the painful disjunction of dream and reality.

The plots of the *chansons* are concerned either with the war against the infidel or with tensions within the feudal-familial social structure. Problems arise through injustice and treason on the one hand, excessive pride and family solidarity (the vendetta) on the other, that is from a negation of the feudal ideal and from an excess of its virtues. The *chanson de geste* can be seen as a *chanson de lignage*, in which the value of family solidarity integrates male and female in a common social purpose<sup>44</sup>. The *chansons* show women having high status as members of family groups and consequently as dreaming on behalf of those for whom they are responsible<sup>45</sup>. This contrasts with the alienation between male and female evident in the romances<sup>46</sup>. Although women do not play a large part in the *chansons*, which are principally concerned with fighting, they do receive more than their fair share of dreams. Through dreaming they identify with the hero and participate in his trials. A variant of the premonitory dream is the dream of the hero's mother concerning her son's future greatness. Such dreams of pregnant women were popular in history and hagiography, as they had been in classical literature<sup>47</sup>. They serve to affirm the hero's exceptional nature and they perform the same suspenseful functions as other premonitory dreams. In the Latin *Ruodlieb*, Christ grants the mother a dream in which she sees her son repelling wild boars and sows, and then crowned and kissed by a dove in a linden tree<sup>48</sup>. Wace attributed to William the Conqueror's mother a conception dream of a tree growing

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42 Braet 1975 p.51.

43 Chrétien de Troyes *Arthurian Romances* (trans.) W.W.Comfort (London, 1914) pp.118, 132-134, 177, 188, 331, 350, 352-353.

44 Gold 1977 & 1985.

45 Braet 1975 p.72 suggests that women dream in the *chansons* because they function as doubles of the hero rather than because they have high status. But these are not incompatible explanations. On female power through the family in the early middle ages see J.A.McNamara & S.Wemple "The Power of Women through the Family in Medieval Europe: 500-1100" *Feminist Studies* 1 (1973) 126-141.

46 On the role of women in the romance see Gold 1977 & 1985, S.Knight "Proesce and Cortoise: Ideology in Chrétien de Troyes' *Le Chevalier au Lion*" *Studium* 14 (1982) 1-52, G.Duby *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest* (London, 1981), L.Harf-Larcner *Les Fées au Moyen Age* (Paris, 1984), Poiron 1982.

47 Lanzoni 1927.

48 (trans) G.Ford (Leiden, 1965) pp.100-101. On the strongly Christian nature of *Ruodlieb* see Schmitz 1934 pp.11-14.

from her body to cover the entire land<sup>49</sup>. Aude's allegorical dreams in the Venice IV version of the *Chanson de Roland* maintain her identity with the dead heroes even while her entire society denies it by concealing the truth from her<sup>50</sup>. Family solidarity and religion triumph in the end when Aude affirms her union with the heroes by dying and being buried with them.

The epic dream functions to integrate the dreamer with society through an appeal to religious truth. It is a supernatural message which in both content and form reaffirms social categories. Opposed to the psychological and delusory dream of the romance, the epic dream has affinities with the political visions of contemporary historiography. In both epics and history, dreams provide dramatic tension, give the work a cosmic dimension and establish a moral framework. A belief in divine providence, in God working through earthly events, underlay both epic and history. The dream was the expression and the proof of this divine involvement.

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49 Krappe 1937-38.

50 *Les Textes de la Chanson de Roland: La Version de Venise IV* (ed) R.Mortier (Paris, 1941) laisses 336-340; cf. a similar paradoxical use in the Germanic heroic epic *Die Klage*, Fischer 1978 p.145.