Chivalry in Literature and Practice: A Study of the Medieval Code of Arms Before and After the Arthurian Legends and its Practice in the Battlefield

Stephanie Matos-Ayala

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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CHIVALRY IN LITERATURE AND PRACTICE:
A STUDY OF THE MEDIEVAL CODE OF ARMS BEFORE AND AFTER THE
ARTHURIAN LEGENDS AND ITS PRACTICE IN THE BATTLEFIELD

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Stephanie Matos-Ayala
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
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Indiana University of Pennsylvania
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of History

We hereby approve the thesis of

Stephanie Matos-Ayala

Candidate for the degree of Master of Arts

__________________________________________
R. Scott Moore, Ph. D
Professor of History, Advisor

__________________________________________
Tamara L. Whited, Ph. D
Professor of History

__________________________________________
Elizabeth Ricketts, Ph. D
Assistant Professor of History

ACCEPTED

__________________________________________
Timothy P. Mack, Ph. D.
Dean
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Title: Chivalry in Literature and Practice: A Study of the Medieval Code of Arms Before and After the Arthurian Legends and its Practice in the Battlefield

Author: Stephanie Matos-Ayala

Thesis Chair: Dr. R. Scott Moore

Thesis Committee Members: Dr. Tamara L. Whited
Dr. Elizabeth Ricketts

This thesis analyzes the chivalric traits expected in medieval knights as illustrated in contemporary chivalric handbooks, *chansons de geste*, as well as medieval romances, to determine the prominent ideals of the code, and show how chivalry was originally a martial concept. The examination of the literature not only supports this argument, but also shows the transition of pre-Arthurian chivalry as a violent warrior code to that of a social doctrine.

This study concludes with an analysis of chivalry in practice through the examination of the actual conduct of combat operations in the well-known battles of the Hundred Years War. Chivalry in these battles is shown to have been a practical ideal that allowed for high degrees of violence. In order to give chivalry its proper place in medieval society, the fact that violence was not always deemed unchivalrous, but was tolerated in certain situations must be understood and accepted.
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Introduction:

Chivalry: A Warrior’s Ideal

Chivalry is a difficult concept to define. Although chivalry is fairly easy to recognize when it appears in paintings, literature and chronicles, defining it is complicated since it does not have one simple definition. In the Middle Ages, it was more of a lifestyle or outlook than an explicit doctrine. Chivalry formed part of everyday life since it embraced both ideology and social practice. In its most popular formulation, chivalry entailed loyalty, courage, generosity, courtesy, and prowess—qualities that were valued by the higher classes and which contemporaries believed the ideal knight should possess. However, while chivalry does uphold these qualities, they do not define it in its entirety because, as Nigel Saul argues in *Chivalry in Medieval England*, chivalry meant different things to different people:

For the heralds its essence lay in the display of armorial charges on a shield…For the clergy,…it was more of a religious vocation…For the legist, whose goal was to bring order to the brutal realities of war, it was a legal construct intended to curb military excess, a set of moral guidelines to distinguish proper behavior from the improper. For the writers of romances…it was about the attainment of virtue through ennobling feats to win the favor of a lady. For knights themselves, it was about what Sir Thomas Malory in the fifteenth century called ‘dedys [deeds] full actual’—fighting on horseback, jousting in tournament lists and the achievement of manliness through prowess” ¹

Although these divergent perceptions make chivalry hard to define, it is certain that chivalry was very important to aristocratic medieval societies. In a sense it was an aristocratic value system, since the aristocracy constituted the military elite. Its influence was felt in both political and social life, its most important function being to regulate the conduct of disputes. Chivalry was central to the identity of the elite. If the nature of chivalry laid somewhere between the ideal and...

reality, between codification and practice, its impact on the culture of society was nonetheless both real and substantial.²

Despite these different meanings and its critical importance, popular misconceptions have attributed to chivalry a level of triviality, as though it merely dictated the proper conduct of a knight in court. In the popular mind, the word chivalry often alludes to courtly romances, like those presented in the Arthurian legends, and the manuals of gentlemanly comportment. Since this mindset has ignored the fact that within chivalry there were tensions and many inconsistencies (conditions that were commented on by many contemporaries in handbooks), chivalry has been reduced to superficial episodes of glitz and glamor. It is this combination that has remained the stereotype of chivalrous distinction.

While chivalry eventually included romance and courtly behavior, originally it was focused solely on the battlefield. Its many meanings still revolved around the idea of chivalry as a warrior-code. Its importance for heralds pertained to the shields used in the battlefields; for the clergy, about just war; for the legist, on lessening the brutalities of war; and for the knight, war itself. In fact, the word in its earliest forms and meaning, chevalier, meant a knight who fought on horseback.³ Being part of the cavalry meant that the warrior was better trained in warfare, for he could not only fight on horseback, but could also fight on foot. Around the thirteenth century with the emergence of knighthood, these mounted warriors acquired social status. Members of this class were men whose families were well established, but lacked noble titles, or combatants who made their fortune through adventure and ambition. Having wealth and land was a pre-

requisite in order to finance the equipment needed for mounted warfare. A knight was not merely a soldier, since knighthood was also linked to vassalage. This knight was bound to defend his lord against his enemies in exchange for being given a tract of land. Although this relationship suffered many changes as society developed, there was always an element of zealous loyalty to whomever one swore fealty. Because of this relationship, knights were expected to exhibit both skills of arms and of service. This dualistic element of knights’ lives is what gave them (and in turn, the concept of chivalry) their distinctive quality. They were their lord’s or king’s army that was paid by long-term contracts offering land grants, meaning that they had to provide service whenever it was needed and in specified times of the year.  

Alongside this warrior who lived in a relatively settled context--the one tied to a particular place--was the entrepreneurial or wandering knight. Not to be confused with mercenaries, these wandering warriors would use their skills to make their fortunes in distant lands. Usually they were political exiles, although many were younger sons for whom their fathers’ could not provide. These younger sons and exiles were to play an important role in the history of knighthood and chivalry. Despite the eminently practical purpose behind their advent, these wandering knights became the inspiration for the chivalric heroes and legends of contemporary fiction and, because of how chivalric handbooks promoted knighthood, they eventually came to represent the ideal knight. Although historically not all of these wandering knights attained wealth and fame, it was among these men that the “dreams and ideals of knighthood grew and were cherished.”

The nature of knighthood, or the mounted warrior, altered warfare. The use of cavalry could tip the war in the direction of the mounted knights since they could employ shock tactics

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against the adversary. This new form of fighting was introduced to England during the eleventh century with the Norman invasion. The Normans not only brought a new way of fighting to England, but a more humane set of values toward the conduct of war: an aristocratic ethic wherein they would treat other members of the elite with respect. Before the Battle of Hastings the English were exceptionally brutal in their treatment of the losers and captives, so that those members of the aristocracy that were captured by the Normans believed that they would also be subjected to torture and mutilation. Yet the Norman regime of the late eleventh century behaved differently, thus revolutionizing the conduct of war in England. The Normans were no less tough or aggressive than the English, yet they did not routinely resort to savagery in their treatment of well-born opponents. The probable reason for this was that on the continent warfare was much more prominent than in England, and the nobility and knights started to practice this attitude with each other for the sake of self-preservation. The informal solution became known as ransoming—the trade of property, strategic assets, political favor, and of course, money. This arrangement not only resulted in self-preservation, but in a financial gain which, depending on the prisoner, could be substantial. Although a nobleman would not think twice about thrusting his sword into a soldier of inferior rank, sparing other nobles became a very appealing practice for said reasons.

As knighthood became more appealing and successful, there grew a need for more training and opportunities for knights to acquire fame. Tournaments provided the perfect scenario for both of these to happen. Tournaments were crucial to the world of chivalry; they acted as a training ground for knights where they could learn to use the sword and lance, provided an opportunity to show military prowess, and could even influence military tactics, for, as Malcolm Vale attests, “it was a sham fight, a mock battle, but one which closely resembled

\[6\] Saul, *Chivalry*, 10.
‘real’ warfare.” The earliest tournament seems to have been held on the borders of the Holy Roman Empire and France in the late eleventh century. By the 1120’s and the 1130’s tournaments were held all over Europe and England. Through such competitions, the knights could refine their fighting skills and at the same time could increase their wealth, since it was customary for a knight to keep the equipment and spoils of those he defeated. Tournaments so strongly resembled battles that at times the two activities were indistinguishable. There was a general rule that the prisoners should be ransomed and not killed, but deaths happened more often than not, and were not always accidental.

By the 1130’s the Church began to openly oppose tournaments. In this respect, the ninth canon issued at the Council of Clermont was a typical condemnation:

We firmly prohibit those detestable markets or fairs at which knights are accustomed to meet to show off their strength and their boldness and at which the death of men and dangers to the soul often occur. But if anyone is killed there, even if he demands and is not denied penance and the viaticum, ecclesial burial shall be withheld from him.

This attitude by the Church toward the tournaments is not surprising, since the Church had previously been trying to control the violence in medieval society by decreeing limits such as the Peace of God, which applied spiritual sanctions in an attempt to limit private wars and the savagery that resulted from them.

Monarchies also attempted to quell the interest in, and practice of, tournaments since they were associated with anarchy. Tourneying became more prominent in weakly governed areas or during a troubled reign. In England under Henry I and Henry II, the competitions were placed under firm royal prohibition and participants had to travel overseas. However, during the reign of

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7 Malcolm Vale, *War & Chivalry* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press), 68.
9 Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry*, 158.
a weak regime, tournaments became frequent and often had subversive overtones. It was not until the end of the twelfth century that tournaments gained respectability.\textsuperscript{11} This was mostly due to the fact that tournaments became the central points of many contemporary literary works and biographies on the subject (i.e. Chretien de Troyes’ \textit{Perceval} and William Marshall’s biographies). These have aided historians in understanding what chivalry entailed and how it worked. These biographies, sometimes written during the lifetime of the knight in question, became very popular during the Middle Ages. They resembled hagiography in the way that they would follow and exalt the knights’ deeds while in the service of his lord and during tournaments. Through them it can be seen how a knight’s exploits in tournaments and in actual battle would gain him honor, which, as many contemporary sources reveal, was the underlying factor in all of the knight’s deeds.

As men engaged and bonded with each other in the tournaments, they developed modes of thought and habits of conduct which eventually bonded them together as a group. They developed a “brotherhood in arms that transcended their ties of lordship, family and ethnic identity. Consequently, tournaments functioned as a key institution in both nurturing and sustaining the culture and performance of chivalry. At the same time, they introduced young knights to the role that money could play in the regulation of military conduct.”\textsuperscript{12}

Although ideally knighthood was a career open to all persons regardless of lineage, it was more common for the sons of nobles than for the poor to become knights. Some nobles were knighted as soon as they were old enough to wear armor and carry a sword. Dubbing could occur on special occasions, such as weddings, christenings and other events of the sort, but by the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[11] Barber, \textit{The Knight and Chivalry}. 158.
\end{footnotes}
thirteenth century these proceedings started to occur more commonly in the battlefield.\textsuperscript{13} As a reward for superior performance in battle, young soldiers were made knights. Dubbing knights in the battlefield inevitably cemented the link between knighthood, chivalry and warfare.

In order to place chivalry within its proper context of military convention, it is necessary to transcend the conceptualization of chivalry as simply a policy of courtly conduct. Although it is impossible to disentangle completely the warrior code from the \textit{Arthurian Romances} and the manuals of gentlemanly conduct that dominate popular discourse on chivalry, if one looks exclusively at how these present chivalry, the code then resembles, as Maurice Keen argues, “no more than a polite veneer, a thing of forms and words and ceremonies which provided a means whereby the well-born could relieve the bloodiness of life by decking their activities with a tinsel gloss.”\textsuperscript{14} The reality is that, although chivalry did have elements of courtly behavior, essentially it was a tough warrior code that valued extreme prowess and honor.

A possible explanation for the preconceived notion of chivalry as merely court behavior is the attention that romances that focus on courtly love have received throughout the modern era. For example, during the Victorian Period there was a growing fascination with the idea of chivalry, since it became, as Michele Cohen argued in “Manners Make the Man: Politeness, Chivalry, and the Construction of Masculinity,” an “imaginative resource in the midst of the social and economic dislocation of the industrial revolution.” This dislocation resulted in a sense of nostalgia among the people and created a demand for art that represented the values of old, but also applied to their own time. Chivalry, then, provided “a vocabulary for refashioning the gentleman as masculine, integrating national identity with enlightenment notions of progress and

\textsuperscript{13} Leon Gautier, \textit{Chivalry} (London, 1965) Ch. 5.
\textsuperscript{14} Maurice Keen. \textit{Chivalry} (New Haven, CT: 2005) 3
civilization.” However, these “chivalric” notions were analyzed and transformed to fit Victorian values, a process that severely distorted the concept of medieval chivalry.

Before the concept of courtly love was the focus of contemporary authors and the popular mind, it was in warfare that chivalry received its highest praise and value. A knight was considered honorable and ideal if he was “noble en couraige et en fais, constant et vertueulx, loyal, preux, et chevalereux et qui doubte et ayme Dieu.” But, what exactly were the traits of a “chevalereux” knight? And most importantly, what were the traits of chivalry that applied in battle?

Contemporary literature provides a window into what this code or lifestyle entailed. Chivalric biographies, handbooks, and literary fiction offered medieval societies a standard by which to define the ideals of chivalry. For the medieval audience, there was no great difference between fiction and non-fiction, because both were considered to be the histories of their ancestors. It is possible to see that the chivalric conduct presented in literary texts closely resembled the historic accounts of medieval aristocratic life. This is due because both aristocratic society and chivalric literature were deeply intertwined; the literature presented the values of chivalry as idealized from the past, and high society, in turn, based their values and conduct on what the literature depicted. By studying both nonfictional and fictional accounts of chivalry, it is possible to draw a model of what chivalry implicated and to see how, above all else, it was originally a warrior code and everything that surrounded it was related to the battlefield.

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Chivalric handbooks were formal exemplars of chivalry wherein their authors sought to instruct their audiences of its requirements. While historians question the extent of their influence, in them can be seen what were considered the ideals of chivalry even if the practice was different. The most notable manuals of chivalry were written by knights themselves or authors that had been closely entwined with court life and knighthood. These handbooks devoted very little space to the subject of love, but concentrated instead on chivalry as the ideal lifestyle of the aristocratic warrior. For example, Geoffroi de Charny, a renowned French knight who served under King Jean II in the Hundred Years War, in his, *Livre de Chevalerie*, rated a knight in warfare to possess more worth than those who only jousted or participated in a tournament, although he praised them as well. Raimon Llull, a knight turned friar, concentrated in his, *The Book of Odre of Chyvalry*, on the spiritual and social aspects of the knight as well as his role in the battlefield. Honoré Bonet’s *L'arbre des Batailles*, which was an inspiration behind Christine de Pisan’s *The Book of Fayttes of Armes and of Chyualry*, considered to be the best source available on medieval warfare, took an almost purely martial approach towards chivalry. Both Bonet and de Pisan were inspired by the style of Flavius Vegetius Renatus’s *De Re Militari*, which discussed in detail the ideal training and discipline of Roman soldiers. These authors discussed the proper behavior that a knight should have both in battle and at home. They

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18 Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry*, 134.
provided insight into what a knight should aspire to and what he should avoid. In them it is also possible to see what political, social, or economic factors contributed to their ideal style of chivalry and how, as warfare evolved, chivalric handbooks also evolved, taking into consideration the new realities of war.

Just as handbooks reveal what the ideals of chivalry were, medieval fiction also provides a window into this complicated outlook on life. Moreover, through the analysis of chivalric fiction it is possible to see how chivalry slowly evolved from its original warrior code to the popular notion of courtly love. The literary genres that prove most useful for this are the medieval epic and the romance. By studying the most popular epics of the twelfth century, (also known as *chanson de geste*, literally “song of deeds”) the *Chanson de Roland* and *El Cantar del Mio Cid*, it is possible to see that the warrior knight found in the chivalric handbooks was no different from the ones found in these works. Since epics were considered to be the histories of their ancestors, especially since they were inspired in part by the actions of historical figures, the people and aspiring knights saw these works as ideal examples of chivalry, wherein it was revealed how chivalrous knights thought and behaved.

However, as times changed and literary aspirations evolved, literature moved farther from the warrior knight found in epics and turned to the figure of the knight as a lover. Romances, with their elaborate vocabulary and rhyme structure, brought forth a concept of chivalry as pertaining to social behavior. It focused on the hero and the heroine’s adventures instead of on the hero’s battles, as epics often did. Women received a more significant role in the romances. Although they were still representations of the male ideal of femininity, they became

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the inspiration behind the heroes’ actions. In the transition from epic to romance is visible the transition from going to the battlefield for honor’s sake to going for the sake of a lady's regard.

An analysis of the chivalric traits expected in knights as illustrated in the aforementioned chivalric handbooks, the *chansons de geste*, as well as medieval romances, will not only demonstrate the prominent ideals of the code, but also show how chivalry was originally a martial concept. The examination of the literary fiction will not only support this argument, given that the epics focus on the warrior knight, but also show the transition of pre-Arthurian chivalry as a violent warrior code to that of a social doctrine. This transition will provide some explanation for the popular conception of chivalry as relevant to courtly conduct. Finally, this study will conclude with an analysis of chivalry in practice through the examination of the actual conduct of combat operations in the well-known battles of the Hundred Years War. Chroniclers of the Hundred Years War, such as Froissart, constantly praised the chivalrous deeds (off and on the battlefield) of the war’s key players. By analyzing these actions, this part of the study will seek to answer the following questions: to what extents were chivalric ideas translated into action by their audience? Was the code of chivalry (whether it be pre-Arthurian, Arthurian, or some combination of the two) faithfully followed in the War? Or, was chivalry not put into actual practice, despite its being a strong social ideal? This, in turn, will help to understand the impact of chivalry on medieval society and warfare, including how it was applied, forgotten, and/or evolved.

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Chapter I: The Ideal of Chivalry According to Chivalric Handbooks

“He who does best is most worthy.” ~ Geoffroi de Charny

“The most valiant and worthy of them all” is how Froissart describes Geoffroi de Charny.22 Charny’s Livre de Chevalerie is fundamental for any study of chivalry because, although other chivalric handbooks exist, his was written during his employment as a knight and was meant for a body of practicing knights, therefore revealing how knights themselves defined and prioritized chivalric values in the fourteenth century. Written c. 1350, Livre de Chevalerie, shows how it was expected that a fourteenth-century knight conduct himself; Charny discusses what knights need to know when engaging other knights, traveling, making court appearances, and most importantly, when in battle.

A member of the Company of the Star created by Jean II, Charny “seems to have been the model of the sort of knighthood that Jean was attempting to promote.”23 Charny’s first major campaign during the Hundred Years War occurred during 1337 in Gascony. He led quite a few notable missions both on the battlefield and in diplomacy that provided him with recognition by both the English and the French. However, Charny’s greatest award, in terms of chivalry, was when he was appointed the keeper of the Oriflamme, the banner of the king of France. The banner had almost sacred connotations; the bearer had to swear to never abandon it, even on threat of death. Charny took this duty very seriously, seeing as he died defending the oriflamme next to his sovereign during the battle of Poitiers in 1356.24

In contrast to other writers of chivalric texts, Charny appears to have a realistic and practical view about the life of a knight. He takes into consideration the knight’s environments

22 Froissart, 230.
24 Ibid., 14.
and from there advises how he should behave. For example, he counsels against excessive drinking, gambling, boasting and even fashionable dress, yet he seems to understand that some knights will eventually find themselves in such situations; therefore he advises them to proceed with sensible restraint.\textsuperscript{25}

Nevertheless, despite his admonishments on a multitude of topics, Charny was a knight that valued battle, in fact “to live without an enemy to fight would be contrary to the spirit of chivalry Charny embodied.”\textsuperscript{26} In his book he shows this spirit, when of all the knights' deeds and duties, he insists, “the deeds of arms in war are the most honorable.” When discussing a knight’s duties he explains that although all of a knight’s deeds should be considered honorable, it is in war that a knight truly achieves this. He argues that although jousting and tournaments are important, war is more so, given that in war knights are able to use all of the talents needed to succeed in both these fields. Charny constantly makes clear that the nature of a chivalrous knight depends on the actions taken on the battlefield, as seen when he states:

> You should love, value, praise, and honor all those whom God by his grace has granted several good days on the battlefield, when they win great credit and renowned for their exploits; for it is in good battles that great honors arise and are increased, for good fighting men prove themselves in good battles.\textsuperscript{27}

Charny ends the majority of his sections with the phrase, “he who does best is most worthy,” and what he means by this is that, while all knights who participate in war are deserving of praise, a knight will have more worth if he follows the chivalric code. The qualities he gives the most importance to are prowess and honor. For him, it was impossible to have a worthy knight who lacked outstanding valor, bravery, or ability in battle. Therefore, he expected a knight to study the art of war, to learn and lead others and to show immeasurable prowess. Honor,

\textsuperscript{25} De Charny, 60.
\textsuperscript{26} Kaeuper, Introduction to A Knight’s Own Book of Chivalry, 4.
\textsuperscript{27}De Charny, 49, 50.
which was the underlying reason for all of a knight’s actions, could only be acquired from actions in the battlefield. As Richard Kaeuper neatly stated in *Holy Warriors: The Religious Ideology of Chivalry*: “skillful, courageous, hands-on violence, the bloody and sweaty work of fighting superbly at close quarters with edged weapons is the glorious means of securing honor”; and Charny was more than comfortable with embracing these “means.”

It is evident then, that prowess and honor were the core principles of the chivalric convention. Prowess did in fact involve all of the basic warrior-virtues: strength, hardiness, and skill of using arms, determination, and most importantly, courage. The same belief is seen in Froissart, who constantly praised chivalry: “*Si comme la busce ne poet ardoir sans feu, ne poet le gentilz horns venir a parfait honneur ne a la glore dou monde sans proece.*” Yet, it must be made clear that the honor that these authors are referring to is not merely the emotional kind that it might refer to today. The honor that these authors refer to is: “is best won at someone else’s expense through force; it is the fruit of a highly physical process…we would miss the point if we imagined prowess as a purely mental or emotional quality, operating in a world unsustained by blood, sweat and tears.”

Judging from how Charny gives more worth to situations where there is a greater risk of physical hardship (*travail de corps*), rising from jousting, tourneys and culminating in war, it is apparent how it is precisely these risks that Charny valued. Moreover, because achieving honor on the battlefield was no easy task, it is the foundation of why a knight should be admired:

One should therefore take far greater account of undertakings involving physical hardship and danger which the great lords are prepared to do, and do embark on their own free will

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29 As firewood cannot burn without fire, neither can a gentleman reach perfect honor or worldly renown without prowess. Froissart, 73.
without any need to do so other than to achieve personal honor, with no further expectation of any reward for the money and effort which they devote to performing these great deeds of arms.\(^{31}\)

Loyalty is the second quality he deems as most important in chivalry. A worthy knight needs to have both prowess and loyalty since “only loyalty can assure the necessary hierarchy and stalwart fighting that is justifiable and ennobling.”\(^{32}\) This loyalty was not necessarily towards the Crown seeing as sometimes the king wasn’t the knight’s immediate lord, and lords more often than not had clashes with their king. A knight was bound to his lord, whether he was the king or not, and he had to swear to protect him against any enemy. A knight was considered unworthy if he left the battlefield without his lord or failed to protect him if the chance arose. Loyalty was also meant towards his companions, and country; men tended to bond with the battle companions or fellow tourneyers creating ties that could last many years.

The code demanded that a knight be worthy in three ways: he must have wisdom, piety and, as discussed, prowess. Although Charny expected soldiers to be brave and loyal, he also expected them to be intelligent. Contrary to the idea that knights charged often and thought little, Charny cautions against those who “spur forward in a disorderly way and perform personally many feats of arms.” He instead advises them to take into consideration the consequences of their actions and to first study the situation they are in before attacking; even if it means forfeiting a chance of individual display. However, it is most interesting that when Charny is criticizing a knight’s actions that he considers to be less worthy, he always clarifies that, regardless of their mistakes, they should still be honored, for “they cannot be reproached in relation to the honor earned in bravery.”\(^{33}\) In rules like these he puts to use his guiding principle

\(^{31}\) Charny, 59.
\(^{33}\) De Charny, 82.
of “he who does best is more worthy.” He explains that these knights who commit less-than-ideal actions on the battlefield are still deserving of praise, but that “as for being worthy in the truest sense it would be possible to do better.”34 This mindset is what reveals Charny’s practicality, for he seems to understand that although knights are men striving to be great, they are still men; some men are indeed better than others, and their deeds are what separate them.

The third most important quality that Charny considers necessary in a chivalrous knight is piety. Although it was generally expected that all knights be good Christians, Charny’s piety must not be taken for granted because, although he expresses extremely pious sentiments at times, he is also very sensible relating beliefs that do not always go hand in hand with the religious ideals of the time. In fact, he argues that the order of the knight is the most rigorous order of all, including religious orders: “Considering the hardships, pains, discomforts, fears perils and broken bones, and wounds….there is no religious order in which as much is suffered as has to be endured by these good knights.”35 He also considers the knights to be martyrs, since although fleeing from battle is the safe route; for the sake of honor they stay and risk death.

There has always been a sort of paradox between knights and religion, since on the one hand they are devout Christians, but on the other they live for and value battle and honor, and that honor is usually at someone else’s expense or blood. Yet, although early Christians felt that military service and Christianity were incompatible, most of the faithful by the time of the Hundred Years War seem to have subscribed to Augustine's teaching that war was not in itself evil, so long as the enemy was not killed in a spirit of malice and the force used was not disproportionately harsh.36

34Ibid.
35De Charny, 95.
36Head, 20.
War was typically seen by the Church as a consequence of the Fall, and hence was not to be reveled in as a casual pastime or showcased through tournaments. The main source of conflict between the martial mentality of the knights and the Church would probably have been estimating military honor as of more worth than a virtuous life and amiable attitude. While Christianity was not inherently pacifist, knights could attach more value to battle than the Church felt that the activity warranted. When the Church tried to denounce tournaments as un-Christian, many knights including William Marshal, the epitome of chivalry, argued against the clerics and denied their ban of tournaments: “The clerks are too hard on us…I can do no more for God than to give myself to Him and repent all my sins. Unless the clergy desire my damnation, they must ask no more. But their teaching is false- else no one could be saved.” Charny not only lauds tournaments, but even more so war: “War after all, was the supreme theater for the knightly manifestations of prowess.”

Charny argues against the idea that a knight’s actions may be considered condemnable; evident when he states, “no one can or should excuse from bearing arms in a just cause, whether for his lord, or for his lineage, or for himself, or for the Holy Church…those who perform deeds of arm more to gain God’s grace…their noble souls will be set in paradise forever Honored and well-remembered.” Thus, Charny believed that fighting in battles, and feats of arms carried out bravely by good men, where religiously meritorious.

It is also possible to see how Charny’s views differ from the religious beliefs of the time when he discusses relationships. When he does mention the love of a lady, he argues that it is all good and well if the couple is discreet. In a time where some medieval romances discuss sex as the sin that caused Lancelot to fail, Charny believes that his failure was due more to his lack of discretion and to boasting, for: “no good is in the end likely to come of it….there are many who

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37 Kaeuper, “Introduction.” *A Knight’s Own Book of Chivalry.* Qtd. in 34.
38 De Charny, 95-96.
say that they would not want to love Queen Guinevere if they did not declare it openly." He also takes into the consideration the honor of the lady and the knights themselves. So, interestingly enough, he does not reproach entirely such affairs, as it was expected from a medieval Christian, but rather indiscretion. Charny’s piety can be a study in itself about his very particular point of view and its conflict with clerical beliefs. He expected knights to be conscious of their deeds, to do only good deeds and realize that all they have are gifts from God that can be taken away if He so pleases. For him it is because they use these gifts well and have chosen the most arduous path that they should be considered worthy men.

Charny believed that the majority of knights were honorable men; in fact he constantly assures the reader of the honor behind their actions. This did not mean that he did not have expectations of these men at arms; he expected them to have a valor that would separate them from others who simply sought personal gain; he expected them to be leaders of men, capable of true wisdom and piety. Above everything, he expected them to be true warriors, to be loyal to the code that prizes prowess and honor above else. For him, men of worth were the equivalent of knights, “humble among friends, proud and bold against their foes, tender and merciful toward those who need assistance, cruel avengers against their enemies, pleasant and amiable with all others.”

Like Charny, Ramon Llull was also a knight who wrote about chivalry. A predecessor to Charny, Llull’s The Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry was written around 1276. Yet unlike Charny, Llull wrote his book when he left the practice of knighthood and became a quasi-friar. This fact suggests that his work was more of a scholarly study than a practical guidebook like Charny's.

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39 De Charny, 52.
40 De Charny, 97.
Yet, with acute study, it still serves as a good window into what was valued by knights themselves—even former knights—and how these chivalric values were prioritized.

As the son of a wealthy and distinguished Majorcan soldier, he was made a seneschal in James II of Aragon’s court. However, in 1266 Llull left court life to become a monk after having experienced visions on five successive nights of Christ being crucified. After this experience, he dedicated his life to the conversion of Saracens in Africa through love and persuasion instead of arms, an idea that was quite singular considering that the Crusades were not over yet. He is also well known for his doctrines that attempt to demonstrate the place of reason in religion and for the establishment of colleges and professorships to encourage the learning of Oriental languages. He died a martyr in 1315, when after having preached in secret for twelve months, he decided to do so in the open, which resulted in his being stoned to death by the Saracens in Bugia.41

Concerning The Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry, the prominent figure that emerges out of Llull’s book is that of a knight almost as a sacred figure chosen by the heavens: “and of eche thousand was chosen a man moost loyal/ most stronge/ and of most noble courage/ & better enseygned and manerd than al the other…most stronge to susteyne trauaylle / and most able to serve the man.” 42 It is evident that Llull considered the knight to be one of the most important figures of society. Not only was the knight chosen by celestial powers, he also had a role to fulfill among his people. Moreover, in his discussion of the role or duties of a good knight, he affirms that there are seven precepts a knight should follow, among these precepts there are some that do not have anything to do with being a warrior, but which he still considers essential to chivalry. For example, precept number Two states that ideally every knight should own land. He argues

42 Llull, 20
that a knight’s duty was to not only own land, but also that he should be lord over many men, and that a squire should serve him. Llull believed that knights were elites, chosen among the rest of the people, therefore they should be presented to society as such and possess an honorable role in the community.\textsuperscript{43}

This hierarchical mindset relates to precept number Five, where he discusses how a knight should show his authority by making peasants till the soil while he indulges in sport. The author argues that just as knights have to obey their lords and serve them, those under the knights—the common people—have to obey and serve them. He reasons that if the common people “drede” and obey the knights “for fere lest they shold be destroyed” by them, the people will therefore respect knights as the upholders of justice.\textsuperscript{44}

Although Llull places a great deal of importance on a knight as a political figure of justice and lord of his lands, Llull also emphasizes that the knight should be a warrior. Precepts number Three, Four, Six and Seven discuss different characteristics of a knight as a soldier and defender of his lord and people. In Four, the author promotes physical heath through constant exercise and admonishes overindulgence that makes so many knights overweight. These exercises should be related to arms, be it either hunting or tournaments, in order to hone battlefield skills. The knight then not only uses his skills in battle, but to protect both his lord and the weak, as discussed in precepts Three and Seven respectively.\textsuperscript{45}

Furthermore, just as Charny does, Llull places great weight on a knight’s duty to honor and chivalry itself. In fact, he argues that chivalry was a heavenly institution sent to restrain and defend the people. He wishes that schools on instruction of chivalry be founded, where not only

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid, 25.  
\textsuperscript{44} Llull, 32.  
\textsuperscript{45} Llull, Precept 3 p.30, and Precept 7 p. 40.
arms are taught, but the ethics and sciences of it as well. Llull discusses that chivalry is not only strength of body, but also courage. He believes that a knight who is afraid of battle, or worse, flees from it, is not only a coward but also an enemy of chivalry. For Llull, to be considered an enemy of chivalry, by either fleeing from battle or acting dishonorably in any other way, is an offense that should be penalized by death, whereby the offensive knight “ought to be taken and delyuered to dethe by other knyghtes.”

Taken together, Llull’s and Charny's books show how honor was perceived as the backbone of chivalry by both authors; basically all of the knight’s actions should be in order to achieve honor. Although there exist some differences in the books concerning how a knight achieves it, both authors seem to have thought that what brought the most honor to a knight was his actions in battle. Llull even considered that the greatest honor to chivalry a knight could do was to die in battle. The major difference between Llull’s book and Charny’s is the practicality they present when discussing the ideal knight. Charny did not truly expect knights to be perfect, simply to aspire to perfection. However, Llull is a bit more ideological about the position and seems to expect a knight to truly be a figure of excellence wherever he goes, under penalty of death. Furthermore, for Llull, a knight should be of high and noble birth, yet many men that reached knighthood and became prominent figures of chivalry were not necessarily from high aristocratic families (although it was more common for knights to be nobles), but soldiers who due to their prowess and dedication to all that chivalry entailed were rewarded with knighthood. These different views of practicality and idealism are probably the significant difference between a book written by a practicing knight and one written by a knight turned friar. At the moment of writing his book Charny was living the exact same life he was teaching and

46 Llull, 49.
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promoting; therefore his advice is based on his experiences and his understanding of them, resulting in a “thoroughly humane view” of chivalry.\(^{48}\) On the other hand, Llull had left court life and had taken a religious approach to life by the time he wrote his book; as a result he is not only looking back, but also doing so with a more idealized mentality.

Since Llull was a friar, it is perhaps not surprising that precept number One, or the most important of a knight's duties, is that he should be defender of the Christian faith. Although it was important to defend the knight’s lord and the weak, for Llull, it was even more important to defend faith. He argues that God chose clerics to maintain the faith by scripture, and that He likewise chose knights to “by force of armes vaynquysshe the mescreautes.” Knights then, can call themselves God’s “frendes honoured in this world,” and can rely on being among those few in society who can call themselves saved.\(^{49}\)

As seen, chivalric handbooks not only discuss the qualities of a chivalric knight in battle, but also give suggestions for their behavior and role in society, validating that chivalry is indeed link to courtly behaviors, however courtly behavior was never the main focus. By the late fourteenth century, however, chivalric handbooks took on an even more martial approach to chivalry, taking inspiration from Flavius Vegetius Renatus’s, *De Re Militari*. This was probably due to ongoing military advancements and the changing role of a knight in battle and society by the late fourteenth century. This martial approach is seen in Honoré Bonet’s, *L'arbre des Batailles*. Written in c.1387, *L'arbre des Batailles* is very specific about the different aspects of a knight’s role as a soldier and the responsibilities he has in battle, providing a more violent approach to chivalry than both Charny and Llull presented. Bonet was a prominent source in Christine de Pisan’s *The Book of Fayttes of Armes and of Chyualry* written in 1410, which is now

\(^{48}\) Keen, 13.  
\(^{49}\) Llull, 25.
considered to be a medieval military manual that elucidates a great deal about the strategy, tactics, and technology of medieval warfare; it became one of the most important sources for early gunpowder weapon technology and for the concept of “Just War.” In her book, she refers to Bonet as her master and herself as his disciple.\textsuperscript{50}

Commissioned by Charles VI, \textit{L'arbre des Batailles}, was meant for heralds and princes, as well as knights. Bonet sought to teach the nobility how to treat their knights, and teach knights their duties and the honorable ways in which they can accomplish them. Although the book seems to be an ambiguous source for the study of chivalry since it has a purely martial approach to the code, if the book is looked at as the product of a man who thinks that chivalry is dying, it is possible to see that instead of being idealistic, the author is practical and offers advice in the areas of chivalry that he deems to be most important. The work, then, serves as a means to understand what was valued within the code through the passage of time. In no place does the author mention a knight’s love of his lady, but only love of honor, battle, and winning. This practicality is what probably made this book as treasured and influential as it was in the fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{51}

Although Honoré Bonet was not a knight, throughout his life he had experienced various environments--both in court and out of it--where he had the opportunity to interact with knights, enabling him to determine which tenets of the code of chivalry needed to be enforced and promoted over others. Although he was a monk before becoming a diplomat, his teachings are not purely religious; instead he shares a form of piety similar to Charny’s, believing that a knight must be grateful to God and accept His will, but should not depend solely on Him when in battle.

\textsuperscript{50}Bonet, 24.
\textsuperscript{51}Ibid., 25.
A knight must trust that God is helping, but he must also trust in his own abilities and put effort in winning the battle.

It is interesting to find that the first quality mentioned as necessary in a warrior by Bonet is strength. He argues that strength is the first of the Four Cardinal Virtues of the soul (the other three being justice, temperance, and wisdom) because, “although all three are great virtues, by my faith, what would they be worth without the virtue of strength?” However, he does not refer to merely physical strength, although he argues that “strength of body is not to be neglected,” since it is the “principal foundations of war,” but also to a strength very similar to that of Charny’s prowess. This strength must give man boldness in battle as well as the ability to lead and fight well. For Bonet, the signs men show if they possess the virtue of strength are thus:

He finds all his pleasure and all his delight in being in arms, and in just wars, and in defending all just causes, quarrels and holy arguments. The second sign is that a man, seeing the great ill and peril incurred in making such a war, or maintaining such quarrel, should yet not quit his purpose, nor for any labour or travail fear to expose his body to fair fight and strict justice.52

These signs, especially “finds all his pleasures and delights in arms,” illustrate how strongly Bonet promotes a figure of a knight whose only purpose should be to fight. When discussing “The Duties of a Good Knight” the first of these duties is to be loyal and “keep the oath which they have made to their lord to whom they belong” an expectation, that alongside prowess, is the root of chivalry.53 As with the other discussed authors, Bonet also expects a chivalrous warrior to wish to die in battle defending his lord. Likewise to Llull, Bonet states that a knight who leaves a battlefield under fear of death should be beheaded. But, it is interesting to find that although other writers, like Llull, for example, advise all knights to own land and keep their affairs in order, Bonet demands that knights should have no other properties or business affairs, under

52 Bonet, 120, 133.
53 Bonet 130
penalty of expulsion from the order. His reason for this is that “knights should have no cause to leave arms for desire of acquiring worldly riches.”

Bonet is very direct in what he believes that a knight should be, so that every single discussion of a good knight's duties confirms the image of a chivalrous knight as being a dedicated and ruthless warrior who does what he must to win, so long as it is just, and who does not hesitate to die in battle, since this should be the preferred death of all knights.

Doing what was necessary to win leads to the military tactics that were perpetrated by knights. A major debate seems to have been how to approach the enemy in battle: for instance, are only frontal attacks considered chivalrous, or are surprise attacks chivalrous as well? Unlike the modern conception that a knight blindly charged with little thought for anything else than personal glory, (like Lancelot constantly does in Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte d'Arthur*) their wars were actually based on good leadership, and some military tactics suggest ravaging the enemy.

Even notable chivalric knights like William Marshall and Richard I have been known to be open about this preference: “when Marshall advised Henry II to fool the French by pretending to disband his forces then secretly assembling them for a swift campaign of ravaging, the king praised William’s advice as the 'most courteous' (*molt corteis*)”

Bonet, a strict promoter of chivalry, confirms this idea of attack, because when discussing dishonorable ways of attacking the enemy he makes sure to exclude: “an ambush in a place where my enemy is in the habit of taking recreation, so that he becomes my prisoner; or to arrange that the enemy should occupy the most disadvantageous part of the field or that they should have the sun in their eyes.”

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54 Ibid., 131.
deeming it as, “good and fitting, and [it] is the result of sound sense and correct conduct.” The fact that knights did indeed keep in mind strategies of attack and used what was best regardless of individual display challenges the common image set by Lancelot in *Le Morte d’Arthur*, who seeks to be in Guinevere’s line of sight while he single-handedly fought many enemies during a tournament. Chivalry did not restrict the knight to simply heroic individual displays; in fact Bonet condemns a knight to also be beheaded if he leaves the battle to seek single combat regardless of the outcome, and, as was previously discussed, Charny opposes it as well.

When victorious they were expected to treat their captives honorably, depending on their rank. However, it was governed by a degree of common sense; just because a prisoner was well born did not mean that he should be pardoned or that his status as a prisoner should be forgotten. In the *Tractatus de Bello, de Represaliis et de Duello*, which deals with the definition of war and its divisions, John of Legnano wrote that mercy should "be shown to persons captured in a lawful war . . .unless by sparing them there is fear of a disturbance of the peace." Bonet, who most likely used Legnano as a source, also argues that some mercy must be given to a prisoner, but it should not be forgotten that “just as fire never forgives water,” mercy should be given “unless by his deliverance there is dangers of having greater wars.”

This idea of a fierce warrior was not only a product of the changes chivalry had undergone through time, since as early as the twelfth century there can be found writings that present knights as ferocious soldiers. Among these are, St. Bernard of Clairvaux’s, *Liber ad milites Templi: De laude novae militiae* (In Praise of the New Knighthood), which, although

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57 Bonet, 155.
58 Malory, Caxton VI.
59 De Charny, 82
61 Bonet 134.
portraying knights as mostly religious figures, also argues that knights should be vicious fighters. St. Bernard of Clairvaux was a Cistercian abbot who in the 12th century wrote his treatise on behalf of new knights joining the Templar order. Just as many chivalric handbooks were written as a reaction to what was considered to be a loss of values or chivalry among the knights, St. Bernard was hoping that his letter would inspire the new knights to follow the values and code that made their predecessors so admired.

Although St. Bernard desired for knights to be extremely religious, and his writing is focused mainly on this concept, he also expects knights to be extremely aggressive in battle, which, as seen, was a pivotal characteristic for chivalric knights in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as well:

At vero ubi ventum fuerit as certamen, tum denum pritina lenitate postposita, tanquam si diceret. Nonne qui oderunt te, domine, odernam, et super inimicos tuos tabescebam? Irruunt in adversarios, hostes velut oves repuntant: nequaquam, etsi paucissimi, vel saevam barbariem, vel numerosam multitudinem formidante...Ita denique miro quodam ac singulari modo cernuntur et agnis mitiores, et leonibus ferociores.

It is important to take notice of the words “hate (oderunt)” and “fierce (ferociores)” which describe the chivalric idea of how a knight should treat his enemy. Llull will argue that a knight should take great vengeance on his enemies, while Charny will promote being “cruel avengers against their enemies [and to] hate and harm” them. Therefore, while knights were told to “be

63 Ibid.
64 Once in the thick of battle, the knight leaves his former gentleness, stating "Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord; am I not repulsed with your enemies?" Seeing them as sheep, these men meet and fall upon the enemy: no matter how few they never look at them as fierce barbarians nor as a formidable multitude... therefore in an extraordinary and singular manner they appear milder than lambs, yet fiercer than lions. St. Bernard. S. Bernardi Abbatis De Laude Novae Militiae ad Milites Templi Liber. http://www.binetti.ru/bernardus/15.shtml
65 Charny 70
merciful to those who need assistance” they were still expected to be fierce warriors, even by religious authors.66

Chivalry is sometimes misconstrued as being relevant only to courtly love and behavior or merciful knights. Although chivalry does include both of these precepts, they are not the foundation of the code. Of course, chivalry is a complex term that, as Leo Braudy states, “was as much in contention in the fourteenth century as it has been more recently among historians”67; but these chivalric handbooks have shown that the knight—the chivalrous knight—was first and foremost a warrior who was a force to be reckoned with; where prowess, strength, intelligence, piety, and loyalty were the characteristics given the most emphasis. As warriors they were ruthless and powerful when dealing with their enemies, while they were pious and good in their religious conduct. When battling the enemy, they were required to do what was necessary to win as long as it was just and honorable. Some actions may have been nobler than others, but in the end, according to Charny, all actions of a good knight are noble. From the analysis of these chivalric handbooks emerges the figure of a knight as an adept and keen warrior whose sole purpose was to fight and win for his lord the battle at hand. Chivalry was, first and foremost, about winning battles either in the battlefield, and if winning was unattainable, then dying while trying. Through these books it is also possible to set aside the misconstructions of chivalry which, in the popular mind, is founded upon works of medieval fiction that place chivalry around acquiring the love of a lady, when in reality it resembles more the Anglo-Saxon concept of “comitatus” and love of one’s lord. Yet, not all works of fiction that deal with chivalry only present the courtly-love ideal, for some stories do not even feature a lady. Chanson de gestes,

66 Ibid.
67 Leo Braudy, From Chivalry to Terrorism: War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity (New York: Knopf, 2003)
like *El Mio Cid* and *Chanson de Roland*, highlight the same traits that were seen to be valued in the handbooks through their heroes’ deeds. Lady or not, for the true chivalrous hero the battle and honor carry the most importance.
Chapter II: Chivalry in Medieval Fiction

“And I, according to my copy, have done set it in imprint to the intent that noble men may see and learn the noble acts of chivalry, the gentle and virtuous deeds that some knights used in tho days, by which they came to honor, and how they that were vicious were punished and oft put to shame and rebuke; humbly beseeching all noble lords and ladies with all other estates...take the good and honest acts in their remembrance, and to follow the same.” ~ William Caxton, Preface to *Morte d’Arthur*.

Medieval chivalric literature was very much linked to aristocratic life in the Middle Ages. As John Leyerle asserts in *Chivalric Literature*, “literary accounts of fictional feasts and tournaments, for example often follow the actual practices of aristocratic society, yet realistic accounts of actual feasts and tournaments were clearly influenced by literary motifs and traditions.” In other words, the reason why the realities of late medieval aristocratic life are close to the fiction found in chivalric literature is because that society tended to base their chivalric behavior on literary texts. The texts, although fictional, reveal the attitudes of the times and the problems that were considered important. The adventures of epic heroes and those of King Arthur’s court were not seen as mere fiction, but as an ideal conduct, worthy of imitation. Like the chivalric handbooks, chivalric literary texts served as examples of the ideal knight for knights; “the fictional elements did not limit the exemplary value of such literature, because the texts were seen as statements about the ideals of chivalry.” In effect, one of the reasons behind the creation of these legends and their transmission in writing was the desire to connect with a celebrated past by recounting the noble and chivalrous deeds of their ancestors. Most importantly, although it was mainly to entertain, medieval literature had a “didactic purpose of

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70 Ibid., 132.
instilling and encouraging a moral code based on loyalty, endurance and on accepting the
dictates of fate.”  

This “code” refers to the code of chivalry and all chivalry was supposed to mean for a knight as made evident in the handbooks.

In order to trace the development of how chivalry in fiction developed as a literary ideal, it is important to examine the two major literary types and the elements found within them. These types are the epics and the romance. The history of these two categories of medieval literary genres “is parallel to the general political history of the earlier and the later Middle Ages and may do something to illustrate the general progress of the nations.”

Epics usually focus on the prowess or heroism of the main character. They are the original adventure story imparted with a sense of high purpose, of sin, redemption, and nobility in peril. A strong historical sense is another characteristic of the epic, though whatever historical events they relate suffer great distortions. Romances, on the other hand, focus on the love between heroine and the hero. In romances there is usually a mythical element, so that the plot also focuses on the phenomena surrounding the hero. These two literary types, starting with the epic, show how chivalry evolved from the warrior-hero ethos discussed in chivalric handbooks to the idea of chivalry as pertaining to courtly love.

The Medieval Epic: Portrayals of the Warrior-Knight

The epic is the older of these two forms, and in it is where the warrior-knight as described in chivalric handbooks can be most accurately found. The primary focus of the epic is action in battles; the hero is measured by his deeds on the battlefield. Epics focus on the hero’s many

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72 Ibid., 36.
victories, his survival of difficult situations, his enduring loyalty, and defiance of any limitations; as Richard Barber states: “the basic principle of the epic is that certain men were to be regarded as generations of superior beings who sought and deserved honour.”74 W. P. Ker agrees that this was the belief and behavior of the time. For Ker, epics are heroic in their styles and temper; without referring too often to the fantastic, (as romances often do) they are a more accurate study of the human character, and are “expressions of the general temper or opinion of their own time.”75

Epics that follow legendary deeds of a knight are commonly referred to as chanson de geste, which literary means “songs of deeds” because troubadours would wander from castle to castle singing about the prowess of their heroes. Chansons de geste originally referred to French epics and matters of France, although now most epics that follow a reputable knight are categorized as such.76 There is almost always a historical root to the poem, although the event may be changed in order to meet the audience’s expectations or simply to fill up blanks left from a lack of sources. Epics raise the historical figure to a heroic stature. Yet, no matter how distorted the historical material was, the authors were aware that they were writing “the history of their people, and that their characters were not simple creations of their imaginations, but personages who had shaped the destiny of later generations. Such a feeling imposed restrictions upon the author which were not felt by the writer of the romance.”77

A principal element of the chansons de geste is how the hero is key in the future of the kingdom; instead of just acting for his own sake and future, the hero usually has the fate of the

74 Barber, The Reign of Chivalry, 46.
75 Ker, 15.
76 Caroline A Jewers, Chivalric Fiction and the History of the Novel (Gainesville: Florida University Press, 2000)
77 Jackson, 162, 168,71.
kingdom in his hands. The second major theme is the complex relationship between lord and knight. Always loyal to the lord’s wishes, the knight must engage in actions that at times are against his own wishes. *Chansons de geste* appealed to all members and levels of society, for as Erich Auerbach states, “the genre’s ideals of ‘knighthood and heroism,’ far from being the direct expression of the experience or aspirations of a warrior caste, were the shared property of all classes and group because for audiences in eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries the heroic epic was history, in it the historical tradition of earlier ages was alive.”\(^7^8\) The two European epics which faithfully follow this historical tradition and whose heroes are considered to be the outstanding examples of chivalrous knights are the *Chanson de Roland* from France and *El Cantar del Mio Cid* from Spain.

The *Chanson de Roland* is the earliest example of epic poems known as *chanson de geste* and it typically serves as the standard by which other works of the genre are judged. It was originally composed around the twelfth century by an unknown writer, but *Roland’s* popularity caused the poem to undergo numerous revisions by other authors. For example, the following poems by different authors all recount Roland’s action at Roncevaux through a different perspective: a rhyme titled *Chanson de Roncevaux*, at the end of the twelfth century, a Latin *Carmen de proditione Guenonis* during the mid-thirteenth, and a *Chronicle of Turpin*.\(^7^9\) The text is based on the Battle of Roncevaux in 778 between the Franks and the Basques, which has been romanticized as the major conflict between the Christians and the Muslims. The poem’s protagonist is based on the historical figure Roland, governor of the Breton March. His only historical attestation is in Einhard’s biography of Charlemagne, *Vita Caroli Magni*, when the


\(^7^9\) Jackson, 172.
author discusses those who died at the battle of Roncevaux: “In this battle died Egghard, who was in charge of the King’s table, Anshelm, the Count of the Palace, and Roland, Lord of the Breton Marches, along with great number of others.”

As in most epics, there is a typical hero, in this case Roland, who is brave, loyal and honorable. His antagonist is his stepfather Ganelon, the treacherous villain who contrives the attack that ultimately killed Roland. The poem begins with a description of how Ganelon安排s for Roland to be selected as the leader of the rearguard and be attacked by the Saracens. His reason to betray his stepson, apart from envy, is that Roland nominates him to be the messenger for the peace negotiations between the Franks and the Saracens. Although Roland considered this role an honorable one and had no ulterior motive, Ganelon believed that his stepson was hoping for his death at the hands of the enemy. When Roland’s army is ambushed in the Roncevaux pass, Roland proudly refuses to blow his horn or Olifant, claiming that the rearguard could defeat the pagans. Yet, terribly outnumbered, the battle became impossible for the Franks. With many valiant kills and a tremendous show of strength, Roland dies after blowing too hard on the horn-- not to ask for help, but so that Charlemagne would honor their deeds and take revenge on their enemies. Roland’s demise is considered to be a martyr’s death, and as soon as he dies the Archangel Michael takes his soul directly to the heavens. When Charlemagne and his army finally reach the battlefield, they find only the dead bodies and that the pagans had fled. They subsequently chase them into the river, where the infidels die. While the Christians are burying and mourning their dead, Baligant, emir of Babylon and ally of the Saracen king, Marsille, attacks Charlemagne, but is killed by the Franks in another glorious battle. In the end, Charlemagne’s army conquers the Saracens, and King Marsille dies of a

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80 Barber, The Reign of Chivalry, 48
wound Roland had previously given him. Ganelon’s treachery is discovered, and after his friend, Pinabel, loses a “trial by battle” on his behalf, he is sentenced to death and is torn limb by limb by running horses. Also, those who pledged in favor of Ganelon are hanged as example against supporting treachery.

It is clear that the poem is about Roland’s actions in battle. The description of the battle occupies almost fifteen hundred lines of the poem. During the confrontation Roland is praised for his outstanding bravery, skills and loyalty to his comrades. Prowess and military efficiency, traits valued in chivalric handbooks, are seen throughout the entirety of the battle. Moreover, as in chivalric handbooks, these qualities are directly praised within the poem, as evident when Turpin is spurring the dying Roland on:

You are doing well!
That sort of valor any knight must have
Who bears arms and sits astride a good horse!
He must be strong and fierce in battle
Otherwise he is not worth four pennies...

Loyalty to one’s comrade is also very important in the poem and it is shown in how the events of the fight are portrayed. The reader is able to see what is happening during the conflict through pairs of different knights locked in battle. Together the knights show a concern for each other’s wellbeing, and at the same time they complement each other during the battle by matching forces. Almost like film, the same occurrences are repeated from the perspective of different soldiers, clearly showing that the focus of the poem is on the confrontations and the actions of the men. Their loyalty is also shown during the fight when several Frankish lords ride

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81 Barber, The Reign of Chivalry, 48
out to avenge their fallen brothers. The following lines narrate an instance that illustrates all of these elements:

123
The count Roland, his sword with blood is stained,
Well has he heard what way the Franks complained;
Such grief he has, his heart would split in twain:
To the pagan says: "God send thee every shame!
One hast thou slain that dearly thou'lt repay."
He spurs his horse, that on with speed doth strain;
Which should forfeit, they both together came.

124
Grandonie was both proof and valiant,
And virtuous, a vassal combatant.
Upon the way there, he has met Roland;
He'd never seen, yet knew him at a glance,
By the proud face and those fine limbs he had,
By his regard, and by his contenance;
He could not help but he grew faint thereat,
He would escape, nothing avail he can.
Struck him the count, with so great virtue, that
To the nose-plate he's all the helmet cracked,
Sliced through the nose and mouth and teeth he has,
Hauberk close-mailed, and all the whole carcass,
Saddle of gold, with plates of silver flanked,
And of his horse has deeply scarred the back;
He's slain them both, they'll make no more attack:
The Spanish men in sorrow cry, "Alack!"
Then say the Franks: "He strikes well, our warrant." 83

This passage not only shows Roland’s great strength, but also emphasizes his prowess, loyalty and comradeship. These qualities are what the poem describes as a knight’s virtues. During their fight Roland and his army show “strict discipline and military decorum” and do not charge recklessly, nor do they stop in the midst of battle to strip the corpses of the adversary as Homeric warriors often do. As Dorothy Sayers argues, “Behind the savage simplicity of the battle-scenes,

one feels a strict sense of decorum at work.”84 This sense of decorum brings to mind how later Charny and Bonet will constantly praise military tactics instead of individual display in their handbooks.

The deaths of Roland and his peers are also epitomic examples of chivalry, since many of the chivalric handbooks proclaimed that a death in battle was the ideal for any true knight; “a noble death is the crown of a noble life” as Dorothy Sayers states.85 In the poem the author depicts what can be considered the different types of chivalric deaths, the most chivalrous being attributed to Roland, the second and third to Oliver and Archbishop Turpin respectively who stand by him when all the rest are slain. Assigning levels to the type of chivalric deaths that knights could achieve in a battle, the warrior-priest Turpin would receive the third level (the fourth being to die while fighting in battle), since he not only died next to the hero, but his last action was to aid another. Roland’s lament towards him only adds to Turpin's esteem:

Ah, debonair, thou good and noble knight!
Now I commend thee to the great Lord of might:
Servant more willing than thee He shall not find.
Since the Apostles no prophet was thy like
For to maintain the Faith, and win mankind.
May thy soul meet no hindrance in her flight,
And may Heav’n’s gate to her stand open wide!86

The second level of a chivalric death could be attributed to Roland’s companion, Oliver. Oliver dies as a result of an enemy blow to the back, which at the time was thought to be both treacherous and unbefitting conduct for a knight. Since Oliver was considered an unequaled warrior there was no possibility for an honorable defeat by any “acceptable” means. Therefore,

85 Ibid., 36.
86 The Song of Roland, 166, p. 137.
his death being in this false manner not only inspires greater hatred towards the enemy, but it also reveals him to be a great knight who was only defeated by shameful means:

Their alcaliph upon a sorrel rode,
And pricked it well with both his spurs of gold;
Struck Oliver, behind, on the back-bone,
His hauberk white into his body broke,
Clean through his breast the thrusting spear he drove;

... Then Roland looked upon Olivier's face;
Which was all wan and colorless and pale,
While the clear blood, out of his body sprayed,
Upon the ground gushed forth and ran away.
"God!" said that count, "What shall I do or say?
My companion, gallant for such ill fate!
Ne'er shall man be, against thee could prevail.
... And with these words upon his horse he faints.  

Similarly, Roland is also too grand to be slain by the enemy. Instead, he dies by his own magnificence when he blows too hard on the Olifant and bursts his temples. His death, like Oliver’s, is quite moving; however, Roland’s death is even more spectacular and would be classified under the first and most prestigious level of chivalric deaths, since as soon as he expires the author writes that God sent the Archangel Michael to lead him to heaven:

But Roland felt that death had made a way
Down from his head till on his heart it lay;
Beneath a pine running in haste he came,
On the green grass he lay there on his face;
His olifant and sword beneath him placed,
Turning his head towards the pagan race,
... And for his sins his glove to God upraised.

God sent him down His angel cherubin,
And Saint Michael, we worship in peril;
And by their side Saint Gabriel alit;

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So the count's soul they bare to Paradise.\textsuperscript{88}

Although Roland is the hero of the epic, he is not perfect. He is generous, brave, loyal and affectionate, but he is also “rash, arrogant, outspoken to a fault.”\textsuperscript{89} His pride is what brought upon their misfortune; yet, as Jackson argues, “it is the superhuman, even the bad, qualities of Roland which make him interesting. The author perceived that in epics...there is more joy over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just men. Roland’s defiance and his final realization of his faults grip the readers’ interest.”\textsuperscript{90} However, if one compares him to his companions Oliver and Turpin, it is possible to see that they as a group represent the ideal knight of chivalry. Oliver is reasonable, intelligent, and, unlike Roland, is humble. It is he who tells Roland to sound the Olifant when there is a chance for them to be saved. Turpin is the mediator who intervenes in the argument between Roland and Oliver, finding a solution that pleased everybody. Together they represent the perfect knight: brave, intelligent, proud, wise, generous, militarily efficient, and loyal. The fact that none of them is perfect by themselves makes the poem more believable, especially to the contemporary audience. The readers still have figures to admire, but these characters also have faults that make them more realistic than what was offered in other epics and romances with nearly supernatural heroes.

\textit{Chanson de Roland} is an epic that celebrates battles, national identity, and chivalry. It is simple in its construction: it is written in verse but does not rhyme, and, almost like a drama, there are not any stage directions except the “actor's” deeds. As W.P Ker states, in epics what is important is the \textit{characters}, “they are not figures ‘animating’ a landscape; what the landscape means to the poet’s audience is determined by the character of his personages.” In fact, the

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., stanza 176, p. 143.
\textsuperscript{89} Sayers, 13,
\textsuperscript{90} Jackson, 167.
success of an epic was largely dependent on the poet’s power of representing and imagining the characters.\footnote{Ker, 20, 18.} It is a simple epic; “it delights in action and broad description, yet concentrates essentially upon one fatal action and its consequences,”\footnote{Jackson, 166.} \textit{Roland} may be simple, especially when compared to the works of Homer, but it is no less powerful. The characters are endearing and the fight scenes are captivating. The epic is truly about war, loyalty, chivalry and love of one’s country. It is not an example of realism in the literary sense, but it has a factual foundation based on actual feudal and personal relationships between nobles (however idealized their relationships may be), the nature of which is illustrated through details of combat and life. As Jackson argues: “there are no elaborate codes, no principles, no artificialities. The absence of such elaborate codes of behavior is probably the most obvious difference between the \textit{Chanson de Roland} and the Arthurian romances and nowhere is this difference more obvious than in the treatment of women.”\footnote{Jackson, 170.} It is not a story about ladies, enchantments or otherworldly adventures. In \textit{Chanson de Roland}, martial prowess is the manliest virtue. There is a heroine in the poem, Aude, Roland’s betrothed, but her only role is to swoon and die as soon as she hears of Roland’s death. At no time does Roland think of her during battle, except at the end when he and Oliver (also engaged) regret that they will never see their loved ones again. Yet, the knights' lives are not affected by them, nor are there any idealization of women in the poem. Charlemagne, France and their friends are foremost in the warriors' thoughts; thus, in the poem the chivalric ideals are loyalty to lord, friend and country.\footnote{Barber, \textit{The Reign of Chivalry}, 49.} The world of Roland is a “man’s world,” where action is
motivated by notions of personal honor, glory in this realm and rewards in the next, as well as the desire to serve France.\textsuperscript{95}

Like \textit{Chanson de Roland}, \textit{El Cantar del Mio Cid} is an epic that highly values loyalty--loyalty to the king, friends and family. Honor is also of utmost importance, since it drives the plot forward. \textit{El Cantar del Mio Cid} is the oldest Castilian epic poem, written around the late twelfth and early thirteenth century, forty years after \textit{Chanson de Roland}. It belongs to the secular literature, oftentimes classified as “juglaria”--regarding the “juglares,” wandering minstrels who performed and edited what became the basis of the Spanish \textit{cantares de gesta}.\textsuperscript{96} Like their French counterparts, the final written versions of \textit{cantares de gesta} were polished works that had been altered from their oral origins. However, although the \textit{cantares} are very similar in style and topic to the French \textit{chansons} the Spanish versions are more realistic in tone. For instance, in \textit{El Cantar del Mio Cid} there are no dragons to slay, no portrayals of superhuman strength, nor do the heroes experience any divine intervention. This is probably due to the fact that twelfth century Spanish society was very different from twelfth century French society. By the time \textit{Roland} was written down, the Saracens were no longer a serious threat to France, and the Carolingian Age held a prominent place in the people’s memories and hence was idealized in their poems. Spain on the other hand, had continuous struggles against the Muslim kingdoms in the south. The struggle had periods of rest and decreased danger, while even alliances were sometimes made, but overall war was an ever-present threat. The resulting society was one that accepted this as part of life, and was often prepared for battle. Bearing arms was seen as a practical precaution, and anybody who could afford to do so owned horses and armor. The Spanish social hierarchy mostly depended on political and economic power, which was not

\textsuperscript{95} Jackson, 170.
\textsuperscript{96} R. Mendez Pidal, \textit{La España del Cid: Volumen 1} (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1956).
necessarily based on lineage. Calvary men, called *caballeros villanos*, could be small landowners, though not necessarily vassals, who fought in their own interest or for the king.  

*El Cantar del Mio Cid* is rooted in these circumstances. Unlike most epics that retell the story of a hero from previous centuries, *El Cantar* retells the story of Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, El Cid, a contemporary soldier, from his biography, *Historia de Roderici*, written not long after his death. In fact Rodrigo’s exploits were celebrated even before his death in the Latin poem known as the *Carmen Campidoloris*, written c. 1093-1094. *Historia de Roderici* is a Latin narrative of his life and exploits during exile, and is the inspiration for the Spanish poem. The text's authorship is still under question, but it is believed that a witness to the events might have written it. Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar was born into the rank of Baronet (*infanzon*) in the village of Vivar, near Burgos c. 1043. He served as a standard bearer to Sancho II of Castile, who was murdered at the siege of Zamora in 1072. Since the new king, King Alfonso IV, was Sancho’s brother and enemy, the monarch had an uneasy relationship with Rodrigo. As a result Rodrigo was banished twice from Castile, first from 1081 to 1087 and again in 1089 to 1092. During his first exile, Rodrigo was under the service of Moorish Emir, Mutanam of Saragossa, aiding him in his wars with his younger brother al-Hayyib, Emir of Lerida, and Berenguer Ramon II, Count of Barcelona. During his second exile Rodrigo continued some of the campaigns he had started earlier, taking prisoner the Count of Barcelona for the second time. However, in 1092 he began the siege of Valencia, a city under Moorish control, and conquered it in 1094. In 1099 he died in Valencia. Three years later his widow, Jimena Diaz, brought to the Castile his embalmed remains and buried him in the monastery of San Pedro de Cardeña near Burgos. This interment

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97 Richard Fletcher, *The Quest for the Cid* (New York: Knopf, 1990)
98 Then word *Cid* is from Arabic origin, *sidi* or Sayyid an honorable title similar to the medieval English *Sir or Lord. Mio Cid* (My Cid) is an extremely honorific variation.
99 Fletcher, 20.
attracted pilgrimages and gave rise to a tomb-cult that most likely included “junglares” who recited poems about his exploits and led to the extant poem *El Cantar del Mio Cid*.100

The poem is written in Castilian, and its approximately 4,000 lines are divided into three cantares: Cantar del Destierro, Cantar de las Bodas and Cantar de la afrenta de Corpes101. The story follows Diaz de Vivar’s actions during exile with some fictional alterations. El Cid is falsely accused of stealing money from the King Alfonso VI of Castile and Leon so that he is forced into exile. However, he regains the king’s confidence by participating in campaigns against the Moors that led to the conquering of Valencia. His honor being restored, the king marries his daughters to the princes of Carrion. However, the princes show themselves to be cowards when compared to El Cid’s men, and they feel humiliated. In revenge they beat their new wives and leave them for dead in the forest. El Cid demands justice from the king, and the princes (*infantes*) are forced to not only return the dowry, but fight in a duel in which they are defeated and lose all honor. In the end the Cid’s daughters are married to the *infantes* of Navarre and Aragon.

It is apparent that the goal of the poem is to present El Cid as a hero. However, although he is strong and combative, the qualities that are most highly exalted are his generalship, devotion to his family and religion, generosity, courtesy, discretion as well as his observance of legal procedures.102 He is portrayed to be more than other men; his is worth more or “vale mas.” Like Roland, Rodrigo is fearless in battle although, unlike Roland, he is humble and reasonable. He is already an old man, something not common in epic heroes; therefore he possesses knowledge and pragmatism that young age seems to have denied Roland. Critics like Ian

100 Vidal, Fletcher.
101 Song of the Exile, Song of the marriage, and Song of the insult of the Corpes. R. Fletcher, 191.
Michael have argued that Rodrigo is “the amalgam of the poetic Roland’s youthful boldness and Charlemagne’s elderly caution.”\(^{103}\)

Another difference found between the Cid and Roland is Rodrigo’s humility and modest birth. The Cid was a common Castilian landowner ready to take up arms when the occasion demanded it, a condition most likely due to the historical discrepancies that existed between contemporary Spanish and French societies. When an enemy is trying to taunt Rodrigo, he mockingly refers to his humble origin:

\begin{quote}
Quien nos darie nuevas de Mio Cid el de Bivar?
Fuesse a Rrio d’Ovirna los molinos picar
E prender maquilas, como lo suele far!
Quil darie con los Carion a casar?\(^{104}\)
\end{quote}

The Cid was in no way poor, but was not born into notoriety or great wealth either; he was man of the land who achieved his fame through his deeds. The Cid’s humility is also shown in his interactions with others, including the Moors who were considered inferior beings. The poem seems to exalt humility over excessive pride, especially when that pride is unearned. For example, the infantes of Carrion are almost comical characters with a ridiculous sense of pride that is not supported by any deeds. In contrast to them the Cid is a humble man with a repertoire of great deeds, and is the hero of the poem.

The Cid’s treatment of the Moors is extremely realistic. He treats them well if it serves him to do so, and if he needs their wealth, he takes it. A topic hardly discussed in epics, but thoroughly discussed in handbooks is the collection of spoils. In tournaments, (the embodiment of chivalry when there was no war), the main reason for combat was to collect spoils from the

\(^{103}\) Michael, 5.
\(^{104}\) “Since when we receive honour from my Cid of Vivar? Let him go now to the River Ubierna and look after his mills, and be paid in corn as he used to do! Who gave him the right to marry into the Carrion family?”
other competitors. In war it was through conquest and victories that a knight had a chance of bettering his situation and acquiring vast quantities of wealth. Geoffroi de Charny maintains that a knight is more chivalrous if he goes to fight in campaigns for glory and honor instead of booty. Yet, he clarifies that if spoils are won there is no loss of chivalry. In another scene, the Cid took record of all of his men in order to divide and secure the spoils; if any decided to flee battle he kept the spoils and divided them between his loyal men:

Si vos quisieredes, Minaya, quiero saber recabbdlo de los que son aquí e conmigo ganaron algo; meter lo he en escrito e todos sean contados, que su algunos’ furtare o menos le fallaren, el aver me abra a tornar a aquellos mis vassallos que curian a valencia, e andan arobdando

Not only does this passage show the importance that spoils had for knights, but it shows that the Cid was, first of all a good general, and that his commitment to chivalric ideals caused him to believe that if a knight did not earn the spoils through battles, he did not deserve them. The poem's realistic tone provides the perfect lens through which to see the characteristics of chivalry, since at times it resembled a chivalric handbook itself. Actions and manners of thinking such as these serve as very similar examples of the precepts that will be later written in the handbooks.

There is obviously much realism in El Cantar, but like Chanson de Roland it is still fiction. For is true that El Cid was truly exiled by Alfonso VI, defeated the count of Barcelona, captured Valencia, was victorious over the Almoravides, as well as that Doña Jimena was really

105 De Charny, 51.
106 If you agree, Minaya, I should like to have a written record of the men here at present who have won riches for themselves while they were fighting under me, so that if any man goes off secretly or is found missing he will be obliged to return his share of the spoils. This I shall distribute among those of my vassals who are on patrol duty outside Valencia. El Cantar, 89, Stanza 76.
his wife.\textsuperscript{107} However, the poet did take certain liberties; for instance, his daughters never married any infantes, (meaning that therefore the forest scene was entirely fabricated), and some names were changed. What it is most apparent though in \textit{El Cantar} are the patterns of life and thought within twelfth-century Castile that the poem illustrates. This is why the chivalric actions taken by the text's characters are so important, since they show what was valued at the time and what was expected of other knights. Although battles were important in the poem, war took up much less space in \textit{El Cantar} than in other epics. If Roland was the ideal warrior-knight, El Cid was the ideal warrior-adventurer. More than a century later, the chivalric author Geoffroi de Charny exhorted his knights to go and find their honor and fortune through adventure far from their homes:

\begin{quote}
We should therefore, be glad to listen to, behold, and honor those who have been on distant journeys to foreign parts, for indeed no one can travel so far without being many times in physical danger. We should for this reason honor such men-at-arms who at great expense, hardship and grave peril undertake to travel to see distant countries and strange things.\textsuperscript{108}
\end{quote}

The Cid did exactly that (although forced to do so through exile); “his exploits were the dream of many a lesser knight in an age where it was still possible to carve out a domain by sheer force of arms.”\textsuperscript{109}

Another chivalric quality that is strongly evident in the poem is loyalty to one’s lord or king. The Cid is presented as extremely loyal to his king Alfonso VI, even though the king treated him unjustly. When he conquered Valencia he pledged life-long loyalty to his king, and during his exile he sent gifts to Alfonso. He even married his daughters to the infantes of Carrion because the king wanted it, ignoring his own misgivings. When the infantes dishonored his

\textsuperscript{107} Fletcher, 193.
\textsuperscript{108} De Charny, 51.
\textsuperscript{109} Barber, \textit{The Knight and Chivalry}, 64.
family, he sought the king’s justice and was confident in the King’s judgment, rather than take personal vengeance. The Cid is presented as a Castilian loyalist embodying virtues both martial and civic, a law-abiding citizen as well as a good family man and soldier.\footnote{Fletcher, 194.}

Yet the chivalric quality exalted the most in the poem is honor, and the virtue was praised in a similar manner to the Chivalric handbooks, where honor was the most important quality a knight had to possess. The Cid’s honor was compromised when he was banished; therefore it was of utmost importance for him to regain it through his deeds. In \textit{El Cantar} this was the main motivation for the Cid’s actions. He first needed to regain his honor after the exile and later when the \textit{infantes} dishonored him through the abuse of his daughters. However, of more importance is the fact that both times he “lost” his honor he regained it through battle. During his exile he fought against the Moors to show the king and others that he was honorable. On the second occasion with the \textit{infantes}, he challenged them to a duel with his men, where their loss gave him back his honor at the same time they lost theirs. When his loyal servant went to King Alfosco bearing gifts and recounting the Cid’s impressive actions, the reader can not only see El Cid’s immense loyalty, but how through battles and victories he regained his honor and glory:

\begin{flushright}
¡Merced, señor Alfonso, por el amor del Criador!
Besavavos las manos Mio Cid lidiador,
Los pies e las manos, como a tan buen señor,
Quel’ayades merced, ¡si vos vala el Criador!
Echastele de la tiera, non a la vuestra amor,
Maguer en tierra agena el bien faze lo so:
Ganada a Xerica, e a Onda por nombre
Priso a Almenar e a Murviedro que es mayor,
Assi fizo Cebolla e adelant Castejon
E Pena Cadiella que es una pena fuert:
Con aquestas todas de Valencia es señor,
Obispo fizo de su mano el buen Campeador
E hizo cinco lides campales e todas las arranco.
Grandes son las ganancias que dio el Criador.\footnote{Fletcher, 194.}
\end{flushright}
After reading this passage it is inevitable to see the Cid as the ideal hero—loyal, practical, reasonable, intelligent, courageous and victorious. *El Cantar* truly shows that chivalry was indeed a warrior code. Just like the chivalric handbooks, *El Cantar* promoted the achievement of glory, fortune and honor through prowess and victory.

The warrior knight found in the chivalric handbooks is no different from the heroes found in epics like *Chanson de Roland* and *El Cantar del Mio Cid*. Epics such as these show how chivalry was an entirely martial concept before it became seen as mere courtly behavior. Honor was gained through battles and battles alone. Proper warriors' conduct was loyal to their king and companions, and deadly to their enemies. Since the poems were uncompromisingly Christian in nature, they also showed the knights to be devoted Christians, which was another common chivalric trait. Although some female characters did arise, and in Rodrigo’s case he was devoted to his family, the women were not the center of the knights’ thoughts. For the Cid, restoring his and his family's honor was his main concern, and for Roland it was being loyal and honoring Charlemagne. But times changed, and so did literary preferences. Charlemagne gave way to Arthur, Roland and the Cid to the Knights of the Round Table; going to battles to win honor became going to battles to impress a lady. As Dorothy Sayers argued, epics with the passing of

111 A favor, my Lord Alfonso, in God’s name!
The warrior Cid makes his most profound obeisance to his excellent lord;
He begs you to grant it, as you hope for God’s protection.
You banished him and he is still in disgrace,
But he continues doing mighty deeds in a strange land.
He was Jerica and Onda, Almenara and better still, Murviedro;
He has also captured Cebolla, Castellon
And the strong fortress of Benicadell.
He is master of all these and lord of Valencia as well;
By his own power he has appointed a bishop there,
And he has fought and won five pitched battles.
God gave him rich gains. *El Cantar de Cid*, Stanza 82, p. 92
time were to be replaced by the rhymed couplets, flowing on unchecked, elegant, and refined.” The same can be said of the knights; the rough knights like Roland, Rodrigo, Oliver and Tarquin were replaced by the elegant and refined courtly knights of romances. “By the middle of the twelfth century Epic was out and Romance was in” and so chivalry changed.  

Romances: The Birth of the Courtly Knight

Ideals of courtly behavior and courtly love did not fully emerge from romances, although these traits certainly were the ones that developed the notion of chivalry into what it is known today. Instead, courtly ideals originated in Germany during the tenth century; the first evidence of this is a difference in style within bishops’ biographies. These bishops were temporal lords themselves, and their biographies usually emphasized their ascetic feats, but during the early eleventh century the bishops began to be praised mainly for their behavior at court, for their learned and noble demeanor, as well as for a sophistication of both manners and morals. Although these texts were written by and for clerics, many of the literary techniques and motifs that were used by these authors also found their way into the works of secular poets and storytellers. All of these productions were preserved by monks, bishops, and traveling scholars.

The word courtly, *curialis*, first emerged in the period around 1060-80. German clerks wrote poems to instruct the knight on proper behavior in court, and as court life developed so did

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112 Sayers, 29.
113 Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry*, 68.
114 Ibid.
the notion of courtly love. As Edmond Faral stated: “The knight in love is the literary invention of the clerk.”\textsuperscript{115} Richard Barber concurred:

Knighthood began as a stranger to the world of courtesy; masculine, aggressive, it was a battle with rules and limits, but its ethos was that of do as you would be done by. Its heroes and feats of arms were those of the \textit{Iliad} and \textit{Chanson de Roland}. The distinctive touch of chivalry was missing; the play lacked its heroine. When the knight’s lady first appears in the literature of the mid-twelfth century, she unlike anything before or since, was unrivalled in her command over men’s hearts, a remote, almost divine being.\textsuperscript{116}

With the appearance of the romance, the lady, not honor, became the inspiration behind the knight’s deeds. Courtly love was literarily stylized and complex. Imitating the theatrical courtly manners, the extravagant and exaggerated courtly fashions, courtly love became just as complicated and elaborate.\textsuperscript{117} Chivalry, then, became indistinguishable from the knights' worship of a lady. No longer were the knights in fiction interested in gaining glory through leading men into violent battles and imitating the renowned warriors of epics or biographies. Rather, in the romance a show of prowess was not for glory, but to gain a token of the lady’s affection. Instead of being motivated by his love for country and lord, her love now protected him from his enemies and gave him strength to face daunting odds. The knight was no longer a vassal to the king or lord, but a servant to his lady:

The clear lesson of these stories is that allegiance to a lady acted as a source of inspiration to knights, providing them with the incentive to perform even more daring deeds of arms. The longed-for lady was the source and begetter of excellence in her lover, the spur to a spiritually ennobling passion in he who fell under her spell.\textsuperscript{118}

Ladies had appeared in medieval literature before, although their role was significantly smaller and much different. For example, in \textit{Chanson de Roland}, Roland was betrothed to Aude, but she is a shadowy figure whose only action was to die of grief at the news of Roland’s death.

\textsuperscript{115} Edmond Faral, quoted in Barber, \textit{The Knight and Chivalry}, 71.
\textsuperscript{116} Barber, \textit{Knight and Chivalry}, 71.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{118} Saul, 268.
Other epics, such as *Chanson de Guillaume*, which followed the fight of Guillaume d’Orange with the heathens, did include a strong female character, but she was admired for entirely different reasons than the ladies of the romance. In the *Chanson de Guillaume*, the heroine, Guibourc, is considered to be a very individualistic character that does not possess a counterpart in the *chansons* or romances.\(^{119}\) She is practical, smart, beautiful, and extremely brave and devoted to her husband. She is not like the blindly devoted figures found in many epics (i.e. *Roland*), nor is she devoid of her own will. Unlike the female characters in romances, the poet admired her for her heroism in the defense of Orange as much as for her beauty. Their relationship was “as much that of companions in arms as of husband and wife.”\(^{120}\) In keeping with what epics admired in the hero, Guibourc was admired for her bravery and courage in matters of war.

Although romances focused more on women than epics did, women were not the main focus of the story; the male lover and his longings were the true focus. The lady was praised for what she was able to inspire in her admirer. The better the knight's deeds, the more she was praised. In one sense, the romances elevated women’s status, since it gave them power over men whereby they could play games with them for their favor. But in another way they became mere objects of male desire and “appendages of men in a male-dominated society.”\(^{121}\)

What was innovative and characteristic of the love found in romances was that it was not supposed to lead to marriage. Longing was idealized in this genre; the more passionate a knight was, the nobler he was considered to be. Richard Barber defined it as a “masochistic attitude” where, “In its purest sense joy d’amour was associated with the restraint and yearning of

\(^{119}\) Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry*, 56.  
\(^{120}\) Ibid., 74.  
\(^{121}\) Saul, 262.
fin’amors and unconnected with an ultimate reward.” Because longing was what was admired, it was inconsequential if one or both of the lovers were married to another, although if the relationship was consummated the lovers were usually repudiated by the authors. Sexual intercourse, then, was not always the desired outcome, and in some romances the poets chastised the lovers for engaging in such activity. This was not necessarily because the flesh was thought to be evil or because the love had to be solely spiritual, but because renunciation prolonged desire. Since longing was the most valued point in the relationship, after attainment the lovers’ relationship would either lose its purity or its participants would lose interest due to the lack of further available conquest. Moreover, something negative would happen to the couple in the plot either to emphasize the wonders of the relationship before desire was actualized or to stir longing again in the lovers by some form of separation. An example of a relationship gone amiss after consummation occurred in Le Morte D’Arthur between Lancelot and Guinevere. After Lancelot and Guinevere consummated their relationship, Guinevere was presented as an almost despicable character, manipulative and plotting the murders of those who know of her adultery. Thus, after sex, their relationship was no longer pure or new.

By the twelfth century King Arthur was already a popular figure in England; however, Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Historia Regum Britannia certainly influenced in his later fame. About one-fifth of Geoffrey’s book is dedicated to the story of Arthur and his court. Arthur was described as the ideal hero and king-- he had multiple lands, was victorious in his conquests, and had a splendid court full of ladies and knights. Widespread interest in the Arthurian tales eventually caused Arthur’s court to become the environment in which all romances were set, and

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122 Barber, The Knight and Chivalry, 90.
123 Jackson, 83.
“romances soon were read as sources for historical details to use for chivalric ceremonies.”

There were many differences in how the figure of Arthur was portrayed; for example, the most renowned version of his story is Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur*, in which Arthur is a central character. In Malory’s version he is a noble, though tragic, hero who was betrayed by those closest to him. Yet he is still strong, just, honorable and sympathetic. In other versions Arthur is a background character, a coward, or an old and tired man, a cuckold who could not prevent his wife from becoming a mistress for one of his knights.

Regardless of the variations, Arthur and his court became the new chivalric ideal. All knights were considered worthy, honorable, and in keeping with the ideal if they belonged to his court; “once this fact became established as a literary convention every hero, whether originally connected with Arthur or not, was made to establish his credential by moving in the Arthurian circle.” For example, Lancelot’s character can be traced back to Irish and Welsh mythological characters with no prior connection to Arthur. The same can be said of Gawain, from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, whose origin had no trace to Arthur, although he later became one of Arthur’s greatest knights.

Sir Gawain is a prominent figure in English romances, through which authors explored the dilemmas of knighthood. Figuring as prominently as Arthur himself, Gawain is the unchallenged hero, the model of masculinity dedicated to fighting. If he died in the poem, his loyalty always received the most attention. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is considered to be a vehicle for the dilemmas and conflicts inherent in the ideal of knighthood because it put into question the idea of loyalty and honor to save one’s life.

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124 Leyerle, 135.
125 Versions by Chretien, Wolfram, Gottfried, Hartman and Thomas of Britain. Jackson, 84.
126 Jackson, 86.
127 Saul, 309.
The story begins when the Green Knight enters King Arthur’s court and challenges anyone to strike him, knowing that he would return the strike in a year’s time. Gawain bravely accepts the challenge and beheads the Green knight. Picking up the severed head, he tells it the place where they would meet again. By Christmas of the following year, Gawain goes to the appointed location, takes refuge in Bertilak’s castle, and waits for the Green Knight. He and Bertilak make an arrangement that they would both share the spoils of the day, after Bertilak goes hunting and Gawain stays behind. While Bertilak is away, the lady of the house visits Gawain daily and kisses him; dutifully, Gawain kisses Bertilak on the cheek at the end of each day. However, on one occasion the lady gives Gawain a magic girdle that would protect him from any blow. This he did not give to Bertilak, and instead uses it in his fight against the Green Knight. When he manages to deflect one of the Green Knight's blows, the Knight reveals that he was Bertilak, and Gawain’s deceit comes to light. In the end, Gawain shamefully returns to King Arthur’s court wearing the girdle as a sign of his failure.\footnote{Anonymous, \textit{Sir Gawain and the Green Knight}, edited by Burton Raffel (New York: Signet Classics, 2009)}

When properly evaluated, the poem raises questions about Gawain's behavior and what he should have done. According to the standard of chivalry, he should have been true and given Bertilak everything that the lady gave him, even if it had cost him his life in the end, since death was to be preferred in this situation rather than dishonor. Through Gawain it is still possible to see some remnants of chivalry as a warrior code. In the early romances in which he is present, he is always shown to be brave, courageous, and chivalrous, a figure of honor. Although he acted dishonorably in his dealings with the Green Knight, his self-inflicted punishment of wearing the girdle to King Arthur’s court was considered to be honorable and the only method of redemption. Gawain’s mortification at retelling the events pertaining to the Green Knight is enough for the
court to forgive him. They even try to convince him that, instead of being a sign of shame, the girdle serves as a “baldric of group honor.” Yet Gawain’s refusal to feel better about his deeds shows that he possesses a good heart and loyalty to true honor, sentiments that allowed him to become the ideal hero. It was because of this unwavering adherence to the original code of chivalry that Gawain exerted such powerful appeal to the English author, for as Saul explained, “to them he was the archetype of the fighting knight, the essential foil to knightly heroes’ consuming erotic or mystical drives.” Nevertheless, as Romances became more popular, the concept of chivalry became even more distorted. According to Barber,

Gawain's unremorseful wenching and killing comes in for increasing disapproval. In the Vulgate Cycle Queste del Saint Graal he is the exemplar of the folly of worldly glory without God; and in La Mort le Roi Artu it is his stubborn pride that drives the tragedy to its last agonies, through his refusal to forgive Lancelot for the accidental killing of his brothers...The simple warrior seemed uncouth in the light of the newer, more polished ideals. Under pressure from those who saw chivalry as a potential religious ideal, secular knighthood had to clear itself of its worst faults, or stand condemned like Gawain.”

Romances, then, became a civilizing element of the harsh and violent world of the knight; romances humanized the fighting man, so that “what the Church had sought to do...the clerks achieved through secular exemplars.”

Lancelot on the other hand, becomes the ideal knight even though he was never more than a courtly knight and lover. From a secular perspective, he was perfect for the romance's standards--faithful to his lady and victorious in tournaments. On multiple occasions, his faithfulness to Guinevere leads him to abandon his honor as a knight and act as a fool to please her. The classic example is when she asked him to show his affection by performing badly in a

130 Saul, 310.
131 Barber, The Knight and Chivalry, 123.
132 Ibid., 72.
tourney; in the tournament he constantly misses the enemy, and even acts as if he is scared of them to the point that other knights jibe and mock him.\textsuperscript{133} Utter humiliation was the sign of utmost devotion in a romance; by this principle, Lancelot was the ideal knight. In a religious sense, however, Lancelot was not the ideal knight. While he was praised for his generosity and desire to be virtuous, his sexual relationship with Guinevere condemned him to impurity, and he to become the medieval example of spiritual aspirations versus flawed human nature.\textsuperscript{134}

Romantic honor was drastically different from how it was portrayed in the epics, and it was surrounded by conflict. There were two different aspects to Romantic honor: what people thought and the correspondence of their ideas with the ethical standards of a true knight. In romances, it was very common that one of the knight’s duties was to save the lady’s honor. This meant that nobody could know of his or her affair even if her honor had already been “lost” when she committed adultery. The other form of conflict that honor posed for the romantic knight was that he often had to choose between honor in bearing himself as a true knight and winning all battles or the honor gained by serving his lady faithfully. A classic example of this dilemma occurred when Lancelot was on his way to save Guinevere, and he hesitates to ride in a cart, since it was a vehicle meant for peasants and criminals. If he were to follow the conventional path to honor as a worthy knight, he should not have ridden the cart, but if he wished to gain honor by being the lady’s perfect servant he should have not hesitated to enter the vehicle; Guinevere sees his hesitation as imperfect dedication.\textsuperscript{135} In the romantic tradition honor

\textsuperscript{133} Chretien de Troyes, \textit{Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart}, translated by Professor Burton Raffel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997)
\textsuperscript{134} S. Humphreys Gurteen, \textit{The Arthurian Epic} (New York, Haskell House, 1965), 240.
\textsuperscript{135} Chretien de Troyes, \textit{Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart}, translated by Professor Burton Raffel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997)
was either a matter of public perception, as with the lady’s honor, or a personal evaluation as was apparent in Gawain’s refusal to be mollified and Lancelot’s initial hesitation.

However minimal or distorted, romances still have traces of the chivalry found in epics and handbooks. Even in Arthurian romances, chivalric qualities like those of epics are praised. An example of this was when the Lady of the Lake teaches Lancelot the duties of a knight:

She begins by explaining why knighthood was instituted: how all men had been equal, but as envy and greed increased, knights were appointed to defend the weak against the strong, and how the ‘tallest, strongest, fairest and most nimble; the most loyal and the bravest, those full of goodness of heart and body’, were chosen for the office. A knight should be ‘merciful without being uncouth, affable without being treacherous, kind towards the suffering, and generous. He must be ready to succor the needy and to confound robbers and murderers, a just judge without favor or hate.’ He must prefer death to shame. Chivalry was also instituted to defend the church.”

Though these qualities were found in epics and handbooks, romances did bring a significant addition to the code: romantic love. As Roland’s prowess became dated, it was the gentleness and devotion of Lancelot that prevailed. Ladies gained a higher status and were thought to possess some power over their suitors, yet this role remained elusive; “rarely is she subjected to the kind of psychological probing accorded to the man.” It is the man, the lover who is the main subject. In this respect, as Nigel Saul states, “we are reminded of one of the main characteristics of chivalry: its values were solidly masculine. Chivalry was the cultural expression of the rough world of the fighting man.” Nevertheless, this “rough world” had indeed changed with the romance. Early romances such as Sir Gawain do show a hero almost worthy of an epic, yet slowly even those traces were deemed undesirable within the same genre; Gawain's vilification in later romances stands as evidence to this fact. Although there are many other romances apart from the Arthurian ones, the behaviors exhibited by King Arthur and the Knights of the Round

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137 Saul, 270.
Table became the epitome of chivalry. Knights of the Round Table were expected to behave more nobly, more generously and in a more cultured manner than any other knights, either living or imaginary. No matter the variations among Arthur’s characters, his court was always a place of great splendor with a highly civilized code of behavior, and where great stress was laid on the influence of ladies. It has been this Arthurian idea of chivalry that has prevailed throughout time, and that centuries later become the inspiration behind many other literary works, such as Tennyson’s *Lady of Shallot*, Twain’s parody, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, and (with slight neo-pagan feminist undertones) Marion Zimmer Bradley’s *The Mist of Avalon*.138 These and many other authors have kept King Arthur’s Court, and the chivalry that it promoted, alive. As a result chivalry came to be perceived solely as a social code of knightly conduct wherein the life and manners of a knight at court where idealized; while knights were often expected to be victorious in war, the reasons for engaging in battles had changed completely, and now love was key to achieving chivalry.

Chapter III:

Chivalry in Practice: Incidents in the Hundred Years War

In peace there's nothing so becomes a man
   As modest stillness and humility:
But when the blast of war blows in our ears,
   Then imitate the action of the tiger;
Stiffen the sinews, summon up men of grosser blood,
   And teach them how to war.~ Henry V

If it is argued that chivalry was indeed a warrior code it is necessary to investigate if it was used during warfare. The medieval handbooks and fiction have shown that chivalry was a concept first and foremost to be applied on the battlefield, although with the rise of the Romance it started shifting to a less violent concept. Regardless of the fact that chivalry changed considerably between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, the abstract concept that it represented remained prominent, as was evident in the attention it received during the Middle Ages. Chivalry was truly important for medieval aristocratic society. It was the topic of their fiction and their handbooks, it was their guide to the ideal lifestyle. Historical attestations of banquets and tournaments reveal that these events were conducted almost exactly as they were represented in the literature, both in nonfiction and fiction; but if chivalry was a warrior concept, was it followed during battles as well?

Any study of chivalry is always conducted with some difficulty. Chivalry is an attractive ideal--in fact it seems to be the perfect ideal for medieval society--but one must avoid romanticizing it and its place within that society. Instead, one must attempt to analyze it as dispassionately as possible and avoid the typical reverential tone, for as Richard Kaeuper attests: “the great danger in the study of chivalry is to view this important phenomenon through the rose-tinted lenses of romanticism, to read chivalry in terms of what we want it to be rather than what

Romanticizing chivalry must be avoided in order to evaluate properly the relationship between the ideal and actuality, as well as to understand the linkage between chivalry and medieval issues like violence and public order. Knights themselves have been looked at through “rose-tinted lenses”; it is easy to be blinded by their shining armor and to believe that their actions usually followed the code, and that if they did not, without difficulty reasons are provided for their deviation. On the other hand, it is not enough to state simply that chivalry was just an ideal that nobody followed in battle, since if chivalry is judged in the same way as any other human ideal, it was probably implemented as much as any ideal typically is. Chivalry is a difficult concept to define. When analyzing romance literature and the handbooks, historians often find themselves struggling to achieve balance between the two extremes of warrior code and courtly code that are found in the era's primary sources. Violence in the Middle Ages has been typically referred to as brutal and savage. So where in this violent age did chivalry fit? If its place was among the knights in the battlefield, how faithfully was chivalry followed in battle? Was it followed at all? Analyzing various incidents that occurred during the Hundred Years War will aid in understanding chivalry’s link to actuality. The Hundred Years War represents the perfect setting for this study, since it not only lasted many years, but involved many different confrontations and key players. This variety provides a wider view of chivalry’s practice, since its use or lack of thereof cannot be attributed to the peculiarities of a single generation or group of people.

The Hundred Years War was not a continuous battle, but a series of sporadic conflicts between England and France that began in 1337 and lasted until 1453. Essentially, the dispute was over the control of the French throne, although it did not originate with this objective.

English monarchs’ claim to the French throne was based on Edward III’s mother, Isabel, who was King Charles’ sister. When Charles died childless, many thought that she or her son should have inherited the throne instead of her first cousin Philip VI. English envoys argued that there was no true precedent for a woman to be legally excluded from wearing the crown of France. Yet, the French refused, having no wish to be ruled by the “She-Wolf of France” and her hated lover Mortimer. It was not until later in the conflict that the French disinterred from their forgotten rules and documents the Salic Law of the ancient Franks that forbade inheritance by a woman or through the female line. When Edward III finally regained control of his kingdom, he was still too weak at home to dispute this law, and was preoccupied with keeping control of his Duchy of Guyenne in France. ¹⁴¹ The true conflict concerned Edward’s duty of homage towards the King of France. When William the Conqueror became king of England, he retained possession of the Duchy of Normandy; however, as rulers of Normandy and other territories in the continent, the English kings owed feudal homage to the king of France. This feudal relationship had been complicated since its origin, but it was not until Edward III refused to pay homage in the late 1330s that war was initiated. As Malcolm Vale states: “a conflict which had begun as a dispute between lord and vassal ended as a war of nations.”¹⁴²

Since the mid-thirteenth century there had been incessant quarreling over Guyenne’s boundaries and the respective powers of its Duke, the King of England. The question was whether the English monarchs had full sovereignty over the duchy or were subjects of the King of France. Previously, Edward II had refused to pay homage to the king of France, which resulted in the War of Saint-Sardos where he lost border territories to Charles. Edward III managed to get back some of the territory lost only by paying homage to Philip in 1331.

Yet the reason for these two nations going to war truly was not as simple as failure to render homage; there were also economic, political and personal factors to consider. As Kenneth Fowler claims: “it is now generally agreed that the causes of the war lay, not merely in the disrupted succession, but in the entire way in which the two countries were developing.”

Politically, the idea of homage by a king to another king would cause a rift between them, and the growing development of each country made the arrangement even more impossible to maintain. Desmond Seward explains that “the growing centralization and institutionalization of both countries was making the old feudal relationship unworkable.”

It was more than likely that war would eventually break out between England and France. The English king was in an untenable situation; an independent prince, he was subject to a monarch whose interest more often than not directly interfered with his own.

These interests greatly interfered in the economic realm. The relationship between Edward III and the Flemish towns was certainly influenced by the nature of the English wool trade. Although Flanders was a French fief with an aristocracy loyal to the French monarchy, the burgesses of its main towns were dependent on English wool. These burgesses strongly supported the English monarch; in fact, the first battles of the war were fought in Flanders. However, although the hostilities did more harm than good to the wool trade and to both country’s economy, it would be a mistake to attribute too much influence to the commercial sector. Commercial rivalry undoubtedly played its part in stimulating a conflict of interest and social unrest, but the alliances made by both France and England were mostly due to political

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reasons rather than economic ones. In fact, if the war is given a purely economic interpretation, it would be very difficult to explain the English victories during the war.

France during the early fourteenth century was a predominant power in the West, thriving and respected. Its towns and population were rapidly expanding. Froissart commented about France: “one may well marvel at the noble realm of France, therein are so many towns and castles, both in the distant marches and in the heart of the realm.” Its king, Philip VI, considered “the King of all earthly Kings,” was well established in his realm; and in essence, controlled the Papacy established in Avignon since 1309. England, on the other hand, was relatively poor, under populated, and was recovering from political strife. Edward III's rise to the throne was preceded by great political unrest that resulted in his father’s arrest and murder, as well as his guardian, de facto ruler Roger Mortimer, seizing control of the kingdom in his name. It was not until Edward III led a special operation to kill Mortimer that he gained control of his country. However, his control was not absolute, since he had to take into account Parliament’s wishes and submit his own to their judgment. Froissart commented on England that: “any man who is king of that country must conform to the will of the people and bow to many of their wishes. If he fails to do this, and misfortune comes to the country, he will be thrown over.”

Yet, regardless of the obviously uneven match between France and England, it was England that dominated the war in France until after Henry V.

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147 Ibid.
148 Perroy, 35.
149 Qtd. In Seward, 26.
150 Douglas, xv.
This discrepancy can be attributed to the military domain. France had a powerful military and French knighthood was considered Philip’s most important asset. Its members were described as to be “[of] good chivalry, strong of limb and stout of heart.”\footnote{Desmond Seward, \textit{The Hundred Years War} (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), 26.} Costly investment in their equipment and warhorses resulted in their possessing the best-equipped heavy armor in Western Europe. They were held to be a formidable army since they had “wrested Palestine from the infidel for a brief moment and had all but re-conquered Spain from the Moors.”\footnote{Ibid.} Yet, regardless of all their accomplishments and reputation, they lacked creativity in tactics. Apart from their cavalry charge, (which was unreinforced at best) they had evolved very little in the art of warfare and strategy. The English, on the other hand, had learned by constant confrontations with the Scots that infantry was sometimes superior to the mounted knight. Before there were any victories against Scotland, England had a dismal military record. The Scots were constantly raiding English towns, and almost all confrontation against them had resulted in English humiliation, including the 1327 campaign where Edward had to sign a peace treaty called the “Shameful Peace of Northampton.” Yet, in July 1333 at Halidon Hill, near Berwick, Edward managed to secure a crushing victory.\footnote{Magnus Magnusson, \textit{Scotland: The Story of a Nation} (London: HarperCollins, 2003)} Not only did he win the battle, but he also saw how a good combination of archers and infantry could turn the war in his favor.

Although the Scots were not nearly as well prepared an army as the French, Edward III’s constant campaigns against them helped restructure his army and military tactics--things that would prove pivotal during the Hundred Years War. However, his victories cannot be solely explained by the implementation of new tactics. Edward’s army was composed of mostly foot soldiers and archers, and unlike the mounted knights, these were not nobles, nor were they
familiar with feudal traditions or courtesies. This, then, presents a problem for the study of chivalry during the war. Should these soldiers’ actions be taken into consideration when evaluating the use of chivalry, since they were not familiar with it, or should only the knights’ actions be considered? Chivalry was essentially a code between the aristocracies, so only their practices will be considered, though their reactions to the lack of tradition among the lower classes will also be evaluated.

The Hundred Years war is renowned for its major battles; from the showdown at Crécy to Henry V’s Agincourt, the battles have captured the minds of historians, poets and common people alike. These confrontations are windows into the belligerents’ minds and martial progress. An evaluation of these skirmishes also is able to reveal the conduct of war at its most pivotal moments. Through the actions of English key players such as Edward III, The Black Prince, and Henry V in their respective battles, as well as the conduct of their opponents, it will be possible to understand how much chivalry was practiced and the way in which it was manifested.

The English decision to invade France did not occur immediately after talk of war had begun, nor even after war had been declared. Both kings at first were attempting to fund their war, create diplomatic alliances, and make truces. In 1334 Pope Clement VI arranged a peace conference between the English and the French. The English tried to discuss Edward’s claim to the throne, but the French refused to talk about the subject. As compensation to the throne the English asked for Guyenne’s borders to be expanded as well as to have full sovereign control over them, but the French, thinking they were in a position of power, only offered a slight increase in the frontier with the condition that one of Edward’s sons—not Edward himself—
would rule it as a vassal of the King of France.\textsuperscript{154} Failing in all attempts to negotiate a truce, war became imminent and was the only course of action available.

The first confrontation occurred at sea in 1340 and became known as the Battle of Sluys. Despite the fact that the English had obsolete ships—especially when compared to the battle-ready French ships—they still managed to overcome the French and destroy the whole fleet, except for a few vessels that managed to escape. This battle not only brought confidence to the English soldiers and civilians at home, but also prevented a possible French invasion and gave Edward control of the channel.\textsuperscript{155} Therefore, the war was restricted to French soil. However, while this battle was important, it did not give Edward much of an advantage. Though Phillip VI was a fan of tournaments and even suggested a trial by battle to settle the matter (an event that never took place regardless of England's enthusiasm and readiness to accept), he constantly avoided battle with the English. He instead ambushed the enemy's supply lines and outposts, so that it was not long before Edward ran out of supplies and had to return to England for more. Desmond Seward claims that “possibly the real drama of the early stages of the Hundred Years War is the herculean effort of both protagonists to harness the resources of their bewilderingly ramshackle and unwieldy states for a confrontation.”\textsuperscript{156} This certainly was the case for both nations. Although France was rich, it was difficult for Philip to tap into its wealth. Unlike England, France did not have a unified tax system and lacked a single consulting assembly.\textsuperscript{157} Edward III, despite his better control of England's wealth, was also faced with extreme difficulty when attempting to get the money to fund the war. The people were already over-taxed, and he was so deeply in debt that he had to flee in disguise to the Low Countries in order to escape his

\textsuperscript{154} Seward, 50. \\
\textsuperscript{155} Fowler, 56. \\
\textsuperscript{156} Seward, 35. \\
\textsuperscript{157} Perroy, 47.
creditors. Yet, both monarchs were able to come up with the money, a condition that had great consequences on their respective countries' economies.

Funding a war did indeed require great expense. In 1346, Edward sailed to France with “a thousand ships, pinnacles and supply vessels, carrying about 15,000 men. These men were composed of knights, lancer, bowmen (mounted and on foot) and knifemen.” His knights wore chainmail over a padded tunic that covered their whole body. They had steel breastplates and armor on their arms and feet. On their heads rested cone-shaped helmets with an occasional visor. The French wore plates on their shoulders and limbs, while their helmets had snout-like visors with holes for breathing. French horses also wore armor. Both English and French knights were equipped with a sword and dagger. On horseback, they would typically use a lance and shield, but also carried a short axe. Only the men at arms--knight-bannerets, knight-bachelors, and esquires--could afford the equipment. These men received a payment of 4s, 2s, and 1s (sou) a day respectively. Mounted archers were paid 6d a day—more than a master craftsman. The foot bowmen outnumbered these riding archers. Each archer carried at least two dozen arrows. It is quite well known that the long bow revolutionized medieval military tactics; having first used them during his Scottish campaign, Edward had learned to use these to his advantage in all confrontations, including the Battle of Sluys. The French were at a disadvantage when faced with this weapon, because they still preferred the crossbow, which, although faster once shot, took too long to load and left the shooter vulnerable. In addition, it

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160 Perroy, 45.
also traveled less distance than the long bow, so that its user was forced to engage the enemy at a closer distance and thus expose himself to greater danger.

Since funding an army was expensive, the English preferred to exhaust the enemy through the practice of chevauchées. Here is where the concept of chivalry's practice is most disputed. Chevauchées were part of the medieval concept of “total war” or dampnum, which consisted of completely destroying the enemy's landscape and people. As the English travelled through a town, they would burn fields, houses, and mills; would slit the throat of the villagers and their livestock; as well as rape and mutilate women. Neither Abbeys nor hospitals were spared. France was soon torn by flames, as was made evident by Froissart when he wrote that one of Edward’s advisors took a French cardinal up a tower to show him the devastation and said: “Sir, does it not seem to you that the silken thread encompassing France is broken?” At this the cardinal fell down ‘as if dead, stretched out on the roof on the tower from fear and grief.”

If a chivalrous knight was supposed to defend the weak, then how is it possible to explain the devastation that they inflicted on the non-combatants? The truth is that it is difficult to find an explanation that would justify (to a modern mind) the atrocious actions of English soldiers in France during a chevauchée. The peasants were the enemy, but they presented relatively little threat to the English army. This tactic seems to go against the idea of a merciful and honorable knight, and it was even questioned by contemporaries such as troubadour Girault de Borneil, who wrote: “Shame on a knight who proceeds to pay court to a lady, after he lays his hand on bleating sheep and robs churches.” However, as Charles Carlton argues, “most Englishmen profited from them for there was hardly a house back home that was not graced with fine French

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162 Seward, 38.
clothing, linen, or silver.” Furthermore, the practice of total warfare can be found in epics, and was sometimes done by the story's hero. An example of this occurred in *El Cantar del Mio Cid*, where it is told how the Cid, in order to force a town to surrender, stopped all food from coming into its borders. The slow deaths of the dwellers until they finally surrendered was even portrayed in a positive, celebratory fashion:

He had taught the Valencians a severe lesson, their distress knew no bounds, and they dared not come out of the town to join him in battle. He cut down their plantations, inflicting great damage on them. Year after year the Cid deprived them of their food. The Valencians lamented loudly, for they were at their wit’s end, being cut off from food on all sides. Fathers could not help their sons nor sons their fathers, nor could friends comfort one another. It is indeed a cruel fate for men to be without food and to watch their wives and children dying of hunger. Disaster stared them in their face and there was nothing they could do to help themselves…. [nobody] could neither relieve them nor come to their assistance. Pleased with the news the Cid…sent messengers through the land of Navarre and Aragon and to the land of Castile to proclaim that anyone who was eager to exchange poverty for riches should come to the Cid, who had a mind to siege Valencia…the Cid’s fame had spread through the lands. Great numbers came…there was great rejoicing when the Cid took Valencia.165

He was praised for his success. At no point in the poem was there any remorse or chastisement towards el Cid for his methods--El Cid was always considered a chivalric hero. Edward III, The Black Prince, and Henry V are also considered exemplars of chivalry, yet they also undertook many brutal actions and chevauchées. The correspondence between Edward III and the Black Prince refer proudly to the pillaging and destruction they were doing in France. Chevauchée, then, must be judged within the context of medieval culture and warfare, just as chivalry must be as well. Vegetius, in his *De Re Militari*, a book rediscovered in the fourteenth century, agreed that “it is preferable to subdue an enemy by famine, raids and terror than by battle where fortune tends to have more influence than bravery.”166 Richard Newhall asserts that, “consequently, the

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165 *El Cantar del Mio Cid*, Stanza 72, 74, p. 86-7.
166 Vegetius, 108.
English King could afford to win by blockade (of food, hope and possible soldiers) rather than assault.\textsuperscript{167} In the end, it was about winning the war. Race, nationality and social status were factors that had much effect in chivalric values; the knights had to defend the weak, but it seems that this applied to only their weak and not the enemy’s, since it was the duty of the enemy king to take care of his people.

**Crécy: Edward III and Philip VI, 1340-1350**

The battle of Crécy was the second major confrontation in the Hundred Years War, and resulted in a much more devastating defeat for the French than the one they suffered at Sluys. In this battle it is possible to see behaviors that can be considered chivalrous. Camped on the downs near the town of Crécy-en-Ponthieu, the English king had the perfect position, for he was on the higher ground. His position was protected by a small river to his front and right, with the woods of Crécy towards his flank. Moreover, the land at his front--the only position the French could attack from--had a downward slope, which provided the archers with an excellent view of the upcoming enemy. Edward encouraged his men just as a chivalrous leader was expected to do, inspiring confidence and pride in them; according to Jean Le Bel, he “went among his men, exhorting each of them with a laugh to do his duty, and flattered and encouraged them to such an extent that cowards became brave men.”\textsuperscript{168}

King Philip was also confident, as his troops far outnumbered the English by nearly three to one. Still cautious, he sent scouts to investigate the enemy's position. When these reported the advantageous position of the English, he decided to make camp for the night, since many of his troops were still arriving and weary of travel while the English were rested and fresh. However,\textsuperscript{169}

\textsuperscript{168} Seward, 63.
his army was so large that, as men kept arriving, the front lines were pushed further and further until they could see the English who, as Froissart narrates, “stood waiting for them in fine order…then it seemed shameful to retreat.” Philip having lost all hope of restraining his troops ordered them to attack. His crossbowmen shot first, but having left behind their shields, they were vulnerable when reloading. The English archers used this moment to shoot them down. The few survivors started retreating, never having experienced the terrible effects of the longbow. Philip saw this retreat as a shameful act of cowardice, and ordered his men to trample the crossbowmen; immediately afterward the cavalry led a deadly, if disorganized, charge, trampling their own men:

When the Genoways felt the arrows piercing through heads arms and breasts, many of them cast down their crossbows and did cut their strings and returned discomfited. When the French king saw them fly away, he said: "Slay these rascals, for they shall let and trouble us without reason." Then ye should have seen the men at arms dash in among them and killed a great number of them: and ever still the Englishmen shot whereas they saw thickest press.

All chivalric handbooks deride the idea of a soldier fleeing battle; in fact, Bonet condemned a soldier who did so to be beheaded, “for by his departure from the host he placed the whole battle in peril of loss. Hence he should lose his head.” Although not beheaded, the crossbowmen were equally executed by trampling by the French knights for showing lack of prowess and courage.

Another event in the confrontation that resembles the chivalric ideal is how the prowess and eventual victory of the sixteen-year-old Prince of Wales-- popularly known as the Black Prince-- served as his rite of passage from boyhood to manhood. Although the account was

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171 Bonet, 123.
most likely romanticized by Froissart, the author described how at one moment the Prince (who was in charge of his own division) seemed as though he needed help, but Edward replied,

    Is my son dead or hurt or on the earth felled?" 'No, sir,' quoth the knight, 'but he is hardly matched; wherefore he hath need of your aid.' 'Well,' said the king, 'return to him and to them that sent you hither, and say to them that they send no more to me for any adventure that falleth, as long as my son is alive: and also say to them that they suffer him this day to win his spurs; for if God be pleased, I will this journey be his and the honour thereof, and to them that be about him.'\(^{172}\)

Geoffrey Le Baker, who provided a less romanticized description of the event, claimed that Edward did send twenty knights to assist the boy, but that when they reached him the prince and his mentors were recovering their breath and waiting silently in front of a large mound of corpses for the next round of attack.\(^{173}\) This inspired admiration and respect for the boy, which served to raise his reputation into that of an adult. Although one should be somewhat skeptical of Froissart’s romanticism, it is still evident how actions in battle led to honor and loyalty.

    The Black Prince was considered an excellent warrior and the epitome of chivalry. He fought with distinction at Crécy, was present at the siege of Calais, and was the victor at Poitiers.\(^{174}\) For almost his entire life he was surrounded by war, an environment that he was quite comfortable in. Even two hundred years later, his memory was still present in the English mind, as seen in Shakespeare’s *Henry V*. According to Shakespeare, the French King Charles VI advised his knights to be wary of Henry V because of his kinship to the Black Prince:

    Think we King Harry strong;  
    And, princes, look you strongly arm to meet him.  
    The kindred of him hath been flesh'd upon us;  
    And he is bred out of that bloody strain  
    That haunted us in our familiar paths:  
    Witness our too much memorable shame

\(^{173}\) Seward, 66.  
When Cressy battle fatally was struck,  
And all our princes captiv’d by the hand  
Of that black name, Edward, Black Prince of Wales;  
Whiles that his mountain sire, on mountain standing,  
Up in the air, crown’d with the golden sun,  
Saw his heroical seed, and smiled to see him,  
Mangle the work of nature and deface  
The patterns that by God and by French fathers  
Had twenty years been made. This is a stem  
Of that victorious stock; and let us fear  
The native mightiness and fate of him.  

Clearly, the prince’s reputation, both during his lifetime and two centuries later, was triumphant. David Green comments that the Prince’s success “was determined in no small way by military talent, his ability to secure adequate finances from his estates, the successful distribution of those revenues in the form of patronage and as demonstrations of power, and pride in his lineage and achievements.”

Crécy resulted in the loss of fifty percent, if not more, of the French army. Philip lost well over 10,000 men, 1,500 of those being lords and knights. Edward, on the other hand, lost no more than one hundred men. After this victory, the reputations of Edward III and England flourished, so that both became known as great and powerful. As Desmond Seward argues: “Until Crécy the English were little thought of as soldiers, while the French were considered the best in Europe. Tactically and technologically the battle amounted to a military revolution, a triumph of firepower over armor. The King of England became the most celebrated commander in Christendom”

It has been discussed that chivalry was an unspoken agreement between the aristocracy and military elite. Partly originating from the classes desire for self-preservation, it was expected

177 Seward, 68
for a noble to spare the life of another noble if one surrendered or was taken prisoner. However, that warriors practiced this ideal should not to be attributed to any altruistic sentiments, since the practiced occurred because the prisoners could often be ransomed for great amounts of money. The following passage in Froissart’s chronicles reveals that ransoming was common practice and was viewed as a source of income:

And also among the Englishmen there were certain rascals that went afoot with great knives, and they went in among the men of arms, and slew and murdered many as they lay on the ground, both earls, barons, knights, and squires, whereof the king of England was after displeased, for he had rather they had been taken prisoners.  

The value of a noble’s life was not moral, but economic. King Edward was angry not at the loss of other nobles’ lives, but at the loss of an opportunity for ransom money. In fact, Edward acted as a sort of broker; he would buy valuable prisoners from their captors at a reduced price, then sell them at a much higher one to the prisoner’s relatives. Also evident is how it was considered an affront for these members of the elite to be killed by those of a lesser class, a fact that is revealed by his use of the word “rascal.” Not surprisingly, chivalry is presented here as a completely practical and profitable concept, but a hierarchical one as well.

Poitiers: The Black Prince and Jean II of France, 1350-1360

While the Battle of Crécy shows chivalry in battle, Poitiers shows chivalrous conduct between captor and prisoner. The Battle of Poitiers was another English victory, although not as thorough as the Battle of Crécy. The Black Prince was not looking for a battle, given that he was heavily outnumbered and that his men were exhausted and heavily laden with plunder. However, he could not retreat to the south since the river Miosson barred the way. Realizing

179 Seward, 81.
their precarious position, the Prince's forces desperately began working on their defenses. Luckily they had two days to prepare since Jean’s plan to attack on the following Sunday was stalled by the Papal envoy who tried to establish a truce. The French wanted nothing but unconditional surrender, leaving no choice for the English but to fight. The confrontation was difficult for both sides. Archers did their damage, but this time the French used their shields to protect themselves. Eventually the archers, having used up all of their arrows, took to the field to fight alongside the men-at-arms. The English were exhausted and believed that they were going to be defeated; however, apparently so did the French King’s brother, the Duke of Orleans, for, instead of attacking the English in what would have led to their downfall, he retreated with the other broken troops. Still, the English believed that it might be their final battle, so they fought with rigor and what little strength was left in them. The Prince ordered that about sixty men at arms to try to get behind the French and surround them. This maneuver broke the French lines, and many French retreated thinking that the force behind them was bigger than it actually was. In the midst of the battle was King Jean with his son, fighting bravely until both were taken prisoners. Their capture gave the Black Prince an opportunity to display his chivalry.

Chivalry presents an image of a knight who is deadly in battle, but well behaved, courteous, and respected at home. The treatment King Jean received as a prisoner is epitomic of this ideal. The Prince treated him with the respect given to a superior; they would dine together and have conversations, and in all situations the Prince acted with humility. Froissart narrated this treatment on the first night of the French King's captivity, and how his prisoners met the Prince’s behavior with admiration:

The same day of the battle at night the prince made a supper in his lodging to the French king and to the most part of the great lords that were prisoners. The prince made the king

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and his son, ... to sit all at one board, and other lords, knights and squires at other tables; and always the prince served before the king as humbly as he could, and would not sit at the king's board for any desire that the king could make, but he said he was not sufficient to sit at the table with so great a prince as the king was. But then he said to the king, 'Sir, for God's sake make none evil nor heavy cheer, though God this day did not consent to follow your will; for, sir, surely the king my father shall bear you as much honour and amity as he may do, and shall accord with you so reasonably that ye shall ever be friends together after. And, sir, methinks ye ought to rejoice, though the journey be not as ye would have had it, for this day ye have won the high renown of prowess and have passed this day in valiantness all other of your party. Sir, I say not this to mock you, for all that be on our party, that saw every man's deeds, are plainly accorded by true sentence to give you the prize and chaplet.' Therewith the Frenchmen began to murmur and said among themselves how the prince had spoken nobly, and that by all estimation he should prove a noble man, if God send him life and to persevere in such good fortune.\footnote{181}

Although Froissart's account may have been overly romantic, Jean was indeed treated with respect, as if he were a guest of honor instead of a prisoner. When he was taken to London, he would go hunting and hawking with Edward III, and was prepared feasts by the Queen. However, true to the practical nature of chivalry, the Prince still made quite a profit from Jean II, given that he had acquired as spoils the king's jewel casket. It must have been little consolation for Jean to hear of his bravery in battle as he traveled back to England with the English who were “laded with gold, silver and prisoners.” As Desmond Seward puts it, “Nor, for all his captor’s beautiful manners, did the king ever see his jewels again.\footnote{182}

King Jean’s ransom was settled at three million gold crowns (£500,000). England would also receive full sovereignty over the territories of Guyenne and Aquitaine, which composed one-third of France. Edward III had only to renounce his claim to the French crown. Jean II was allowed to go home when one-third of the first installment was paid in 1360. However, he had to leave three of his sons as hostages; when on escaped and refused to go back in 1364, King Jean “chivalrously” returned to London and was met with great reception.


\footnote{182}{Seward, 94.}
Agincourt: Henry V and Charles VI, 1413-1422

Henry V is considered to be one of the most heroic English kings, the conqueror of Agincourt and the king who finally won the throne of France for his son’s inheritance. Lauded by Shakespeare and contemporaries alike, he is presented as a courageous, brave king who, although hard and domineering, ruthless and downright cruel, would inspire genuine devotion. Twenty-five when he ascended the throne in 1413, he was tall and muscular, educated, pious, and militarily efficient. Due to receiving an arrow to the face when he was sixteen while quelling the Welsh uprising of 1603, he had multiple scars on his face that greatly contributed to his martial appearance. Since youth, Henry V had been involved in matters of state and was familiar with the battlefield. Because of his father's constant bouts of ill health, Henry V would often be in control of the country until his father could recover. Since his foreign and domestic policies differed from those of the king he would frequently be in conflict with him. After his father’s death in 1413, he was deeply involved with the his own policies of the country and sought to follow these rigorously. Among the most notable reforms of his reign was that Henry V promoted the use of the English language in government. Since the Norman conquest in the eleventh century, French had been the primary language of the English monarchs. Henry V started a precedent, since he was the first king to use English in his personal correspondence.

No less consequential were his objectives in foreign affairs, for he soon began negotiations with France, asking for Charles VI’s daughter as a bride alongside ten million crowns. Shakespeare claimed that as an answer he was sent tennis balls, but in truth the French were prepared to offer the princess’s hand with 600,000 crowns and the remainder of King

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183 Carlton, 58.
Jean’s ransom. They were also willing to give back Aquitaine (which England had lost again during the last years of Edward III’s reign) but not its sovereignty. However, Henry not only insisted on sovereignty over Aquitaine, but also Normandy and various other territories. Although the French refusal was blamed for the ensuing war, Henry had been preparing to invade for a year prior to the negotiations.185

Henry’s invasion did not start well. In an attempt to besiege Harfleur, a well-fortified town that was almost completely surrounded by water, the men were faced with extremely hot weather that ruined their wine and cider. Dysentery and malaria spread throughout the ranks, so that about a third of his army died by the time the campaign had been concluded, and many of the soldiers still alive were ill. When he finally conquered the city, Henry had to send his sick back to England and leave the garrison after a month.186

At first glance the Battle of Agincourt seemed like it was going to be a guaranteed French victory. The French army heavily outnumbered the English, many of whom were still sick and suffered with low morale; an English chaplain recalled: “we were very few, and wearied and much fatigued, and weak from lack of food.”187 Weather was not to their advantage either, since it had not stopped raining for days. The English position was precarious at best—wet ground, deep mud and no chance of retreat. Even though he was initially optimistic, Henry was losing his confidence in the upcoming battle. He had a habit of walking around the camp at night to see for himself that his orders were being carried out, as well as to talk with and inspire his soldiers. There is no record that he did so the night before the battle except in Shakespeare’s

186 Carlton, 59.
rendering, but it is safe to assume that he kept his habit, especially before such a daunting fight. He even attempted negotiations, but the French wanted nothing except total surrender.\footnote{Hibbert, 104.}

The next day when the battle began, the French men waited for the English to move toward them, since they were already familiar with longbow tactics and wished to decrease the effectiveness of Henry's archers. As the battle progressed, the French struggled to move through the thick mud towards the English. By the time they reached the English lines, they were in no formation, leaving themselves vulnerable to the enemy. This lack of order and their immobility would cost France the victory. Despite their difficulty, however, the French managed to break the English line during the first wave of attack, but were unable to exploit this advantage. Henry ordered the archers to drop their bows and attack while the French men-at-arms were sunk in the mud, so that the archers were able to nimbly move around their foes and stab them between the openings in their armor. The fallen French were stabbed in the face, suffocated by other soldiers falling on them, or drowned in the mud.\footnote{Carlton, 61} The second wave, also unorganized, met the same fate.

This battle has been considered a controversy in terms of chivalry. While the English were waiting for the third wave, they believed the French were obtaining reinforcements. At once Henry ordered his men to kill all the prisoners and get back into formation. The men were reluctant to do so, since they did not want to lose the ransom money, so Henry ordered his archers to do it and threatened to kill any who refused.\footnote{Ibid.} According to a Tudor historian, the French were “sticked with daggers, brained with poleaxes, slain with mauls,”-to ensure that they died they were also “paunched in fell and cruel wise. One group was burned to death by setting
fire to the hut where they were confined.”\textsuperscript{191} The third wave never happened. Although the French still outnumbered the English, they were so horrified by what they witnessed that they refused to attack and left the battle. As Desmond Seward explains, “in medieval criteria it was a particularly nasty atrocity to murder unarmed noblemen who had surrendered in the confident expectation of being ransomed.”\textsuperscript{192} Nobles expected to be treated well when captured, as the Black Prince had done. Yet Henry V practiced a very different form of chivalry. The very high-ranking prisoners still left alive had to wait on him at dinner as oppose to the Black Price who waited on his. The wounded, if they could walk and if profit could be made from them, would be kept alive; if not, their throats were slit. Although these acts have received much criticism not only for their moral value, but for their affront to chivalry, it must be recognized that Henry ordered the men to be slain because he thought another wave of attack was coming that would serve to threaten his victory. While it would have been merciful to ransom the wounded, it was not practical for an army that had to be on the move to be loaded down with men who could not walk. Shakespeare portrayed the moment Henry V ordered the execution of the prisoners, and had one of his characters deride the order as an affront to chivalry, although another character concludes that it was not unjustified:

\textbf{KING HENRY V}

But, hark! What new alarum is this same?
The French have reinforced their scatter'd men:
Then every soldier kill his prisoners:
Give the word through.
(Exeunt)

(Enter FLUELLEN and GOWER)

\textsuperscript{191} Seward, 169.
\textsuperscript{192} Seward, 169.
FLUELEN
Kill the poys and the luggage! 'tis expressly against the law of arms: 'tis as arrant a piece of knavery, mark you now, as can be offer't; in your conscience, now, is it not?

GOWER
'Tis certain there's not a boy left alive; and the cowardly rascals that ran from the battle ha' done this slaughter: besides, they have burned and carried away all that was in the king's tent; wherefore the king, most worthily, hath caused every soldier to cut his prisoner's throat. O, 'tis a gallant king.193

Shakespeare’s conclusions should not be taken at face value since he was a Tudor propagandist, but Honoré Bonet and John of Legnano also discussed in their handbooks the killing of prisoners and came to the same conclusions. In the Tractatus de Bello, de Represaliis et de Duello, which dealt with the definition of war and its divisions, John of Legnano wrote that mercy should "be shown to persons captured in a lawful war . . . unless by sparing them there is fear of a disturbance of the peace."194 Bonet also argued that some mercy must be given to a prisoner, but it should not be forgotten that “just as fire never forgives water,” mercy should be given “unless by his [the captive's] deliverance there is dangers of having greater wars.”195 Therefore, ideally a high-ranking prisoner was left alive and ransomed, but if doing so might affect the results of the war then it was “acceptable” to kill him. In no way does this fact deny that Henry V was a brutal monarch in battle and had little mercy for the enemy, but it lessens the notion that he committed

194 Giovanni da Legnano, Tractatus de Bello, de Represaliis et de Duello (Washington: Carnegie Institute, 1917), 128.
195 Bonet 134.
a “crime” against chivalry. His chivalry was not practiced in the truest or noblest of forms, but as seen with Bonet and Legnano, his actions were still acceptable under the code.

Chivalry in these episodes of the Hundred Years War is shown to have been a practical concept and an ideal. It cannot be said that all of its tenets were present in the battlefield, but it also cannot be argued that they were completely lacking either. Chivalry intrinsically was a warrior code. Despite its evolution as the years passed, in the end it still was about performance in war. These events illustrate not only that chivalry was present, but also how chivalry was applied, since doubting its presence signifies a misunderstanding of its violent nature and significance. Although important, it did not guide a knight’s every action, as no ideal ever does. While romance was indeed incorporated, it pertained to life at court. In its original essence, chivalry pertained to medieval warfare, and medieval warfare was not gentle. In fact, as Sean McGlynn states: “A gentle knight was not much use on the battlefield.” While there were many acts committed by knights that in no way could be classified as chivalrous, (such as rape and mutilation), chivalry did allow for a great level of savagery. Although chivalry promoted self-control in a battle and did not necessarily praise the berserk knight, its criteria were essentially practical. It suggested mercy, but if lenience was highly disadvantageous it allowed for brutality. Like Charny’s motto “he who does best is more worthy,” chivalry was the same; if a knight followed the code unfailingly he was better than the rest, though the others were not necessarily considered to be wicked, but simply not as good.

196 McGlynn, xi.
Conclusion

“Do you know not that I live by War and peace would be my undoing?” ~ Sir John Hackwood

“It is what it is” ~ Edward III

Chivalry indeed is a hard concept to define. However, the precepts that it promotes can still be appreciated. These precepts are not entirely straightforward though, for while the chivalric handbooks at times took a prescriptive approach, they also provided room for interpretation. Chivalric handbooks more than anything showed how chivalry was, in essence, meant for the soldier. They present in detail how a knight should lead his life and what qualities he should strive for. Among all of their teachings, it is clear that for a knight to imitate the ideal, he had to be a brave and powerful warrior. A knight had to be able to lead and inspire men with courage, while at the same time to inspire fear in the enemy. He had to be loyal to his lord, God, country, and his fellow soldier. For a knight honor, glory and prowess were the qualities he should most desire. As time passed and warfare evolved, handbooks became more concerned with the knight's role in battle, so that these works assumed an almost fully martial approach to chivalry. While authors like Llull and Charny discussed other aspects of knights’ lives, writers like Bonet argued that a knight's sole purpose was to participate in warfare. In his book, he discouraged a knight from having any other interest than this.

Similarly, the heroes in epics resembled the ideal heroes in the guides. As seen with Roland and the Cid, these two men were warriors at heart. Roland was concerned with prowess and loyalty, while El Cid was about conquest and fame. Considering the style in which these texts were written, it is evident that these poems were composed to enthrall their medieval audience. In Roland, the battle scenes were repeated again and again from different points of view, showing that these were the highpoints of the poem. Knights listening to these stories
could only hope for similar adventures. Even romances esteemed fighting, though they altered the concept of chivalry by adding a certain gentleness to the ideal knight; instead of glory gained at the battlefield, knights should desire glory gained by being devoted lovers. Although this genre did romanticize the courtly knight, the man had to still value winning battles. As seen in *Gawain*, honor, glory and fame were achieved or lost through combat, though this story also highlighted the chivalric trait that brings confusion to the code’s perception: the concept of preferring loss rather than dishonorable action. All handbooks present the idea that a shameful knight was no good at all and must be punished (in Bonet’s case beheaded), but the question arose of how this was properly applied to warfare. Plus, this idea attributed certain altruism to knights, wherein they would rather lose a skirmish than win by underhanded methods. Yet, the reality is that chivalry did allow for high degrees of violence.

Edward III, the Black Prince, and Henry V all committed what can be considered atrocities, yet even to the current day are still remembered as great knights and kings, as exemplars of chivalry. Their much-celebrated conquests were achieved by chevauchées, the killing of prisoners, ransoming, and deadly battles. Combatants and non-combatants alike suffered--it was all part of the military strategies by which they actualized their objectives. Chivalry was a practical code that allowed doing what had to be done, (within certain guidelines) in the execution of the martial imperative. It did not promote the bloodthirsty cruel knight, (although they surely existed), but it still extoled a warrior-knight. After all, prowess consisted of a knight’s ability to kill and win a battle.

Furthermore, chivalry was an ideal, and as such was followed only to a certain extent. Chivalry was indeed important--as made evident by the attention it received--but a knight did not always ask himself in the midst of battle, “are my actions chivalrous?” There were indeed
circumstances when chivalry was practiced just as the romances presented it, as in the Black Prince's treatment of Jean II and his sons while they were his prisoners. Yet, in many instances knights acted savagely, and remained in keeping with chivalric standards. Although the romance did pertain to chivalry and most knights loved the Arthurian legends, the legends most significant hindrance to an accurate modern understanding of the code is that they covered it in glitz and glamor; romances introduced the “Knight in Shining Armor,” but hid the fact that this knight was usually covered in blood. As Maurice Sheen determines: “chivalry, with its idealization of the freelance fighting man, could not be a force effective in limiting the horrors of war: by prompting men to seek wars and praising those who did so, its tendency, for all its idealism and because of it, [was] rather to help these horrors [become] endemic.” That these knights did horrible things which cannot be found anywhere in a handbook proves that despite chivalry being a valued ideal, it remained an ideal nonetheless.

In no way is the argument being made that the medieval knight was a crueller and lower individual than the men who came after them, since savagery happens in all war environments, even the modern ones. Killing was arbitrary, for in some sieges they would destroy everything and in some they did not. All depended how the siege would profit the participants. Just as Legnano and Bonet advised, they would show mercy if doing so would not negatively affect the outcome of the war.

Chivalry was not adhered to perfectly, nor did it determine a knight's every action, but it still was followed. To see this it is necessary to reevaluate how chivalry was perceived. This study is not attempting to romanticize chivalry or justify the actions that were taken by knights,

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198 Legnano, 128, Bonet 134
but to state that the truth is more complicated than simply saying chivalry did not exist because of how violently the knights behaved. This medieval concept was more complex than such an assumption. In the end, chivalry was violent, and although it contained less violent concepts, (as were evident in the Arthurian legends), these peaceful ideals seem to have been reserved for tournaments or court life, areas away from the battlefield. When it came to battle, a gentle knight had no place, as McGynn affirms.\footnote{199 McGlynn, xi}

It has been argued that chivalry is difficult to define, but it clearly was present in medieval aristocratic minds and in their practice of war. To fully grasp its constitution and its importance, chivalry cannot be romanticized, since doing so distorts its true nature and inhibits proper analysis of the concept. As Richard Kaeuper states: “The most compelling reason to avoid romanticizing chivalry is that taking a view though rose-tinted lenses distorts and finally trivializes this extraordinarily powerful force in early European history.”\footnote{200 Richard Kaeuper, \textit{Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3.} The superficial understanding of chivalry that dominates modern thinking most likely gained prominence due to the Victorians Age’s revival of the Arthurian Legends and the idea of the courteous knight, (which it equated with the courteous gentleman), so that only the glimmer and glamor of chivalry was remembered. Although much research on this intellectual transformation of chivalry remains to be done, the truth is that the historical reality of chivalry during the Middle Ages was very different. Mark Twain understood just how violent this seemingly courteous ideal was, as he made plain in his novel, \textit{A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court}:

\begin{quote}
As a rule, the speech and behavior of these people were gracious and courtly; and I noticed that they were good and serious listeners when anybody was telling anything—I mean in a dog-fightless interval. And plainly, too, they were a childlike and innocent lot; telling lies of the stateliest pattern with a most gentle and winning naivety, and ready and
willing to listen to anybody else's lie, and believe it, too. It was hard to associate them with anything cruel or dreadful; and yet they dealt in tales of blood and suffering with a guileless relish that made me almost forget to shudder.\textsuperscript{201}

Just like Twain's character we cannot forget to shudder. In order to give chivalry its proper place in medieval society, the fact that violence was not always deemed unchivalrous, but was tolerated in certain situations must be understood and accepted. Thus, Richard Kaeuper summarizes the historian's task perfectly:

For the great danger in the study of chivalry is to view this important phenomenon through the rose-tinted lenses of romanticism, to read chivalry in terms of what we want it to be rather than what it was. However glorious and refined its literature, however elevated its ideals, however enduring its link with western ideas of gentlemanliness- and whatever we think of that- we must not forget that knighthood was nourished on aggressive impulses, that [it] existed to use its shining armor and sharp-edged weaponry in acts of showy and bloody violence.\textsuperscript{202}

\textsuperscript{201} Mark Twain, \textit{A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court} (New York: Simon and Brown, 2012),
\textsuperscript{202} Kaeuper, 2.
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