2012

The Unbought Grace of Life: Chivalry in Western Literature

Richard N. Boggs
Rollins College, RBOGGS@Rollins.edu

The Unbought Grace of Life:
Chivalry in Western Literature

A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Liberal Studies

by

Richard N. Boggs
May, 2012

Mentor: Dr. Thomas Cook
Reader: Dr. Gail Sinclair

Rollins College
Hamilton Holt School
Master of Liberal Studies Program
Winter Park, Florida

The Unbought Grace of Life:

Chivalry in Western Literature

By

Richard N. Boggs

May, 2012

Project Approved:

_____

Mentor

_____

Reader

_____

Director, Master of Liberal Studies Program

_____

Dean, Hamilton Holt School
Rollins College

Dedicated
to my wife Elizabeth for her love, her patience and her unceasing support.

CONTENTS

I. Introduction

> "Little did I dream that I should have lived to see such disasters fallen upon [a Queen] in a nation of gallant men, in a nation of men of honour and of cavaliers. I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult. — But the age of chivalry is gone. — That of sophisters, economists, and calculators, has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever. Never, never more, shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom. The unbought grace of life, the cheap defence of nations, the nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprise is gone! It is gone, that sensibility of principle, that chastity of honour, which felt a stain like a wound, which inspired courage whilst it mitigated ferocity, which ennobled whatever it touched, and under, which vice itself lost half its evil, by losing all its grossness."
>
> --Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the French Revolution*

The most famous section of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution* is his defense of Marie Antoinette and his condemnation of the gentlemen of France for failing to draw their swords in her defense. This section resonates across the centuries for the power of its imagery. Not only is it the most celebrated section of a most celebrated work, it is arguably the most famous passage ever written on the institution of chivalry. Though Burke uses all the gorgeous rhetorical gilding he can devise, he utilizes far different language to forecast what will follow the "Age of Chivalry."

> But power, of some kind or other, will survive the shock in which manners and opinions perish; and it will find other and worse means for its support. The usurpation, which, in order to subvert ancient institutions, has destroyed ancient principles, will hold power by arts similar to those by which it has acquired it. When the old feudal and chivalrous spirit of *Fealty*, which, by freeing kings from fear, freed both kings and subjects from the precautions of tyranny, shall be extinct in the minds of men, plots and assassinations will be anticipated by preventive murder and preventive confiscation, and that long roll of grim and bloody maxims, which form the political code of all power, not standing on its

> own honour, and the honour of those who are to obey it. Kings will be tyrants from policy when subjects are rebels from principle.[1]

Burke makes the point that chivalry, for all it beautiful and romantic aspects, is about power. This claim, coming from one of chivalry's most ardent champions is revealing for it makes explicit that chivalry was, and had always been, an instrument of social control. By idealizing a certain portrait of male behavior, chivalry has since its inception represented a clear and determined effort by society to alter and improve male character. This effort manifests itself in many ways. From systems of manners and etiquette, to the creation of military and martial orders, to political arrangements, society has used a variety of mechanisms to create the ideal image of the chivalric man. Like any important cultural value, chivalry also has a rich literary history. From the *Iliad* forward, Western literature has grappled with the very issue of social control of male behavior, a problem to which Burke proclaimed chivalry as the solution. It is my claim that chivalry was an institution of social control and that examining the literature of chivalry offers a marvelous window into how society either embraces or resists that control.

As eloquent as Edmund Burke's description is, it is less than ideal as a definition, so before proceeding to peer into that window, let us attempt to more specifically define chivalry. At its height in the medieval period chivalry became a written and explicit code covering the following duties:

1. Duties to God: these duties would include being faithful to God, protecting the innocent, being faithful to the church, being the champion of good against evil, being generous and obeying God above the feudal lord.

---

[1] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France and on the Proceedings of certain Societies in London relative to that event* (London: Seeley, Jackson and Halliday, 1872) 133.

2. Duties to comrades, countrymen and fellow Christians: this contains virtues such as loyalty to our comrades in arms but would also include mercy, courage, valor, fairness, protection of the weak and the poor, and the knight's obligations of service to his lord. These duties carry with them a "self-regardless" ethic.
3. Duties to women: This would contain what is often called courtly love, the idea that the knight is to serve a lady, and after her all other ladies. Most especially in this category is a general gentleness and graciousness to all women.[2]

Implicit in all these often overlapping duties is the assumption that the man who undertakes the code has the power to carry out the prescribed duties. Exhortations to protect the weak and poor are rather meaningless in any grand sense if one is, in fact, weak and poor. One cannot show mercy unless one occupies a dominant position. Strength, power and a certain modicum of affluence are absolutely essential to the carrying out of chivalric duties.

The elements of this code and any accurate definition of chivalry share a common tendency to encompass a set of male characteristics that contradict one another, such as courage and courtesy. There is certainly no natural connection between courage on the field of battle and courtesy off it, yet that is a central tenet of the code of chivalry. We see that paradox in the language of Burke's description as he uses contradictory phrases like "that proud submission, that dignified obedience."[3] At its highest expression chivalry demands that a man fill two obviously disparate roles, the warrior and the lover. The conflict of masculinity is to bridge the divide between the warrior and lover, between violence and gentleness. This is the divide which chivalry attempts to bridge.

---

[2] Leon Gautier, *Chivalry* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1891) 22-31.
[3] Burke, *Reflections*, 88.

Another central tenet is the manner in which the code of chivalry emphasizes subordination of self. The power, which is fundamentally necessary to carry out the duties, is strictly subordinated with hierarchical chains of restraint. The chivalric knight is subordinate to God, the Church, his liege-lord, his courtly love, and ladies in general. The weak and poor demand his courtesy and protection and even his defeated enemies on the battlefield demand his mercy. His power and strength are, in every direction, hemmed in and restrained. This subordination of power to society's definition of legitimate authority is the ontological basis of the code of chivalry and one need only examine the literature idealizing male behavior in ages before chivalry to understand why such a code was necessary. The ideal male figure that chivalry needed to defeat and supplant appears in the very first pages of Greek literature, in none other than Achilles, sacker of cities.

II.

Greek Pre-Chivalry

"The Nurse of Manly Sentiment and Heroic Enterprise"

In our examination of chivalry in Western literature, we turn first to the literature of the ancient Greeks. The purpose of this is to explicitly define the literary male ideal which chivalry would attempt to supplant. This might seem counter-intuitive for there are certainly characters in Greek literature that exhibit significant chivalric traits and virtues. The foremost of these characters is Hector. As J.T. Hooker writes:

> Hector is unique among the heroes. He is explicitly contrasted with his brother Paris and implicitly with the warriors on the [Greek] side. What sets him apart from the rest is, to use a modern expression, his 'sense of responsibility'. He is a family man to an extent that none of the others is: he has care for his wife and child, beyond them for his aged father and mother, and even beyond these for the entire Trojan Community.[4]

Hector's special status is underscored when the other major characters' motivations are considered. Menelaus fights for wounded pride, Agamemnon for power and dominion, Paris fights to retain his ill-gotten prize and Achilles, after refusing to fight for churlishness, finally takes up arms out of rage and guilt. Only Hector is cast in the chivalric role of defender. It is Hector that appeals to our contemporary sensibilities, which, if only for sentimental reasons, still honor some vestige of chivalry. All of Hector's qualities create a common misconception amongst contemporary readers of the Iliad, who often view Hector as the tragic hero of the work. Yet for the Greeks, Hector was merely a noble foil for the true hero of the action, Achilles. Symonds argues that "[t]o exaggerate the importance of Achilles in the education of the Greeks, who used the

---

[4] J.T. Hooker, "Homeric Society: A Shame-Culture?" *Greece & Rome* 34, no. 2 (Oct., 1987)122.

Iliad as their Bible, and were keenly sensitive to all artistic influences, would be difficult."[5] If it is difficult to exaggerate Achilles' importance to the Greeks; it is equally difficult for a contemporary reader to read the *Iliad* and see Achilles in the same way the Greeks did, because of a fundamentally different moral compass. Only by understanding that moral compass can we fully understand the differences between the ideal Greek warrior and the later development of the chivalric knight.

E.R. Dodds, in his *The Greeks and The Irrational*, made the claim that the Greeks were a shame-honor culture and as such were fundamentally different from the later European Christian guilt culture. According to Dodds, Homeric society had no concept of guilt feelings as a motive power for the heroes of their myths.[6] Even the word, which translates as 'guilty' (*aitios*), never seems to capture the internal sanction that is so familiar to our Christian culture. What does motivate the Homeric heroes, in Dodds' view, is the threat of 'losing face', of being shamed before one's comrades in arms. If *aitios* represents the downside for the Homeric warrior, *kleos* represents the reward. *Kleos* roughly translates as glory but that falls short of its significance in Greek culture. Glory was more than simply fame or notoriety, but rather the only sure way of obtaining immortality. To achieve great deeds on the battlefield, to cover one's self in the laurels of glory was to make one's name a legend, which would endure long after a warrior had "shuffled off this mortal coil."[7] In this pursuit of *kleos*, not Hector but Achilles was the role model for the Greeks. The figure of Achilles is far more than merely the central subject of the poem, but the subject which provides the unity, which elevates the entire work, or as Symonds writes:

---

[5] John Addington Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1893) 39.
[6] E.R. Dodds, *Greeks and the Irrational* (Sacramento: University of California Press, 1962)
[7] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (London: T. Hughes: 1823)

> It is not fanciful to say, with the old grammarians of Alexandria, that the first line of the poem sets forth the whole of its action.
>
> 'Sing, goddess, the wrath of Achilles, son of Peleus'
>
> The wrath of Achilles and the consequences of that wrath in the misery of the Greeks, left alone to fight without their fated hero; the death of Patroclus, caused by his sullen anger; the energy of Achilles, reawakened by his remorse for his friend's death; and the subsequent slaughter of Hector; form the whole of the simple structure of the Iliad.[8]

And if Achilles does constitute the central and unifying figure, the hinge of the action turns not simply on his violence and anger, but fundamentally on his love for a friend, for Patroclus. Though Achilles is certainly no chivalric knight, it would be wrong to claim that he totally lacks any of the qualities, which would later be included in the code of chivalry. Of the three area of duties which we identified as comprising the chivalric code, Achilles and the Greeks most closely align with the second area, duties to comrades, or as Shakespeare might have put it, duties to our "band of brothers."[9] As Symonds writes in his *Studies of the Greek Poets*:

> It may seem at first sight paradoxical to speak at all of Greek chivalry, since this word, by its very etymology, is appropriated to a medieval institution. Yet when we inquire what chivalry means, we find that it implies a permanent state of personal emotion, which raises human life above the realities of every-day experience, and inspires men with unselfish impulses. Furthermore, this passionate condition of the soul in chivalry is connected with a powerful military enthusiasm, severing the knight from all vile things, impelling him to the achievement of great deeds, and breeding in his soul a self-regardless temper.[10]

This is the role of chivalry, which Burke acknowledges when he speaks of chivalry as the "nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprise" and the role of the heroic warrior would seem to be impossible in its absence.[11]

---

[8] Symonds, *Greek Poets*, 41.
[9] William Shakespeare, *Henry V* (London: T. Hughes: 1823)
[10] Symonds, *Greek Poets*, 42.
[11] Burke, *Reflections*, 91.

Common to both Homeric hero and medieval knight was the fusion of the disparate roles of warrior and lover, which, as we previously discussed, is central to any discussion of chivalry. The role of warrior is one that fits both Homeric and medieval eras, but the role of lover differentiates these worlds, for while the courtly love of a damsel was the mainspring of medieval chivalric love, for the ancient Greeks it was the love of a friend, a comrade, a member of the fraternity of arms. Though the friendship of Achilles and Patroclus is the best-known example of this martial and fraternal bond, it is by no means unique in Greek literature. Damon and Pythias, Orestes and Pylades, and Harmodius and Aristogeiton are all Greek tales emphasizing the power and indestructible nature of male friendship.[12] I have no intention of leaping into the quagmire of endless scholarship over whether these relationships were homosexual in nature, for that is rather immaterial to the point that Symonds is attempting to make. He argues that the love of a friend, a comrade in arms, regardless of its particular expression, inspires unselfish impulses, just as the courtly love of a medieval knight for his lady. In a sense, he is correct, for certainly selflessness is a common characteristic of the fellowship of arms, but Symonds fails to grasp that that sort of love provides no counter-weight to man's violent tendencies but merely reinforces the martial virtues. The courtly love of the knight for his damsel provided an avenue for cultivating the non-warrior virtues of the knight. His courtly love encouraged his gentleness, grace and mercy. Achilles' love for Patroclus, on the other hand, real though it may be, simply enhances his courage, his

[12] Pythias was accused of plotting against the Dionysius I of Syracuse. As punishment for this crime, Pythias was sentenced to death. Damon offers to take Pythias' place and eventually Dionysius is so impressed at the strength of their friendship he pardons them both. Orestes was the son of Agamemnon and he and his friend Pylades return to Argos to avenge Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon. Harmodius and Aristogeiton were Athenians and these two friends collaborated to assassinate the tyrant Hipparchus, thus liberating Athens.

bloodlust and his violence. It never offers an alternative. While the medieval chivalric love for a damsel demands an entirely different range of emotions and qualities from those best left on the field of battle, Achilles on the battlefield recognizes no authority, no restraint and no moderation. His love for his friend makes his exploits purely a matter of personal passion, uncoupled even from the military objectives of the campaign. Despite its fragments of nobility, Greek pre-chivalry provides none of the controlling aspects that the later chivalric model exhibits.

As the Homeric Age progressed to the classical period of ancient Greece we see the first concerted attempt to rein in the excesses of the Achillean ideal. Aristotle's *Nichomocean Ethics* was a systematic examination of virtue and his golden mean between the extremes of error is precisely the antithesis of Achillean excess. Even the virtue of perfect courage, according to Aristotle, is something between cowardice and recklessness, a definition with which Achilles would have been baffled. In Aristotle's catalogue of virtues we recognize many of the qualities, which would subsequently be recast as a solid foundation for Christian virtue and the code of chivalry. Courage, temperance, generosity, gentleness, truthfulness, good humor, and friendship were identified by Aristotle, if not exactly as virtues, at least as the qualities found in a virtuous man.[13] Some scholars such as Romei have gone so far as to argue that Aristotle actually foreshadows Christ's teaching to turn the other cheek, for Aristotle does comment that "it is better to be injured than to inflict an injury.[14] But this seems to ignore the many instances when Aristotle argues that an honorable man must never "swallow an affront or

[13] Aristotle never actually enunciates a clear list of virtues. He treats some traits, like Justice, as merely a combination of many virtues and some like *aitios* or shame, have to be interpreted to mean a sense of decency or modesty.
[14] Aristotle, *Ethics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926) 61-2.

let [his] relatives be insulted."[15] In Aristotle's *Rhetoric* he goes even further, stating that, "[T]o take vengeance on one's enemies is nobler than to come to terms with them; for to retaliate is just, and that, which is just is noble; and further, a courageous man ought not to allow himself to be beaten."[16] Clearly, mercy for a foe was not high on Aristotle's list of virtues and until the mid-seventeenth century his words would be quoted by moralists in support of the duels of honor that would comprise the administration, not of justice, but of private vengeance.[17]

It was not Aristotle's purpose to create a code of conduct for a select group of warrior-knights. Aristotle's *Ethics* are equally applicable to all classes and stations, but they represent a very early attempt to express a written code of behavior for men. Yet despite the significance of Aristotle's *Ethics*, and despite the fruit they would bear when rediscovered by twelfth-century Catholic scholastics, Aristotle's own pupil Alexander the Great rejected his tutor's words. Alexander set out in pursuit of conquest and *kleos* and went to bed every night with the *Iliad* under his pillow, dreaming of becoming another Achilles. Imagine for a moment, a world in which Achilles remained the standard for male behavior. His rage, his sense of singularity and specialness, entitling him to nurse his personal grievances and indulge his personal passions as his whims dictate – nothing could be more inimical, "more contrary to all laws and civil order."[18] Harnessing and controlling the Achillean ideal of courage, valor and selflessness would consume the literature of the successors to the hegemony of the Greeks – Rome.

---

[15] Jean Gagen, "Hector's Honor," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (Spring, 1968) 133.
Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book IV, Chapter 5 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926) 128.
[16] Aristotle, *Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926) 97.
[17] Gagen, *Hector's Honor*, 134.
[18] Lodowick Bryskett, *A Discourse of Civil Life* (San Fernando Valley State College, 1970) 65.

III.

Roman Pre-Chivalry

"Patriotism is the virtue of the vicious." – Oscar Wilde

When we turn our examination from the literature of the Greeks to that of the Romans, we find a concerted attempt to bring discipline and control to the wild passionate quest for *kleos* that consumes the Greeks. The Roman statesman Cicero held that the archaic virtues of courage and heroism were incompatible with justice if they were not placed in the service of the common good:

> But if the exaltation of spirit seen in times of danger and toil is devoid of justice and fights for selfish ends instead of for the common good, it is a vice; for not only has it no element of virtue, but its nature is barbarous and revolting to all our finer feelings. The Stoics, therefore, correctly define courage as "that virtue which champions the cause of right." Accordingly, no one has attained to true glory who has gained a reputation for courage by treachery and cunning; for nothing that lacks justice can be morally right.[19]

Important though courage and heroism may be, Cicero subordinates them to the service of a greater good, which he closely identifies with the welfare of the state. The notion of serving the greater good of Rome was an indispensible element in the creation of the Roman empire and the Roman legions would march from Britannia to the Euphrates, harnessing the wild heroism of Achillean single combat into a disciplined fighting force that comprised the right arm, but never the head of the Roman Empire. But when the legions began to serve their general's ambition for preeminence rather than the welfare of the state, we witness the internecine warfare that contributed so mightily to the collapse of the Roman authority in the West. If Greek pre-chivalry is characterized by an enthusiasm for glory intensified by the love toward one's fellow warriors, Roman pre-

[19] Cicero, *De Officis, Book XIX* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931) 93.

chivalry is characterized by a patriotic enthusiasm intensified by love of duty toward the state. Though still far from medieval conceptions of chivalry, at least civil order was now possible with violence, ostensibly, the prerogative of legitimate authority.

When we turn our attention to the literature of the ancient Romans, it is immediately apparent that regardless of how the Romans chose to portray their ideal male figure, duties toward women were not high on their list of qualities. The stories of Rome's founding and early monarchical period, documented in Livy's *History of Rome*, are revealing in their account of the primacy of patriotism and the relative unimportance of duties toward women. The story of the Rape of Sabine Women in which Romulus carries off the women of a neighboring tribe, contains enough violations of the chivalric code to give pause to any proponent of a theoretical Roman chivalry. In this story, one of the foundational episodes of Rome, Romulus commands the abduction of unwilling female victims under the deceptive cover of a religious festival in violation of sacred oaths and rituals of consecration.[20] This radical solution to an under-population problem makes abundantly clear that Rome comes first, last and always with the status of women barely entering the equation except as breeding stock.

Another decidedly unchivalric tale is the famous story of Horatius who must fight in single combat a great warrior from the neighboring city of Alba. This Alban warrior was the betrothed of his sister. After Horatius slays the Alban champion he returns to Rome wearing the cloak of his vanquished opponent. When his sister sees that her brother has slain her betrothed, she breaks into tears and curses him for his cruelty. Horatius, in a passion, draws his sword and stabs his sister crying, "So perish every

[20] Livy, *History of Rome* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919) 33-39.

Roman woman who mourns a foe!"[21] Though Horatius was made to do penance, the Romans still celebrated his patriotism. Lions on the field of Mars, Roman heroes still had not yet learned to be lambs once they left the battlefield.[22]

In general the only role a woman could occupy that was valued by the Romans was the role of mother. There is the famous story of Coriolanus where a rebellious Roman general marches against Rome. In peril, Rome resorts to sending out Coriolanus' mother who saves Rome with her reproach of her son.[23] The story of Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, is another episode from Roman history that offers great insight into the Roman's cultural attitudes toward women. Cornelia, a widow, devotes her life to the rearing and education of her two sons, raising them to be strong, noble guardians of Rome. There are numerous such stories, which positively portray women as central figures and it must be noted that Roman attitudes toward women were contradictory in many ways. Though the male head of the household, the *paterfamilias*, held absolute command in theory, including the right to punish and discipline his wife and children, in practice Roman women had many rights, which they would not see again until the 19th century.[24] Roman women could attend the theatre, petition the law courts, and most importantly, control property. Nevertheless, invariably when Roman women are shown in a positive light, they are acting in the role of mother and acting in the interests of the state.[25] Gracious behavior toward women as part of an explicit code, so great a part of medieval chivalry, was notably absent from Roman attitudes toward women.

---

[21] Livy, *History of Rome*, 331-351.
[22] Ibid, 278.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Colleen McCullough, *Caesar's Women* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996).
[25] The Romans would hardly be the last society to attempt to intensify patriotism by associating it with motherhood.

The greatest work of Roman literature was also its greatest work of patriotic propaganda. Virgil's *Aeneid* tells in epic verse the story of the founding of Rome by the refugees of Troy led by the semi-divine Aeneas. Though we will examine the *Aeneid* for what its literary value tells us of Roman pre-chivalry, its value as political polemic cannot be overlooked. The *Aeneid* communicates an ethic of control, of subordinating personal passion to the good of the state. Virgil's patron was the first Roman emperor Augustus Caesar and Virgil certainly earned that patronage with a work, which reinforces every element in the political narrative Augustus was promoting. Aeneas is portrayed as the archetypal Roman citizen, strong, courageous, and most importantly dutiful. In a sense, Roman pre-chivalry expands on Greek pre-chivalry by including the duties to the state. For the Romans, the state was much closer to the significance which Christians would place on God. Therefore, duties to the state would roughly correspond to the first category of duties to God that we identified as comprising the first element of the chivalric code. This patriotic enthusiasm of the Romans provides a similar higher calling that religious enthusiasm imparts to the chivalric knight. Those duties do not include, however, any code of gracious or protective behavior toward women and for all of the virtues of Aeneas he leaves a trail of destroyed women in his wake.

Vast amounts of scholarship have been devoted to Dido-Cleopatra parallels. The fictional African Queen Dido attempts to turn Aeneas from his duty, just as the very real Cleopatra attempted to turn Augustus's fellow triumvir Mark Antony from his duty. Aeneas's rejection of Dido draws the explicit contrast with Antony's capitulation to Cleopatra's blandishments. But what is less obvious is the manner in which the Aeneid constantly stresses Aeneas's rejection of personal passion in favor of fulfilling his duty.

That personal passion expressed in the Achillean ideal of the Greeks vanishes in the character of Aeneas. This theme is also part of Augustus' propaganda for he emerges from a historical period in which the Roman Republic was torn asunder by the personal ambitions of powerful Romans such as his uncle Julius Caesar and Caesar's political opponents Pompeius Magnus and Cato the Younger. Augustus himself would have to win his own personal contest with Antony, but once emerging victorious Augustus' most fervent wish was to portray an image of duty over personal passion and Aeneas was the perfect role model.

Aeneas' most compelling trait is his sense of *pietas*. The English language has no word adequate to the task, as "duty" or "piety" falls short of the mark. In the character of Aeneas, *pietas* becomes fully actualized as the fulfillment of obligation to all whom obligation is due. The image of Aeneas carrying his father and leading his son is justly famous as the epitome of *pietas* as he honors his past and leads to the future. Self-sacrifice is another credit to Aeneas' character. He is not a superhuman who pursues his goals with single-minded fervor. All too often Aeneas is conflicted by his personal passions and his public duty. The entire sojourn from Troy to Italy is not what he wanted in his heart. When awakened by the shade of Hector his true desire is to seek the ultimate release in the immediacy of a heroic death, but he does not have the luxury of being another Achilles. A simple hero in the Greek Achillean mode may have the luxury of dying in the pursuit of a glorious end but Aeneas has the far more difficult task of living for the sake of Rome. Aeneas is the literary embodiment of the Roman pre-chivalry. Whereas the Greek model was one of personal passion, the *Aeneid* demonstrates the glorification of duty to the state at the expense of personal passion.

Aeneas' treatment of Dido is another notable example of his placing his patriotic duty before personal passion. Virgil portrays Dido as an incredibly appealing character, but that only serves to underscore the nature of what Aeneas is choosing. The more loveable Dido becomes, the more difficult the battle for Aeneas between *furas* and *pietas*, between desire and duty. Aeneas must hunger to put aside his cares and stay on the sun-soaked beaches of North Africa with this woman. For a decade he has been besieged in a city with blood, war and death as his constant companions. He has lost his home, far too many of his comrades, his wife and his beloved father. For years he has borne the lonely responsibility of leading the last refuge of his people to safety. Yet he can still summon the force of will to do what must be done and leave those shores for his true home in Italy. In one compelling episode the appetites and passions of Achilles have been supplanted by the duty and patriotism of Aeneas. Yet, this episode in which a noble woman is sacrificed to patriotic duty makes apparent the wide gulf still separating Roman pre-chivalry from its medieval Christian counterpart.

The ultimate scene of the *Aeneid* further underscores that gulf. Aeneas' killing of Turnus, unarmed and begging for quarter, is completely at odds with true chivalry, but it is perfectly in keeping with Roman sensibilities. This action underscores a troubling aspect of the supremacy of the Roman state filling the place, which the medieval chivalric knight would reserve for God, for the Roman state preached no beatitudes. There is nothing in the duty of the state to ameliorate the violent nature of man and specifically of Aeneas. Fulfilling his duty to his country, exactly like Achilles fulfilling his duty to his comrade, offers no counter-weight to the violent nature of man which medieval chivalry attempts to cure. The only ambiguity arises from Aeneas' motivation.

If that motivation is the realization that clemency toward Turnus will inevitably lead to further bloodshed, then Aeneas's sword thrust is his patriotic duty, an essential act to maintain civil order and safeguard the nascent Roman state. But Virgil tempts us with less noble possibilities. Aeneas hesitates in the climactic scene until he sees on Turnus' shoulders the sword belt of his young friend Pallas whom Turnus slew earlier in the action. Motivated by a need to indulge personal vengeance in response to the death of a young friend is pure Achilles and quite out of place in Augustan Rome. Perhaps that essential conflict is what motivated Virgil, on his deathbed, to ask that the draft of the *Aeneid* be burned. Perhaps the poet laureate of the Roman Empire saw that the patriotism he so dutifully promoted in 19 B.C.E was less than an ideal solution. Perhaps Virgil could not write the ending he truly wanted in which Aeneas ushers in his kingdom in mercy instead of blood. Little did he know that a value system celebrating mercy was just about to be born in a distant Roman backwater, in a province called Judea, in the town of Bethlehem.

IV.

The Rise of Christian Chivalry

> "Chivalry! – why, maiden, she is the nurse of pure and high affection – the stay of the oppressed, the redresser of grievances, the curb of the power of the tyrant – Nobility were but an empty name without her, and liberty finds the best protection in her lance and her sword." – Sir Walter Scott

In our brief exploration of Greek and Roman pre-chivalry hopefully I have clearly identified the problem that chivalry would evolve to address. Both cultures embraced and celebrated codes of male behavior primarily based on power. As J.L. Spalding wrote, "[t]he strongest governed and governed in virtue of their strength, and not in virtue of any moral sanction or divine authority."[26] This reality of the celebration of strength and power was certainly mirrored in the literature of ancient Greece and Rome. Achilles and Aeneas possessed many virtues – courage certainly and, to different degrees, loyalty and duty as well – but these virtues were all best expressed by their willingness and ability to wield spear and sword. In such a code, "where strength is made the measure of right, [the] woman is inevitably driven to the wall."[27] What was true for women was certainly true for the weak and poor. In the hierarchy of power vast segments of the population existed merely as chattel. Into this sort of society the gospel of Jesus Christ was nothing short of a revolution. Christianity was a faith specifically tailored to the weakest in society. The beatitudes celebrated the meek rather than the proud, mercy rather than vengeance, and peacemakers rather than warriors. Luke's Gospel even specifically calls down woes on the rich, the well-off, the happy and the admired. The

---

[26] J.T. Spalding, "Has Christianity Benefited Woman?" *The North American Review* 140, no. 342 (May, 1885) 403.
[27] Spalding, "Has Christianity Benefited Woman?", 404.

early Church formed a refuge for the politically and economically weak, and its ranks were swelled by the marginalized segments of society, especially women.

At the same time the early Church was forming on the edges of the Roman Empire, at its center a new value system was being discussed. The Roman historian Tacitus in his *Germania* finds a great deal to praise about the Teutonic tribes living outside the borders of the Empire. Beating Rousseau to the punch by sixteen centuries, Tacitus favorably compares these rough barbarians with the corruption and vices of the sophisticated and civilized Romans. He lauds their egalitarianism, their leadership based on example, and especially praises the Germanic attitudes toward women. According to Tacitus, the voices of women are heard and respected in council, and women often accompany men into battle. Tacitus relates that this motivates men to fight more fiercely in order to defend the women from potential captivity.[28] On the social side, monogamy was the social norm of the Germanic tribes and adultery was extremely rare.[29]

Tacitus also writes of the solemnity of a German rite in which all the military elements of future chivalry are ritualized.

> The scene took place beneath the shade of an old forest. The barbarous tribe is assembled, and one feels that a ceremony is in preparation. Into the midst of the assembly advances a very young man, whom you can picture to yourself with sea-green eyes, long fair hair, and perhaps some tattooing. A chief of the tribe is present, who without delay places gravely in the hands of the young man a framea and a buckler. Failing a sovereign ruler, it is the father of the youth, or some relative who undertakes this delivery of weapons. 'Such is the virile robe of these people,' as Tacitus well puts it; 'such is the first honor of their youth. Till then the young man was only one in a family; he becomes by this a member of the Republic. *Ante hoc domus pars videtur: mox rei republicae*. This sword and buckler he will never abandon… So the ceremony finished, the assembly separates, and the tribe reckons a miles – a warrior – the more. That is all![30]

---

[28] Tacitus, *Germania*, Book V (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914) 112.
[29] Ibid, 89.
[30] Léon Gautier, *Chivalry* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1891) 21.

To a contemporary observer, there may seem little distinction between the warrior ethic of the Greco-Roman world and this Germanic variant, but in the mind of a sophisticated Roman of the first century the difference was vast. Tacitus expresses that difference in speeches he places into the mouths of Germanic chieftains such as this one he attributes to Calgacus the Briton:

> …Romans, whose arrogance you cannot escape by obedience and self-restraint. Robbers of the world, now that earth fails their all-devastating hands, they probe even the sea: if their enemy have wealth, they have greed; if he be poor, they are ambitious; East nor West has glutted them; alone of mankind they covet with the same passion want as much as wealth. To plunder, butcher, steal, these things they misname empire: they make a desolation and they call it peace.[31]

Tacitus does not even grant the Roman soldiers the virtue of archaic courage, claiming that, "Further , courage and high spirits in their subjects displease our masters [Romans]…Or do you imagine that the Romans have as much courage in war as wantonness in peace? It is our dissensions and feuds that bring them fame."[32] Clearly Tacitus was skeptical of the Empire as a field of building patriotic virtue. Tacitus never crossed the Rhine and his tales of *Germania* were entirely based on second-hand tales, but his lack of first hand knowledge merely increases the suspicion that there is a sermon lying beneath the pages. Tacitus is writing a moral tale as much as an ethnographic one and his eyes find Roman society wanting in the very aspects he speaks of so favorably in the Teutonic tribes.

These two seemingly incompatible traditions, Teutonic strength and Christian pacifism were the indispensable ingredients in the code of chivalry. The violent nature of Greek and Roman pre-chivalry could not be ameliorated and brought under control without the addition of duties to the poor, to the weak, and to women. But for these two

---

[31] Tacitus, *Germania*, 81.
[32] Ibid, 84-85.

traditions to merge, the barrier holding them apart must give way, and that barrier was the Roman Empire. The Teutonic and Christian influences added the missing ingredients to ancient pre-chivalry and these two powerful forces, one physical and the other moral, overpowered the might of Rome.[33] Chivalry could never develop as an effective code of controlling male behavior until it offered an enthusiasm that would offset the qualities of a warrior and encourage the qualities of a lover. The chivalric knight was offered a religious enthusiasm that accomplished that goal and finally the evolution of a male ideal with skills outside of martial prowess could now begin. In the literature of the late Roman Empire and early Middle Ages we encounter how that male ideal evolved and fused with the archaic virtues of ancient pre-chivalry.

St. Augustine of Hippo was incredibly influential in achieving a fusion of the classical and Christian values, creating a foundation upon which chivalry would be built. His *City of God* was written primarily to vindicate from the charge, later resurrected by Gibbon, that Christianity was responsible for the decline of Rome. But in the course of that argument Augustine cites the virtues of pre-Christian pagan Rome that enabled her

---

[33] The physical force is readily apparent. The barbarian tribes of Northern and Central Europe, Germans, Goths, Visigoths, Vandals and Huns, exerted continuous and growing pressure on a lengthy, porous and increasingly difficult to defend frontier. Roman military strength was sapped by political infighting as the armies of the empire were increasingly used as instruments of internecine warfare instead of guardians of the frontier. The effect of Christianity is far more controversial. The view from the Enlightenment, most famously from Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, puts the blame squarely on Christianity. Its code of pacifism, its turn away from this terrestrial existence and toward spiritual reward in heaven, and its diversion of resources to fund massive construction of church property, according to this view, all contribute to a collapse of Roman military, economic and moral strength. This view ignores many important counter arguments such as the fact that in the later empire, the army was comprised of considerable numbers of Christians and that administration of Roman provinces increasingly fell on the Church, making the Christians the primary defenders of Rome. Fortunately, we can leave that debate for others and there is little doubt that just as Rome was being Christianized, Christianity was being Romanized and the early Church's focus on pacifism was being leavened with a more *realpolitik* attitude toward warfare. Rome was also becoming Germanized, so to speak, as the barbarian tribes began to increasingly fill the ranks of the Imperial legions. The effects of this combination and how it combined into a more muscular Christianity is readily observable in the literature of the late Roman Empire and early Middle Ages.

Empire to flourish and expand for centuries. Amongst these virtues he asserts that "… glory, honor, and power are desired alike by the good man and the ignoble."[34] Therefore even pagan Romans were the recipients of the benefits of these virtues, especially their thirst for glory:

> Glory they most ardently loved: for it they wished to live, for it they did not hesitate to die. Every other desire was repressed by the strength of their passion for that one thing. At length their country itself…glorious to rule and to command, they first earnestly desired to be free…[35]

In recognizing that the archaic virtues had value, Augustine's influence would have far reaching consequences in the expansion of Catholic doctrines on the legitimate uses of force and just warfare. Augustine prevents the pacifism and ascetic qualities of Christianity from becoming hostile to its classic ancestry. As one Catholic scholar notes:

> This teaching – that Christians could learn from pagan Rome, from the Stoics and other virtuous Romans – ensured that Catholicism never narrowed itself intellectually…never denied history or history's complexity or its relevance to the faith, never repudiated the wisdom and the talents of the ancients.[36]

Augustine would also ensure that there was a strong intellectual basis for Christians, not simply to submit to travails as martyrs, but rather to take up arms in defense of goodness as paladins and cavaliers.

A generation after Augustine reconciled Christian faith with pagan virtue, Salvianus, a fifth century priest from Gaul, would attempt to achieve the same sort of reconciliation between Christian faith and the virtue of Rome's conquerors, the barbarians. In his *On the Government of God*, Salvianus explicitly contrasts the corruption of the Romans with the rugged virtue of the Vandals who conquered southern

---

[34] St. Augustine, *City of God*, Book V, Chapter 12 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963) 193.
[35] Ibid, 191.
[36] H.W. Crocker, *Triumph: The Power and the Glory of the Catholic Church* (Roseville, California: Forum Publishing) 85.

France, Spain and North Africa. He indicts the greed and harshness of Roman authority and sites the many examples of Roman peasantry seeking the protection of the barbarian invaders who offered more justice and honesty than could be found from wealthy Roman property owners. Salvianus contrasts the ludeness, lust and iniquity of Romans with the "chastity of the Vandals, the piety of the Goths and the ruder virtues of the Franks and Saxons."[37]

In the early sixth century the noble Roman Boethius would achieve yet another reconciliation of the value systems with his *Consolations of Philosophy*, written, as so many great Christian works seem to be, from a jail cell. While Augustine was a provincial North African and Salvanius an obscure Gaul, Boethius was born to one of the oldest and noblest families in Rome. His father had served as consul and Boethius entered the Roman Senate at the age of twenty-five, before going on to serve as consul himself.[38] From such an august lineage, Boethius was highly educated and fluent in Greek, an increasingly rare skill in the western half of the empire. According to Gibbon, Boethius:

> …[E]mployed eighteen years in the schools of Athens…and attempted to reconcile the strong and subtle sense of Aristotle with the devout contemplation and sublime fancy of Plato. For the benefit of his Latin readers, his genius submitted to teach the first elements of the arts and sciences of Greece. The geometry of Euclid, the music of Pythagoras, the arithmetic of Nichomachus, the mechanics of Archimedes, the astronomy of Ptolemy, the theology of Plato, and the logic of Aristotle … were translated and illustrated by the indefatigable pen of the Roman senator.[39]

---

[37] S. Dill, *Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire* (London: MacMillan & Company, 1919) 115-120.
[38] Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire - Vol. IV* (Norwalk, Connecticut: Easton Press) 1244.
[39] Ibid.

In Boethius, we have the last of a breed of noble Roman patrician, "the last of the Romans whom Cato or Tully could have acknowledged for their countryman."[40]

From such a learned and august source, who had ascended to the heights of worldly success and praise, his legacy to the Western world was a work written in a prison cell after his political enemies had poisoned the barbarian emperor Theodoric against his most able and virtuous servant. His *Consolations of Philosophy* is a perfect fusion of Stoic fortitude and Christian virtue, contemplating how the events of this life cannot truly harm as long as one holds to the path of grace and virtue. Told in the form of a dialogue with Lady Philosophy,

> She taught him to compare his long prosperity and his recent distress, and to conceive new hopes from the inconstancy of fortune. Reason had informed him of the precarious condition of her gifts; experience had satisfied him of their real value; he had enjoyed them without guilt; he might resign them without a sigh, and calmly disdain the impotent malice of his enemies, who had left him happiness, since they had left him virtue.[41]

Boethius' last work was enduringly popular and influential as it bridged the so-called "Dark Ages" and maintained a spark, which would leap again to flame in the age of chivalry. Such a lofty sentiment and elevation of the soul would not have been out of place coming from the mouth of King Arthur himself.[42]

In the space of little more than a century we witness a Catholic saint extolling pagan virtue, a Roman provincial praising the invasion of virtuous barbarians and the noblest of patricians reconciling Stoicism with Christianity. In Augustine, Salvianus and Boethius, the literature of western civilization was gifted with an amazing portrait of how the ancient, Christian, and barbarian virtues were combining into something quite new.

---

[40] Gibbon, *Decline and Fall,* 1244.
[41] Ibid, 1245.
[42] The term "Dark Ages" has thankfully fallen out of favor with serious historians and its origins are just another example of the self-congratulatory nature of the Renaissance.

From this mixture and amalgamation, the very best of each tradition would be retained while the remainder would fall away until what was left was a power tempered with gentleness, a strength tempered by mercy, a freedom restrained by duty, and where the boundless waves of human appetites were channeled into the calming canals of respectful admiration. This portrait of Christian chivalry was to find its first expression in a figure that personified the fusion of which Augustine, Salvianus and Beothius had written; the Christianized barbarian crowned Holy Roman Emperor, Charlemagne.

V.

The Age of Chivalry

"Knights,…whom everybody should honour … have us all to guard; if it were not for knighthood, our lordship would be of little worth for they defend Holy Church, and they uphold justice for us against those would do us harm…. Our chalices would be stolen before us at the table of God, and nothing would ever stop it. The good would never be able to endure if the wicked did not fear knight." – *Ordene de Chevalerie*

At the outset of this exploration of chivalry and western literature, I posited the idea that chivalry is a form of social control that evolved to control and improve male behavior. The discussion of Greek and Roman periods demonstrated the problems with male literary models that chivalry evolved to address. In the previous chapter, we examined how classical, Christian and barbarian values created the ingredients from which chivalry could emerge. Finally we reach a point where we can discuss chivalry itself, but despite the great many written codes of chivalry, its values evolved slowly over centuries, long before it was ever codified. At the outset we also identified three main areas of chivalric duties: duties to God, duties to fellow Christians and duties toward women. In the literature of the Age of Chivalry, which we refer to as the period from the coronation of Charlemagne in 800 C.E. to the beginning of the Renaissance in roughly 1400 C.E., we will observe a society, which enthusiastically embraced the idea of the chivalric duties. In the minds of scholars, writers and the landed nobility the code of chivalry enjoyed great prestige and honor during this period even if, in reality, it was honored more in the breach than in the practice.

In the evolution of chivalry all three of these duties did not arise simultaneously and the reason for this lies in the identity of the catalyst to chivalry's evolution – the Roman Catholic Church. The Catholic Church was in numerous ways the inheritor of the

Roman Empire and found itself surrounded by Rome's conquerors whose religion was heretical Christian Arianism or pagan animism. Bringing these warriors under some sort of control and allegiance to the Church required a massive missionary and conversion effort, so it is not surprising that the first area of chivalry that evolved was a warrior's duties to God. The central figure in that evolution was the Frankish King Charlemagne.

Charlemagne's coronation as Holy Roman Emperor on Christmas Day, 800 C.E. was a culmination of centuries of effort by the Catholic Church to spread their teachings to the barbarian hordes that overran the western half of the Roman Empire. Some of these peoples, like the Goths, had been partly Christianized, though with the heretical Arian form of the faith, but most were polytheist pagans. To transform these invaders into devout defenders of the Catholic faith was an explicit purpose of the Catholic Church and Charlemagne's coronation was a signal achievement in those efforts. The Catholic Church's effort to convert the barbarian invaders is a fascinating story that has enormous consequences to the advent of chivalry. The Church is well known for its syncretistic attempt to co-opt many pagan festivals and rituals rather than try to simply ban and prohibit. This tactic, born out of the lack of power to enforce outright prohibition, is exemplified by tactics such as the Church's adoption of the Norse festival of Yule's date of December 25th as the date memorializing the birth of Jesus. The tactic of accommodation was similarly used in the evangelical missionary activity of the Church in the era after the collapse of Roman Imperial authority in the west. Certainly, the Christianity of pacifism, meekness and martyrdom would never appeal to the descendants of Alaric the Goth and Attila the Hun, but in a work called *The Heliand*, we see how the

Catholic Church tailored its message to conform to the dominant warrior ethic of its prospective converts.

The Heliand was a poem composed in Old Saxon, which condensed the four Gospels into one poem and dates from the mid seventh century. *The Heliand* was perfectly tailored to an audience of warlike barbarians. In it, Jesus Christ is referred to as the "Chieftain of mankind" who was "born in David's hill-fort" attended by the "three foreign warriors from the East." "The mighty Chieftain and Champion of mankind" is immersed in the Jordan by his "loyal thane John" and calls twelve men to be his "warrior-companions." The "best of thanes", Peter is given power over Hell's gates and after the "last mead-hall feast" this "mighty swordsman of Christ" defends him in the Garden against the "deserter Judas."[43] Every location of the Gospels, from Rome to Jerusalem is a "Fort" and magic abounds as Christ rescues mankind from the loathsome enemy. Putting the gospel of Jesus Christ in these familiar war-like terms was an intentional strategy to appeal to the martial valor of the barbarian tribes, of which the Franks would emerge as the most important.[44]

The Franks settled into what had been the Roman province of Gaul, today the area of western France. The Franks had never been converted to any form of Christianity and when Clovis came to the throne in 481 C.E. the church moved decisively to support his accession and begin a process of conversion. There is an apocryphal tale that when Clovis was told the story of the crucifixion he exclaimed "If only I had been there with my Franks!"[45] Such a martial devotion to drawing their swords in defense of the faith

---

[43] Unknown author, *The Heliand*, J.E. Cathey, trans. (Charleston, West Virginia: West Virginia University Press, 2002) 1-12.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Crocker, *Triumph*, 112.

was an indispensable element in not only the development of chivalry, but in the preservation of Christianity itself, for it would be the Franks under the command of Charles "The Hammer" Martel who would turn away the seemingly unstoppable Islamic armies at the Battle of Tours in 732 C.E.

The Catholic Church and the papacy itself increasingly relied on the Franks throughout the seventh and eighth centuries and even negotiated a peaceful change of power from the Merovingian to Carolingian dynasties. Charlemagne, the greatest of the Carolingian kings, was the spiritual father of medieval chivalry. His importance emerges as not only a powerful and successful historical figure but also as a literary imaginative ideal that would dominate early chivalric literature. The historical Charlemagne truly did exhibit many of the characteristics of a chivalric king. He was physically brave, leading over fifty campaigns in person from the Moorish kingdoms of Spain to the steppes of the Balkans. He was also a dutiful son of the Catholic Church. Though Charlemagne was aware that the Pope was a temporal political ally, he never forgot that he was also his spiritual father. Charlemagne was a patron of the arts and of education, though he himself never learned to write. His family life involved a great affection for not only his four successive wives, but also for his daughters whom he kept in his own household rather than use them as political pawns in the game of marital alliance building.[46]

The imaginative ideal of Charlemagne possessed far more lasting consequences for the institution of chivalry than even the historical reality. These consequences come in the form of the second area of chivalric duties, those to the knight's comrades and fellow Christians, and these duties are readily apparent in the great epic of Charlemagne and chivalry, *The Song of Roland.* Written in Old French nearly three centuries after the

[46] Crocker, *Triumph*, 114.

historical event upon which it is based, it weaves a tale of betrayal and vengeance in the context of Charlemagne's campaigns in Spain against Saracen Muslims. Charlemagne's rearguard, commanded by his nephew Roland, his faithful friend Oliver and the "twelve paladins of Charlemagne" is betrayed by the cowardly Ganelon's jealousy and ambushed at the mountain pass of Roncevaux. *The Song of Roland* glorifies the virtue of the loyalty, the duties, and the martial prowess of a knight, as Barber notes: "The emphasis of the poem, then, is simple: it is a poem about one man's [Roland's] conduct in battle. Its ideals are loyalty to lord and friend and country: Charlemagne, Oliver and France are foremost in Roland's mind."[47]

Numbering some twenty thousand soldiers, the ambushed rearguard of Charlemagne's host is beset by 400,000 Saracens, yet the violent action described in the poem is nearly always individuals or pairs of knights in mortal combat. The Franks maintain "discipline and a sense of military decorum" as they keep formation and throw back wave after wave of the Saracen horde.[48] Even a short excerpt gives the reader a flavor for the qualities of the early knight:

> The County Roland grips fast his blood-red blade;
> Well has he heard how the French are dismayed
> His heart grieves so, 'tis like to split in twain.
> He hails the Paynim: 'God send thee all His plagues!
> Thou has slain one for whom I'll make thee pay[49]

With the last of his strength Roland sounds his horn, which alerts Charlemagne to his comrade's peril and though Charlemagne cannot return in time to save his rearguard, he will avenge them. Charlemagne's loyalty toward Roland and Roland's toward Oliver

---

[47] Richard Barber, *The Reign of Chivalry* (Rochester, New York: The Boydell Press) 49.
[48] Ibid.
[49] C.K. Moncrief, trans., *The Song of Roland* (New York: Kessinger Publishing, 2002) 114.

form the links in the great adamantine chain of duty and obligation that holds fast against the treachery and faithlessness of the deceitful Saracens.

What is noticeably lacking in *The Song of Roland* is a role for women.[50] There is Roland's betrothed, the beautiful Alde, and the few lines devoted to her are indeed beautiful, yet she does not actually appear until the very end of the poem. When she approaches Charlemagne, she inquires as to the fate of her beloved:

> Was come to him there Alde, that fair dame;
> Said to the King "Where's Roland the Captain,
> Who swore to me he'd have me for his mate?"
> Then upon Charles a heavy sorrow weighed,
> And his eyes wept , he tore his beard again:
> "Sister, dear friend, of a dead man you spake.
> I'll give you the far better in exchange,
> That is Louis, what further can I say;
> He is my son, and shall my marches take."
> Alde answered him: "That word to me is strange.
> Never, please God, His Angels and His Saints
> When Roland's dead shall I alive remain!"
> Her colour fails, at th' feet of Charlemagne,
> She falls; she's dead.
> Her soul God's Mercy awaits!
> Barons of France weep therefore and complain.[51]

But despite their poignancy, Alde's death merely punctuates the enormous importance of Roland rather than a relationship that the reader never hears of until twelve lines before her death. Roland never seems to evidence any deep attachment to Alde, and she never enters his thoughts during the battle of Roncevaux. Roland's motivation is his allegiance for his emperor and uncle, and his actions are in no way designed to serve Alde in the slightest. Even his moment of death fails to spark any thought of his betrothed.[52] Clearly Roland was not that kind of knight. As Barber observes of Alde, "her part is only to

---

[50] Barber, *Reign*, 51.
[51] *Song of Roland*, 60.
[52] Ann Tukey Harrison, "Aude and Bramimunde: Their Importance in the Chanson de Roland", *The French Review* 54, no. 5 (April 1981) 673.

swoon and die."[53] Roland's duties toward God and toward his fellow knights and lords had certainly become part of what it meant to be a good knight and *The Song of Roland* idealizes and glorifies men performing those duties. At the time *The Song of Roland* was written, however, in the early eleventh century, duties toward women had still not risen up as an important part of the chivalric code. We first see those duties being written of in the troubadour poetry, which bloomed in southern France in the early twelfth century as chivalric literature shifted from a tales of great deeds to tales of love and lyricism.[54]

Though troubadour poetry dealt with a wide variety of subject matters its central focus was on the love of a lady. This ideal love was characterized by a male desire for a woman of high birth, thus rendered as unattainable. The troubadour poets delve into the conflict between the enjoyment of physical love, *Amars* and the unfulfilled longing of spiritual love or *fin'amors*. Different poets reach different conclusions about which form of love is superior but unanimously agree that love is the prime mover of a man's life. His great deeds are now a means of gaining a woman's notice and favor. His knightly virtues – courage, humility and courtesy – flow from the fountainhead of his love for the idealized woman.

That such sentiments should have flowered in the south of France was actually quite natural. This rich and prosperous region produced enough material bounty to allow the lords and ladies the luxury of diversions, and in which the poetic talents of Guillame IX, the Duke of Aquitane set an example to spur other great lords and ladies to emulate. Also, the region of Southern France was one where the vestiges of ancient Roman law,

---

[53] Barber, *Reign*, 49.

[54] Some of the earliest surviving poems were written by Guillaume IX, the Duke of Aquitane and the grandfather of the future Queen of France and England, Eleanor of Aquitane. Her influence in spreading these values to the rougher climes of England through her marriage to Henry II cannot be overstated.

more favorable to women in general, still held sway. Themes of physical as well as spiritual love also found fertile ground, for here the authority of the Catholic Church was less than absolute.[55] In this heady atmosphere, one of the earliest troubadour poets, Marcabru found the perfect audience for his "lyrical adulation" to "grace and beauty."[56]

> Ah, gracious Love, fountain of good,
> Illuminating the whole world,
> I ask forgiveness for these cries –
> shield me from having to linger there!
> I hold myself your prisoner
> to have your comfort everywhere,
> hoping that you will be my guide.[57]

Marcabru resolves the tension between *Amars* and *fin'amor* in favor of spiritual love and in his view the inherent tension between chivalry's dual roles of warrior and lover are resolved in favor of restraint. Male aggression is thus held prisoner to the demands of moderation and restraint as the sole pathway to the "fullness of courtly virtues and actions."[58] Later troubadour poets such as Bernart de Ventadorn would go even further drawing an explicit parallel between the knight's spiritual servitude toward his lady love and his temporal servitude to his feudal lord. Here the knight's power and prowess are virtually enslaved to his courtly love:

> Noble lady, I ask of you
> To take me as your servitor;
> I'll serve you as I would my lord,
> Whatever my reward shall be.
> Look, I am here at your command,
> You who are noble, joyous and kind.[59]

---

[55] From this same region would spring the Cathar heresy which would be suppressed by the first crusade to be preached against fellow, though heretical, Christians.
[56] Barber, *Reign*, 56.
[57] Ibid, 57.
[58] Ibid, 58.
[59] Ibid, 59.

The woman is thus idealized and elevated and the carnal aspects of love, possession and gratification, having and using, are transfigured into serving and thus into protecting. With the knight's male power thus enslaved to the feminine, the ultimate release is to draw his sword in the defense of a noble lady and, in fact, her favor provides limitless strength to that same sword arm. For example, in Malory's *Le Morte d' Arthur*, Sir Palomides is inspired to "smite down, either with spear or sword, all the knights he met, for through the sight of her he was so enamored in her love."[60] The power of the woman is so great that it can extend to humiliating the knight whom she holds in bondage as a lady does to Sir Gawain in *Perlesvaus*, commanding him to behave as a coward during a jousting tournament. No longer is the noble woman merely an inspiration but has literally become the chivalric knight's master. How far from Achilles have we now traveled?

The literary idea of servitude toward a noble lady had now reached a fever pitch which would endure long after the other aspects of chivalric duty – to God and to fellow knights – began to decline. As Sir Walter Scott wrote in 1818:

> He [the knight] was not called upon simply to practice these virtues when opportunity offered, but to be sedulous and unwearied in searching for the means of exercising them, and to push them without hesitation to the brink of extravagance, or even beyond it.[61]

If the opportunities for going on holy crusades and for standing shoulder to shoulder with fellow knights to defend Christendom had greatly declined as the age of chivalry neared

---

[60] Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1899) 306.
[61] Barber, *Reign*, 168.

the fourteenth century, then duties toward women offered a increasingly welcome outlet for the chivalric spirit.[62]

The fullest expression of the chivalric romance can be found in the multitude of medieval stories surrounding the court of King Arthur. The Arthurian myth features all the duties of chivalry: to God, to fellow knights and Christians and to courtly love. Though based on Celtic folktales full of magic and the supernatural, they also claimed to tell the story of a historical figure, obscured though he was by the mists of Avalon and time. In the hands of the sophisticated troubadour poets of France, the Arthurian cycle would become a treasure trove of chivalric literature.

Chretien de Troyes first began enriching these folktales in the mid-twelfth century by introducing a number of characters to King Arthur's court of which there was previously no record, such as Calogrenant, Eric and most importantly Lancelot. But perhaps Chretien's most important contribution was the way his stories combined tales of physical adventure with the theme of courtly love while always maintaining a world of supernatural wonder. Chretien's knights actively seek adventures that will prove their prowess but they are never simply sword swingers but complex conflicted characters attempting to reconcile their spiritual quest to prove their mettle with earthly desire and, all too often, unrestrainable passion. Such is the famous tale of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. According to Chretien, Gawain is actually a bit of a mere man of action who has little taste for courtly love.[63] Yet Gawain's greatest challenges in the Green

---

[62] One notable exception to the rise of "chivalric metaphysics" was the fourteenth century scholar Honore' Bonet. In his *L'Arbre des Batailles* he utterly rejects the notion that a knight's prowess can emanate from his courtly love. He writes a handbook for the knight's true occupation – warfare – and dismisses all other whimsical notions. Raymond L. Kilgour, "Honore' Bonet: A Fourteenth-Century Critic of Chivalry", *PMLA* 50, no. 2 (June, 1935) 352-361.

[63] In Chretien's *Le Chevalier au Lion*, Gawain persuades the young knight Yvain to abandon his wife Laudine in order to pursue adventures and marvels.

Knight tale is of his fortitude in submitting himself to the Green Knight's return stroke, and his restraint in resisting the seduction of Lady Bertilak, the wife of his host. Gawain's encounter with the beautiful Lady Bertilak is very much a battle. Just as it would be shameful for Gawain to retreat from an enemy on the field, he cannot simply refuse to allow her to visit his bedroom but must face her on her chosen field of battle. His honor dictates he must refuse her advances, but his courtesy dictates that he must not offend her in the process. This tension is indicative of an entire sexual subtext where desire is sublimated as courtesy and the taking of a physical token – a scarf or in this case a girdle – becomes the substitute for physical possession of the woman herself. This sort of heroic portrayal in both aspects of warrior and lover made the stories of Arthur immensely popular in noble and royal courts across the continent where the tastes of ladies as well as lords must be satisfied.

If Gawain is the slightly flawed knight for whom worldly desire intrudes with inevitably harmless or even comical consequences, then Lancelot stands as the ideal knight undone by the intensity of feeling for the idealized woman. In Lancelot we see all the paradoxes and contradictions of the entire chivalric code for which can praise as man for being:

> …the most courteous knight that ever bore shield
> …the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrode horse
> …the truest lover, of a sinful man, that ever loved woman
> …the kindest man that ever struck with sword
> …the goodliest person that ever came among a press of knights
> …the meekest man and gentlest knight that ever ate in a hall among ladies
> …and the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that put spear in the rest.[64]

Being the embodiment of the chivalric code, this greatest of chivalric knights must serve the highest, the most virtuous woman, who must be Queen Guinevere. His virtue must be

[64] Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, 486.

expressed by his devotion; his strength must flow from her favor. How can they not become lovers? For Lancelot the twin roles of warrior and lover are irreconcilable. His duty to his liege-lord and sovereign is in direct conflict with the purity of his love for the embodiment of female virtue. The consummation of their desire brings ruin to the entire kingdom, recreating the fall of Adam and his exile from Eden. For all its lyrical romance the tale of Lancelot and Guinevere is still a cautionary tale reinforcing the medieval ideals of loyalty and fealty to the King.

Arthur himself is often reduced to a merely supporting character. As the King, he does no riding out in search of adventure but generally remains in Camelot. According to Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth century *History of the Kings of England*, Arthur was an actual historical figure, the last of the Romans waging a dozen battles to defend Britain from Saxon invasion. His great exploits were as a military commander not a knight-errant and his passivity in the face of trials such as Guinevere's betrayal earned him the sobriquet of the *roi fainéant,* the "do-nothing king." [65] It is only in his death, that he finds the adventure and release from the decline of his once brilliant glory. Yet Arthur always appears as the man at a Round Table surrounded by adolescent boys. While his knights are impetuous, he is wise. While they are foolhardy, Arthur is dignified. Some of his knights have purity and innocence, while Arthur defies disillusionment and innocence lost. His knights seek personal glory, but Arthur must defend a kingdom. Whatever his failings Arthur's "prestige is never…compromised by his personal weaknesses ... his authority and glory remain intact."[66]

---

[65] O. J. Padel, "The Nature of Arthur", *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 27 (1994) 27.
[66] Norris J. Lacy, "Character of Arthur", *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland) 16–17.

The evolution of the chivalric code throughout the Middle Ages represents an increasingly successful effort to create an ideal knightly class that was as pleasant at leisure as they were courageous at war. The literature of the period created models that the royalty and nobility found irresistible and which they began consciously to imitate. Thus the chivalric literature of the period demonstrates that the Catholic Church's project of creating warriors for Christ had evolved even further to control and ameliorate the warrior mentality. It might be tempting to dismiss the stories of King Arthur and the Round Table as so much medieval fluff – tales of magic, giants and dragons, stories of quests with damsels and the credulity of plotlines in equal distress. Yet these stories had powerful impact on the royalty and nobility of Europe. Jean Froissart, a fourteenth century historian tells how that English victory at Crécy would not have been possible without French tactics placing honor and chivalry ahead of pragmatism. Time and again, the vanguard of the French cavalry charged in glory with colors flying against the entrenched English, a recipe for French disaster, which would be replayed thirty years later at Agincourt.[67] In 1344, King Edward III announced that he was, as his ancestor Arthur had done, founding a Round Table of three hundred knights to convene on Whitsun, just as the Arthurian romances state. Though war with France would place a hold on Edward's plans it is easy to see how influential the Arthurian myth was not only to the Age of Chivalry, but to all ages. The Arthurian legend lit a flame, which has inspired men of chivalric temperament for nearly a millennia. When Winston Churchill wrote *The Birth of Britain* he wrote of the academic skeptics' attempts to disprove any historical Arthur:

---

[67] Leo Braudy, *From Chivalry to Terrorism: War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity* (New York: Random House, 2003) 85.

> Authorities say 'No Arthur; at least no proof of Arthur.' It was only when Geoffrey of Monmouth six hundred years later was praising the feudalism and martial aristocracy that chivalry, honour, the Christian faith, knights in steel and ladies bewitching, are enshrined in a glorious circle lit by victory. Later this would have been retold and embellished by the genius of Mallory, Spenser and Tennyson. True or false, they have gained an immortal hold upon the thoughts of men…We prefer to believe that the story…which delighted the fiction-loving Europe of the twelfth century is not all fancy. If we could see exactly what happened we should find ourselves in the presence of a theme as well-founded, as inspired, and as inalienable from the inheritance of mankind as the *Odyssey* or the Old Testament. It is all true, or it ought to be.[68]

Far be it from me to disagree with The Right Honorable Sir Winston Churchill, himself knighted at the hands of a female sovereign, Queen Elizabeth II.

The ideal literary male character in our survey thus far has changed rather dramatically. The personal passion of Achilles, the merciless pietas of Aeneas and even the great deeds of prowess of Roland and the literary Charlemagne, have given way to the likes of Gawain, Lancelot and to King Arthur himself. Purity of heart and spirit, generosity and modesty toward women even to the point of extravagant gestures of servitude have become as important to the ideal of chivalry as loyalty toward fellow knights and a strong sword arm. But if the imagined man had changed immensely, the actual behavior of men, it seemed, had changed very little, for almost from the moment that chivalry became codified it began to be criticized. This critique was not an attack on the substance of the chivalric code. The medieval critics would not assert, as later critics would, that the chivalric code was irrational, patronizing or even silly. The great medieval complaint about the code of chivalry was that it was not being honored in actuality. The scathing criticism of knights breaking the code of chivalry merely demonstrates how deeply attached the medieval world was to the ideal. The chivalric

---

[68] Winston Churchill, *A History of the English Speaking Peoples: The Birth of Britain*, Dodd, Mead & Co. (London, 1956) 59-60.

code was no antidote for human avarice and violence, leading the twelfth century scholar Alan of Lille to scold knights that used their military prowess to "… become cattle thieves. Now they engage not in soldiering, but in plundering, and under the guise of soldiers, the take on the cruel nature of marauders. Nor do they fight against their enemies so much as victimize the poor."[69] Lest it be thought that these were wartime excesses against non-Christians during the Crusades, Alan makes it clear that "[i]nto the bosom of Mother Church they plunge their swords, and the force, which they should expend against the enemy, they expend against their own people."[70]

It is ironic that the Catholic Church, which had so assiduously labored to create the medieval knight was now apprehensive about the warrior class they had wrought. St. Bernard of Clairvaux spoke for a great many clerical critics writing:

> What then, O knights, is this monstrous error and what this unbearable urge, which bids you fight with such pomp and labor, and all to no purpose except death and sin. You cover your horses with silk and plume your armour with I know not what sort of rags; you paint your shields and your saddles; you adorn your bits and spurs with gold and silver and precious stones, and then in all this glory you rush to your ruin with fearful wrath and fearless folly.[71]

In fact the breadth and intensity of criticism of the medieval knighthood was such that one might be tempted to disregard its literature as nothing more than a gloss, attempting to dress up the depredations of sword-wielding brutes against defenseless feudal serfs in a more pleasing aspect. But that fundamentally misses the purpose of the chivalric literature of the period. If the writers and poets are glorifying the code of chivalry it is perhaps because they recognize how desperately their society needed it. Their tales of sacrifice, purity and courage, no doubt contain an element of flattery for the nobility who

---

[69] Alan of Lille, *The Art of Preaching* (Rome: Cistercian Publishing, 1981) 146.
[70] Ibid, 149.
[71] Bernard of Clairvaux, *In Praise of the New Knighthood* (London: Gorgias Press, 2010) 37.

were their patrons, but they also served as moral parables offering up these literary ideals and exemplars for these same lords and knights. It is a testament to the attachment that the medieval world had for notions of chivalry that its many abuses led not to discredit but to reforming zeal as more and more chivalric orders sprang up to attempt to reclaim the pure chivalry of their distant ancestors. On the borders of Christendom in the thirteenth century the Order of the Knights of the Temple, the Order of St. John the Hospitaller and the Order of the Teutonic Knights all sprang into existence as ascetic orders eschewing the trappings, which St. Bernard of Clairvaux found so repellant. Yet even in the heart of Western Europe knightly orders flowered with lofty ideals and intentions for reclaiming true chivalry. In Spain the Order of the Sash and the Order of St. Catherine, in France the Order of the Star, in Burgundy the Order of the Golden Fleece and, most famously of all, in England the Order of the Garter all emerged within a single thirty year period from 1330-1360 C.E.[72] In the end, it was not the violence or the greed or the breaches of honor, which threatened the moral hegemony chivalry enjoyed over the literature of the medieval imagination. The resistance to chivalry, with all its great contradictions, came from another source entirely. The great threat to chivalry was the rise of humanism, rationalism and the advent of a fascination with ancient culture of Greece and Rome, which were the hallmarks of the self-congratulatory and smugly self-titled epoch known as the Renaissance.

[72] Barber, *Reign*, 146-151.

VI.

The Renaissance – Chivalry and Artifice

"If you see a philosopher determining all things by means of right reason, him you shall reverence." – Pico della Mirandola

Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man* is often called the manifesto of the Renaissance. Within its pages, Pico makes a passionate appeal to place the human quest for knowledge at the center of human endeavors. By the use of right reason, man can ascend the great chain of being and approach the dignity of angels. Though Pico was a faithful son of the Catholic Church, his brand of humanism was emblematic of the resistance that began to manifest itself to the chivalric code during the Renaissance. This resistance was not simply an objection to the failures of knights to live up to the code, though that certainly played a role, but more fundamentally to the very precepts of chivalry. The Renaissance did not turn its back on the chivalric virtues *per se*, but its fascination with intellectual achievement and self-creation were increasingly at odds with either of the dual roles of the chivalric knight, the warrior and the lover. In all phases of its code chivalry depends on a generosity and, at times, extravagance of spirit. The ideal chivalric knight was not a golden mean between warrior and lover but extreme in both arenas, thus fusing the seemingly irreconcilable. This passion was simply out of fashion in the more cerebral climate of the Renaissance, where earnestness and enthusiasm were being eroded by elegance and sophistication. Tragically, the world was growing up and the boyish enthusiasm for swordplay and impressing damsels began to give way to more mature and sober pastimes.[73]

---

[73] Like reading Machiavelli and exchanging courage for cunning – Oh the horror!

After spending such time on the pre-chivalric ideals of Greece and Rome, one might suspect that the Renaissance's embrace of classical culture might also represent a threat to the chivalry. But that, in fact, was not the case as the period did not embrace the true culture of the Greeks and Romans, but an idealized and reimagined world where they projected their cultural values on the figures of the ancient world. Thus we have Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, where the Trojan War becomes a story not of wrath and violence as in the *Iliad*, but a love story in conflict with Renaissance conceptions of honor.[74] Other examples are found in Hector's inclusion – instead of Achilles – as one of the Nine Worthies.[75] The Renaissance selects the selfless and chivalric Hector as the hero of the Iliad, something unthinkable to an ancient Greek. This Renaissance obsession with reconciling their values and classical values is perhaps best found in Torquato Tasso's philosophical defense of Aeneas. In Tasso's *Discourse on the Heroic Poem* he crafts a detailed three-pronged defense of Aeneas' killing of Turnus in the climactic scene. While Tasso's defense is interesting in its own right, the fact he feels compelled to make it at all speaks volumes of the Renaissance mindset. It demonstrates the need the Renaissance felt to identify closely with a classical past and also exhibits the flexibility of Renaissance ethical constructs. Tasso's primary defense was centered on the idea that Turnus represented a threat to civil order and therefore need not be accorded the dictates of honor. The interests of the state have now superseded the dictates of honor.

In addition to these instances where ancient stories and characters are recast in accordance with Renaissance values, we also encounter cases where medieval literature is

---

[74] Gagen, "Hector's Honor," 131.

[75] The Nine Worthies were originally a medieval idea that included nine great men, three Christians, three pagans and three Jews. The Christians were Charlemagne, King Arthur and Godfrey of Bouillon. The three pagans were Hector, Alexander and Caesar. The three Jews were Joshua, David and Judas Maccabeus. The Nine Worthies were often used as stock characters in Renaissance pageants and masques.

reinterpreted in light of classical values. The greatest example of this might be Edmund Spenser's *Fairie Queen*. Published in 1590, Spenser reconfigures the Arthurian legend for a new purpose. Instead of martial prowess, religious devotion or even lyrical romance, Spenser's intent was to teach Aristotelian virtue. It is a gentleman that Spenser is attempting to educate, no longer a knight. In a letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, Spenser confessed his intent that:

> The general end … of all the book is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline…to portray Arthur, before he was king, the image of a brave knight, perfected in the twelve private moral virtues as Aristotle hath devised.[76]

The Aristotelian focus of ethics was on finding the perfect balance between the extremes and this radically differs from the chivalric tradition from which the Arthurian legend springs. Chivalry requires a generous – to the point of excessive – display of the qualities it considers virtue. Though Spenser would only write six of a projected twenty-four books, even the six he wrote show his list of qualities – Holiness, Temperance, Chastity, Friendship, Justice and Courtesy – were far better suited for a gentleman than a warrior or a lover. Certainly some of these qualities do appear in the code of chivalry, but one cannot help but observe that they come from the kinder, gentler side of the ledger. That of course is in perfect accord with the general drift of Renaissance chivalry.

Spenser also touches on a number of other aspects of the Renaissance that evidence its building resistance to chivalric values. The first of these is the importance of being gentle-born. According to Michael West, "at times his utterances seem to align

---

[76] Edmund Spenser, *Fairie Queen* (Oxford: MacMillan, 1873) iii. It is an interesting side note that this passage should also reveal how loose was the Renaissance grasp of Aristotle's Ethics, that Spenser would assign a strict number to the private moral virtues that does not actually exist in Aristotle's work. J.J. Jusearnd, "Twelve Private Morall Vertues as Aristotle Hath Devised" *Modern Philology* 3, no. 2(Jan. 1906) 373-374.

him with the most extreme spokesman of Continental humanism for the inherent superiority of the wellborn:"[77]

> In brave pursuit of honorable deed,
> There is I know not what great difference
> Between the vulgar and the noble seed,
> Which unto things of valorous pretence
> Seems to be born by native influence;
> As feats of arms, and love to entertain;
> But chiefly skill to ride seems a science
> Proper to gentle blood: some others fain
> To manage steeds, as did this vaunter; but in vain.[78]

This preference for a class-conscious gentility is also emphasized in another quintessential Renaissance work, *The Book of the Courtier* by the Italian, Baldassare Castiglione, a Renaissance diplomat, soldier and writer. Castiglione writes that the ideal courtier should be of noble blood for:

> …noble birth is like a bright lamp that manifests and makes visible good and evil deeds, and kindles and stimulates to virtue both by fear and shame and by hope of praise. And since this splendour of nobility does not illumine the deeds of the humbly born, they lack the stimulus and fear of shame, nor do they feel any obligation to advance beyond what their predecessors have done.[79]

Certainly we should not pretend that the Age of Chivalry was an oasis of egalitarianism where noble blood counted for little, but the code of chivalry with its emphasis on physical prowess and courage did allow for a meritocracy of deeds to arise. Regardless of the nobility of one's birth, knighthood was never a hereditary title. To be knighted depended on the performance of a conspicuous act of bravery on the battlefield. History records many humble squires knighted for their courage and continuing to rise for their merits. One of the most notable was Sir John Marshall of England who was knighted as a

---

[77] Michael West, "Spenser and the Renaissance Ideal of Christian Heroism", *PMLA* 88, no. 5 (Oct., 1973) 1014.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Baldasore Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier* (New York: Digireads Publications, 2009) 22.

squire by Henry II, and rose to serve as Chancellor of England and the principal advisor of two of Henry's sons. This avenue of advancement through physical prowess began to close in the Renaissance as the entire warrior ethos of chivalry began to be undercut by humanism's faith in the superiority of noble bloodlines.

The Renaissance's resistance to chivalry can also be detected in the authors' deliberate choice of which virtues their literary knights will practice. Both Spenser and Castiglione demonstrate the Renaissance's rise of the intellect over physicality. Spenser's epic poem certainly does contain a multitude of scenes of physical combat, but throughout there is a clear preference for the intellect. Spenser creates numerous allegorical figures symbolizing wisdom, such as Heavenly Contemplation and Merlin, who constantly offer up calming advice to Arthur and his knights. Even the decline of physical abilities is presented in terms of praise at the tradeoff of physical for intellectual power such as when the aged Eumnestes described as being of "weak body…well changed for the mind's redoubled force."[80] Castiglione joins in diminishing the importance of physical prowess by having his characters poke fun at men of pure action:

> …one might justly say that which a brave lady jestingly said in gentle company to one whom I will not name at present; who, being invited to dance, refused not only that, but to listen to the music, and many other entertainments proposed to him, -- saying always that such silly trifles were not his business; so that at last the lady said, 'What is your business, then?' He replied with a sour look, 'To fight.' Then the lady at once said, 'Now that you are in no war and out of fighting trim, I should think it were a good thing to have yourself well oiled, and to stow yourself with all your battle harness in a closet until you are needed, lest you grow more rusty than you are…[81]

This turn away from the physical is also in keeping with the Renaissance's belief that peace rather than war was the natural state of man. Again, Spenser cannot completely

---

[80] West, "Spenser and Renaissance Ideal," 1020.
[81] Castiglione, *Courtier*, 26.

avoid the necessity of war in the genre of heroic epic but he goes to some length to demonstrate his preference for peaceful reconciliation over heroic triumph. In the episode where the knight Guyon attempts to play the role of peacemaker only to be drawn into the conflict between Huddibras and Sansloy, the conflict is finally suppressed by Medina who praises the blessings of:

> …[L]ovely concord and most sacred peace
> Doth nourish virtue and fast friendship breeds;
> By which she triumphs over ire and pride,
> And wins an olive garland for her meeds:
> Be therefore, O my dear lords, pacified,
> And this misseeming discord meekly lay aside.[82]

As West argues, "the whole fable is the most complete dramatization…of the futility of combat."[83]

When Spenser grapples with the conflict between the medieval chivalric ethic and Renaissance humanism, the end product is an ambivalent dichotomy where his knights fight but seem constantly in doubt about the rightness of their actions. Just as Spenser set out to teach Aristotelian ethics, his characters, through trial and error, struggle toward some golden mean between prowess and intellect, between honorable conflict and perpetual peace. Castiglione carries this transition even further. While we have documented instances where he echoes Spenser, his characters suffer none of the doubt and struggle of Spenser's. Castiglione's work also takes up the dual roles of warrior and lover and combines them – not as chivalry does in a dynamic contradiction, or even as Spenser does in a golden mean – but as a lukewarm, watered down substitute known as a "Courtier."

---

[82] Spenser, *The Fairie Queen*, 31.
[83] West, "Spenser and Renaissance Ideal," 1017.

Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*, told in the form of dialogues, is basically an instruction book on how a man can "*seem* to be a natural nobleman."[84][my italics] That small word, "seem" is what makes the Courtier so very different than the man of chivalry. There are a number of substantive differences also; a classical education in Greek and Latin has replaced martial prowess and the Courtier requires more social skills than the knight. Yet the essential difference is that chivalric code requires a man to be something and the *Book of the Courtier* only instructs him on how to appear to be something. For example, the ideal courtier should be relatively young but appear to be sober and thoughtful beyond his years, not by virtue of sober thoughtfulness, but by the expedient wearing a grave expression and dressing in darker colors – in other words, through tricks. Castiglione has replaced the passionate art of living with the hollow artifice of pleasing.

The Renaissance had not degenerated so far as to completely lose respect for a man's prowess. Castiglione acknowledges that "the principal and true profession of the Courtier ought to be that of arms" but even here he diminishes the force of the statement by immediately stating what is vital is to "be known among others as bold and strong.[85] As for courage and valor, while undoubtedly a good thing to have, what truly matters is for the Courtier to "always be seen to possess them."[86] Castiglione echoes Machiavelli in his ideas that what is ultimately important is reputation over true virtue and style over substance. A perfect courtier cannot even allow his stratagems rest on their own merit but must find artful ways of praising his own merits though "in such a way that they shall not seem to said to that end, but let fall so naturally that it was impossible not to say

---

[84] Castiglione, *Courtier*, 34.
[85] Ibid, 127.
[86] Ibid.

them, and while seeming always to avoid self-praise, yet to achieve it."[87] It is impossible to read Castiglione for very long before the cynicism and cleverness begin to grate. But if his exercise in counterfeit virtue were not bad enough, the Renaissance had one more weapon in its arsenal to demonstrate its resistance to the chivalric code – mockery.

Cervantes' *Don Quixote* is justly famous as a seminal work in the decline of chivalry and the adventures of the mad title character are often presented as cultural Rubicon from which chivalry could never recover. Lord Byron in his Don Juan makes the claim that:

> Cervantes smiled Spain's chivalry away;
> A single laugh demolish'd the right arm
> Of his own country; -- seldom since that day
> Has Spain had heroes. While Romance could charm,
> The world gave ground before her bright array;
> And therefore his volumes done such harm,
> That all their glory, as a composition
> Was dearly purchased by his land's perdition.[88]

There is certainly something to his charge, for chivalry had withstood six centuries of repeated violations of its stated code, but as a social institution it did not survive far beyond the parody of *Don Quixote*. One need look no further than The Crusades to see how far actual conduct had deviated from the portrayal of chivalry in literature, yet as a societal value chivalry had withstood these depredations reasonably well. Chivalry was like a fortress whose high towers and thick walls were impregnable from frontal assault, so long as the walls were manned.[89] But what swords and blood could not conquer, laughter could. Once Cervantes held up the mirror to expose the pomp and pretence of

---

[87] Castiglione, *Courtier*, 134.
[88] Lord George Byron, *Don Juan* (London: John Hunt, 1823) 407.
[89] Reminiscent of the legend of the *Krak de Chevaliers*, the impregnable crusader fortress of the Knights of St. John in Syria. Once garrisoned by over two thousand knights, the fortress was simply abandoned when the collapse of the pilgrimages to the Holy Land took away its reason to exist.

chivalry as a social institution, chivalry's palisades stood deserted, no longer even worthy of conquest, but a dusty relic to an inconsequential past.

There is however, much historical evidence that chivalry's demise was already an accomplished fact before Cervantes ever put pen to paper and that Don Quixote was already riding his nag across a post-chivalric landscape. Spain's War of the Alpujarras was fought from 1569-1571, nearly thirty years before the publication of *Don Quixote*, and the behavior of Spain's actual knights clearly demonstrates that the "debasement of chivalry" was not merely a literary phenomenon.[90] The conflict between the Spanish crown and the Morisco descendants of the Moors of Granada witnessed an attempt by Spanish authorities to enforce the feudal obligations of their liege-men, the *hidalgos* and *caballeros* of Spain. These noble classes received tax exemptions and legal immunities in return for their obligation to ride out when their liege lord called upon them, but when the call came the result demonstrated the "gap between social hierarchy and the ideology on which it continued to be based."[91] These knights of Spain came arrayed only slightly less comically than Don Quixote himself as historical accounts note their dusty mismatched armor and borrowed plow horses as they hurriedly outfitted themselves for service. Their performance once they reached the theatre of war also reminds us more of *Don Quixote* than the *Song of Roland*:

> …[T]hese "Christian" forces focused more on plundering the towns near Granada than on pursuing the rebels into their remote strongholds. They not only stole the horses and valuable moveable good of Moriscos pacificos…but also took women and children captive and sold them into slavery….The other side of this lack of discipline was the extraordinary frequency of desertions. Once they had all the

[90] William Childers, "Don Quixote and the War of the Alpujarras: The Historical Debasement of Chivalry as a Correlative to its Literary Parody, *Hispania* 88, no.1 (March, 2005) 11.
[91] Ibid.

> plunder they could carry back to their town, these "knights" often simply disappeared.[92]

If plundering everything in sight were not ample enough evidence of chivalry's debasement, there is the comical, though historical, attempt of the *caballeros* to invoice the Spanish government for their service. Whereas in the "Age of Chivalry" the knight owed military service to his liege lord funded from the revenues of the fief he had been granted by his liege lord, the caballeros wanted those revenues without any reciprocal obligation of service. In effect, they wanted to have their cake paid for by their liege-lord and eat their Moorish neighbors' too! Civil suits were brought against royal officials to recover the cost of the knight's "rations, salaries, and liability for the instruments of war that had been damaged, lost or stolen."[93] Despite their feudal obligation to maintain horse and arms at all times at their own expense, the caballeros of Cadiz sued the town council for the cost of the arms, armor and mounts "they had to borrow in order to go to war."[94] Many *caballeros* did not even answer the call in person but merely sent substitutes in shabby armor and on inferior mounts. We can almost visualize dozens of Sancho Panzas with barber's basins for helmets riding donkeys off to battle.

The episode of the War of Alpujarras took place in Cervantes' lifetime and its effect on his literary efforts is of some dispute. Childers suggests that "when the parody of chivalry in *Don Quixote* is overlain onto this already quite absurd historical reality, it appears that more than a literary genre is being ridiculed."[95] Others conclude that, though Cervantes might have been aware of some specifics of the War of Alpujarras, in general

---

[92] Childers, "Historical Debasement," 12.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid, 13.
[95] Ibid, 15.

his art must be viewed as free from this sort of literally historical determinism.[96] *Don Quixote's* relationship to the demise of chivalry is certainly a controversial subject, with the mad knight of La Mancha having no shortage of defenders. Barber writes for many when he says:

> Byron's shaft, that he 'smiled chivalry away' is neither true nor accurate: Cervantes pricked the bubble of pretentiousness and exaggeration, which surrounded chivalry, but he would have regarded chivalry itself as a valid if old-fashioned ideal. His target was 'the authority and welcome which books of chivalry enjoy with the common people.'[97]

Indeed there is much to support the view that *Don Quixote* is fundamentally a critique of chivalric literature, not chivalry itself, for the literature had reached a sensationalist and extravagant extreme. When Don Quixote's friends, the priest and the barber, go to his house in Chapter VI, they immediately seize upon the library as the source his madness. Their solution is to burn all the books on chivalry, but the priest cannot bring himself to carry out the plan but tries to sort out the early, worthy books from the later ones.[98] The priest himself alternates between trying to save his friend from madness and wanting to join in the imaginary world of Don Quixote, symbolizing the conflict between mind and heart at the center of Renaissance attitudes toward chivalry. Near the end of the book, with Don Quixote safely locked in a cage, Cervantes returns to his critique of chivalric literature in the character of the Canon of Toledo. This high church official charges that "by experience that those books which are instituted of chivalry or knighthood are very prejudicial to well-governed commonwealths."[99] Though the Canon's attack starts from the charge that they promote civil disorder it becomes quickly apparent that he is more

---

[96] Carroll Johnson, *Cervantes and the Material World* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000) 96.
[97] Barber, *Reign*, 160.
[98] Miguel Cervantes, *The First Part of the Delightful History of the Most Ingenious Knight: Don Quixote of the Mancha* (Danbury, Connecticut: Grolier Enterprises, 1990) 48.
[99] Ibid, 474.

literary critic and frustrated novelist than guardian of public order. The Canon speaks of the Renaissance ideal that the "delight … the mind conceives must proceed from beauty and conformity" and charges chivalric literature for violating that maxim:

> …[W[hat beauty can there be… in a book or fable wherein a youth of sixteen years of age gives a blow to a giant as great as a tower, and with that blow divides him in two as easily as if he were a pellet of sugar?[100]

The Canon confesses that he attempted to write a chivalric romance but gave it up due to the familiar claim that he faced a choice of writing a popular book of low quality or a book for the critics that few people would wish to buy. In conclusion the Canon charges that books of chivalry "…deserve, as most idle and frivolous things, to be banished…"[101] Don Quixote's friend the priest, though instrumental in putting the mad knight in a cage, is not so sure and makes an eloquent defense of chivalric literature, that it offered:

> …a large and open plain, through which the pen might run without let or encumberance…delineating a valorous captain with all the properties required in him – as wisdom…eloquence…ripeness in advice, promptness in execution, [and] as much valor in attending as in assaulting of an enemy…[102]

The priest also recognizes that books of chivalry teach "all those parts that make a worthy man perfect:"

> …the subtlety of Ulysses, the piety of Aeneas, the valour of Achilles, the misfortunes of Hector, …the amity of Euryalus, the liberality of Alexander, the resolution of Caesar, the clemency and truth of Trajan, the fidelity of Zopyrus, [and] the prudence of Cato.[103]

There is little doubt that Cervantes's 'smile' was a deeply affectionate, perhaps even wistful smile for a world that was passing away. His deep knowledge of chivalric literature and the popularity of his mad knight's tale certainly demonstrate that chivalric

---

[100] Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, 474.
[101] Ibid, 475.
[102] Ibid, 476.
[103] Ibid.

literature still represented a powerful cultural force in the Renaissance. If that were not the case, the impact of much of the humor would have been lost. Unless chivalry still possessed currency in late Renaissance culture, Don Quixote would cease to be a romantic and tragic figure, but merely a lunatic wearing a barber's basin for a helmet. Perhaps the fact that Don Quixote is so attractive to contemporary sensibilities as a 'dreamer of impossible dreams' and 'fighter of unbeatable foes', shows that chivalry's light has not been completely extinguished. But at the dusk of the Renaissance, it would be difficult to imagine how chivalry could be further discredited. The eighteenth century, however, would endeavor to deliver the *coup de grace* to chivalry using the dangerous hubris of a boundless optimism in human nature.

VII.

The Age of Enlightenment

"The Age of Chivalry is gone, and that of sophisters, economists and calculators has succeeded and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever." – Edmund Burke

At the dawn of the eighteenth century, one might be forgiven for believing that any interest in such an anachronistic topic as chivalry would be purely historical, if not anthropological. To the humanism of the Renaissance, the Enlightenment would add rationalism, empiricism and secularism. This heady brew of "–isms" intoxicated the intellectuals of Europe into a belief that society was fundamentally changeable. The manner in which Castiglione's Courtier could simply decide to behave in a certain way and refashion himself into whatever he wished, was now applied to entire societies.[104] Every institution, tradition and societal value was now to be reexamined in light of someone's idea of reason. The identity of that "someone" was not something upon which the *philosophes* dwelt, preferring to hide behind amorphous concept like "the General Will."[105] Perhaps they simply assumed that using reason as the arbiter of value, all of mankind would quite reasonably agree. Or perhaps they were simply more interested in exploding all the settled values, institutions and societal arrangements that had been painstakingly assembled over the course of millennia. But in any case, the deserted walls of chivalry seemed a pitiful defense against the Enlightenment's "new conquering empire of light and reason."[106] Chivalry was a forgotten relic of the Dark Ages in a century that expressed not simply resistance, but full-throated contempt for the values of the past.

---

[104] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
[105] J.J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (New York: Cosimo Publishing, 2008) 103.
[106] Burke, *Reflections*, 75.

This brand of contempt is plainly apparent in such Enlightenment tracts as Condorcet's *Essay on the Historical Progress of the Human Spirit*. No one could charge this French mathematician with subtlety as he bombastically claims in the opening lines of his essay:

> …The aim of the work that I have undertaken, and its result will be to show by appeal to reason and fact that nature has set no term to the perfection of human faculties; that the perfectibility of man is truly indefinite; and that the progress of perfectibility, from now onward independent of any power that might wish to halt it, has no other limit than the duration of the globe upon which nature has cast us.[107]

That is certainly an ironic claim coming from a man who sat in a prison cell at the hands of his fellow perfectible revolutionaries. The logical corollary to Condorcet's optimism for the future is a distinct disdain for the "prejudices of the masses which had so long afflicted and corrupted the human race" among which chivalric duties must have certainly numbered. [108] Instead of embracing a societal code handed down from generation to generation, Condorcet reveals his relief that "nature had not forever condemned [man] to base his beliefs on the opinions of others, the superstitions of antiquity and the abasement of reason before the transports of supernatural religion."[109] Chivalric duties toward God and fellow knights could find little refuge in Condorcet's perfect future state. Condorcet strongly advocated the full political and social equality of the sexes. Believing that women were the intellectual and moral equals of men he argued that any "inequality has its origin solely in an abuse of strength" and any contrary viewpoint merely a "later sophistical attempt … made to excuse it…in vain."[110] Given

---

[107] Condorcet, *Essay on the Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, trans. June Barraclough (London: Weidenfield, 1979) 4.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid, 24.

that chivalry specifically claims not to be an abuse, but a subordination of strength to legitimate authority, no doubt Condorcet would have seen it as just another such "sophistical attempt." If Condorcet had been aware that at the height of the Terror, the French Revolution's guillotines would be dispatching up to two thousand victims a day, one wonders if he would have remained firm in his belief that the French Revolution was "an Elysium created by reason and graced by the purest pleasures known to the love of mankind."[111]

Condorcet may have best expressed the optimism and hope of the Enlightenment, but the true patron saint of the French Revolution was Jean Jacques Rousseau. Being safely dead already, his words and writings could be used in whatever way the Revolutionaries wished and they expressed their veneration for Rousseau by moving his body to a place of honor in their Panthéon in Paris. It was Rousseau that was invoked by different factions in support of everything from the institution of Deism as the new civil religion to land reform. Rousseau's theory of the "General Will" was just foggy enough to make it a wonderful implement for all occasions, with the general will being expressed by the Paris mob and enforced with the guillotine. But where Rousseau's writings truly express their antipathy toward chivalry is not in his political writings but in his novel *Émile*.

Émile focuses on the proper way to educate a young man, but also spends considerable time on the proper relations of men and women. Rousseau imagines the relations between the sexes in a fundamentally different way from the chivalric model and advocates a relationship that would have been quite familiar to the ancient Romans. He found the idealization of women, a key feature of chivalric literature, a dangerous

[111] Condorcet, *Progress*, 24.

development and preached a code of strict subordination of women in the private sphere. Whereas chivalry consistently nurtured a man's duties toward women, expressed through consideration and respect, Rousseau preached that femininity was so powerful that unless women were kept strictly subordinate they would exercise "tyranny" over men through their irresistible sexuality. Though Rousseau's brand of misogyny tells us more about his own psyche than about reality, it is clear that he would have been thoroughly hostile to the developments of courtly love in chivalric literature that indeed placed knights in positions of service, even servitude, to the object of their affections.

Throughout *Émile*, Rousseau expresses his outright hostility to the customs, codes and authorities upon which institutions like chivalry depend: "Our wisdom is slavish, our customs consist in control, constraint, compulsion…All his life long man is imprisoned by our institutions."[112] Rousseau correctly sees that a "custom" is a form of control, but such control is anathema to Rousseau who advocates a natural way of life. As Voltaire said of Rousseau, he wanted men to "walk on all fours" like animals and behave like savages, believing them creatures of perfection.[113] Rousseau would have nothing but contempt for chivalry's carefully constructed project of subordinating strength to duty and would have eradicated such concepts from the education of the young man writing that:

> The very words *obey* and *command* will be excluded from his vocabulary, still more those of *duty* and *obligation* [his italics]; but the words strength, necessity, weakness…must have a large place in it.[114]

---

[112] J.J. Rousseau, *Émile* (New York: Nuvision Publications, 1992) 16.
[113] Jacques Barzun, *From Dawn to Decadence: 500 Years of Western Cultural Life: 1500 to the Present* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001) 384.
[114] Rousseau, *Emile*, 61.

In place of duty and obligation as the basis of human relations, Rousseau preaches an ethic of raw power. Whereas a young squire would have been inculcated with duties of a knight to serve God, fellow Christians, and women; Rousseau would educate his young man by:

> Giv[ing] him no orders at all, absolutely none. Do not even let him think that you claim any authority over him. Let him only know that he is weak and you are strong, that his condition and yours puts him at your mercy; let this be perceived, learned, and felt. Let him early find upon his proud neck the heavy yoke which nature has imposed upon us, the heavy yoke of necessity, under which every finite being must bow. Let him find this necessity in things, not in the whims of man; let the curb be force not authority.[115]

It is difficult to imagine a passage more antithetical to the code of chivalry. It is equally difficult to imagine any young man so educated being anything but a brutish thug and a society so constructed being anything but rampantly misogynistic.[116] The code of might makes right which chivalry attempted to redress, the Enlightenment threatened to restore with a tyranny of the "General Will" and as the eighteenth century drew to a close it appeared it would succeed.[117] With the storming of the Bastille in 1789 it was a time of heady optimism, a time when man could employ the light of his own reason to see his way forward to a better tomorrow. What the American colonies had accomplished in the New World, the citizens of France appeared to have accomplished in the Old. The

---

[115] Rousseau, *Emile*, 78.

[116] In his follow-up to the *Reflections*, Burke took dead aim at Rousseau in his *Letter to the National Assembly* (1791), "Your rulers are well aware of this; and in their system of changing your manners to accommodate them to their politics, they found nothing so convenient as Rousseau. Through him they teach men to love after the fashion of philosophers; that is, they teach to men, to Frenchmen, a love without gallantry; a love without anything of that fine flower of youthfulness and gentility, which places it, if not among the virtues, among the ornaments of life. Instead of this passion, naturally allied to grace and manners, they infuse into their youth an unfashioned, indelicate, sour, gloomy, ferocious medley of pedantry and lewdness; of metaphysical speculations blended with the coarsest sensuality. Such is the general morality of the passions to be found in their famous philosopher, in his famous work of philosophic gallantry the '*Nouvelle Éloise*'."

[117] Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 103.

people of France had risen up and demanded their rights and their liberty, and the dream of men like Voltaire, Condorcet and Rousseau appeared on the verge of realization.

Into this critical moment of human history, with the fortunes of the Enlightenment running at their flood tide, an unlikely hero emerged from the mists of Avalon to stem that tide and defend the long-deserted ramparts of chivalry. He exposed the gleaming hopes and innovative designs of the Enlightenment as contemptible illusions. He tore away the veil of optimism to reveal the awful and deadly consequences of heedlessly knocking away all the ancient supports of a civil society. He demanded that the airy theorists and "coxcombs of philosophy" gaze upon the results of their intellectual innovations and witness, in terrible clarity, that the path they cleared led nowhere but to the guillotine.[118] This father of conservatism stood for all that the enlightened philosophers of France mocked. This defender of honor, manners, religion, custom, nobility, property, and most importantly, the natural power of tradition was a proud Englishman by the name of Edmund Burke. Burke would fight his battle with the *philosphes* with his own brand of reason, with his own brand of logic and with a keen insight into fundamental human nature. Though most of his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* is closely reasoned and coolly argued, Burke used chivalry as the emotional backbone upon which all his other arguments are built. Burke, like a modern day Roland, sounded the clarion trumpet which recalled an entire generation to take up again their duty.

We have now come full circle and return to the quotation with which we began our inquiry. Given that it now lies nearly sixty pages behind us, let us examine it again in

---

[118] Burke, *Reflections*, 51.

light of our inquiry, this time including Burke's prologue on the vision of Marie Antoinette, the Queen of France which so inspired him:

> It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw the Queen of France, then the dauphiness, at Versailles; and surely never lighted on this orb, which she hardly seemed to touch, a more delightful vision. I saw her just above the horizon, decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she just began to move in, - glittering like the morning-star, full of life, and splendour, and joy. Oh! What a revolution and what a heart must I have, to contemplate without emotion that elevation and that fall! Little did I dream when she added titles of veneration to those of enthusiastic, distant, respectful love, that she should ever be obliged to carry the sharp antidote against disgrace concealed in that bosom; little did I dream that I should have lived to see such disasters fallen upon her in a nation of gallant men, in a nation of men of honour and of cavaliers. I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult. — But the age of chivalry is gone. — That of sophisters, economists, and calculators, has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever. Never, never more, shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom. The unbought grace of life, the cheap defence of nations, the nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprise is gone! It is gone, that sensibility of principle, that chastity of honour, which felt a stain like a wound, which inspired courage whilst it mitigated ferocity, which ennobled whatever it touched, and under which vice itself lost half its evil, by losing all its grossness.[119]

As scholars have noted, "it has always been evident that the most famous passage in the *Reflections*…somehow holds the solution to the enormously complex problem of Burke's political philosophy."[120] There is a sense that if a man be moved at an emotional level by Burke's lament to chivalry then all of the finer details of his political philosophy will naturally follow. As William Dowling contends,

> …behind Burke's lament for a lost age of chivalry there lies remote in the moral and temporal distance, the sustaining vision of an heroic age in human society, a time when, there having occurred no fatal cleavage between the rational and the emotional, man's nature was yet whole.[121]

---

[119] Burke, *Reflections*, 74.
[120] William Dowling, "Burke and the Age of Chivalry," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 12, Heroes and the Heroic Special Number (1982) 109.
[121] Ibid.

The view that Burke uses chivalry as almost shorthand for his entire worldview, one of social cohesion and profound respect for traditional authority, is one that has persisted from the publication of *Reflections*. His critics at the time pounced upon that section as the key to discrediting the entire work. They charged that his *Reflections* were devoid of substance and reason and his lament to chivalry nothing but the crown jewel of his "overheated rhetoric and empty bombast."[122] Thomas Paine in his reply to Burke, *The Rights of Man*, vents his spleen at this particular passage:

> When we see a man dramatically lamenting in a publication intended to be believed that, 'The age of chivalry is gone!' that 'The glory of Europe is extinguished forever!...and all this because the Quixotic age of chivalric nonsense is gone, what opinion can we form of his judgment, or what regard can we pay for his facts. In the rhapsody of his imagination, he has discovered a world of wind-mills, and his sorrows are, that there are no Quixotes to attack them.[123]

Part of this furious attack on Burke's lament stems from the tremendous reception it received in England, as well as across Europe, and the manner in which it almost single-handedly turned public opinion against the French Revolution.[124] His critics felt that reason, rationality and the course of history were on their side and that somehow Burke was cynically winning over the English public with an emotional argument, with demagoguery. As James Mackintosh said of Burke, "He can escape from an intolerable

---

[122] Dowling, "Burke & Chivalry," 110.
[123] Thomas Paine, *The Writings of Thomas Paine vol. II*, ed. Moncure Daniel Conway (New York, 1967) 287.
[124] Connor Cruise O'Brian, *Edmund Burke: The Great Melody*, 465. "The *Reflections* had made him famous throughout Europe, hated by the revolutionaries, and revered by their enemies. He became the intellectual focal point, in Britain, for the European counter-revolution. The brothers of Louis XVI, the Comte de Provence (later Louis XVIII) and the Comte d'Artois (later Charles X), had succeeded in escaping from France in June of 1791. Burke's hoped rested on these princes." Burke sent his son Richard to meet with the French princes and became a sort of informal foreign minister to the European counter-revolution.

position into a splendid declamation. He can sap the most impregnable conviction by pathos."[125]

If his reception from his opponents was a fusillade of criticism, his friends were little better. Of his closest political allies, Charles James Fox, the leader of Burke's Whig Party in the House of Commons, publicly split with Burke over the French Revolution, driving him out of the very political party Burke had spent his lifetime serving. Another political ally, Phillip Francis, severely criticized the *Reflections* after having been sent the proofs by Burke prior to publication. Francis warns Burke against publishing the *Reflections*, arguing that not only was it poorly written and a futile gesture, but that:

> …all that you say of the Queen is pure foppery.[126] If she be a perfect female character you ought to take your ground upon her virtues. If she be the reverse it is ridiculous in any but a Lover, to place her charms in opposition to her crimes…[127]

There is something chilling in Phillip Francis's refusal to defend a woman unless she be of "perfect" virtue. It is the very antithesis of the "generous loyalty" for which Burke calls. Francis does recognize, if only to criticize it, that Burke not only sounds the trumpets of battle, but speaks of the Queen as a "lover" fulfilling in the same breath the dual roles that chivalry demands. Burke's rejoinder to Francis, which effectively ended not only their political collaboration but their personal friendship, provides powerful

---

[125] James Macintosh, *Vindiciae Gallicae*, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1974) 113. Within a decade of the publication of *Reflections*, Macintosh had become one of Burke's most ardent adherents, writing that Burke "is only not esteemed the most severe and sagacious of reasoners, because he was the most eloquent of men, the perpetual force and vigor of his arguments being hid from vulgar observations by the dazzling glories in the which they were enshrined."

[126] Foppery**:** foolish character or action **:** folly – The first literary use in that sense is Shakespeare's *King Lear*, from ironically enough, a character named Edmund: "The excellent foppery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune, often the surfeit of our own behaviour, we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars…."

[127] O'Brian, *The Great Melody,* 450.

evidence that Burke's lament was not a cynical ploy, but proof of his deep and profound emotional engagement for the ideal of chivalry:

> I tell you again that the recollection of the manner in which I saw the Queen of France in the year 1774 and the contrast between that brilliancy, Splendour, and beauty, with the prostrate Homage of a Nation to her, compared to the abominable Scene of 1789 which I was describing did draw Tears from me and wetted my Paper. These Tears came again into my Eyes almost as often as I looked at the description. They may again. You do not believe this fact, or that these are my real feelings, but that the whole is affected, or as you express it, "downright Foppery." My friend, I tell you the truth – and that it is true, and will be true when you and I are no more, and will exist as long as men – with their Natural feelings exist. I shall say no more on this Foppery of mine.[128]

While it is tempting to read Burke's lament purely as shorthand for his conservative political philosophy, it is clear from this passage that Burke is sincerely moved by the "spectacle of beauty in distress" and is genuinely concerned for the fate of the Queen and by extension all women.[129] As Burke explicitly states of the Enlightenment's scheme of egalitarianism, "On this scheme of things, a king is but a man, a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal, and an animal not of the highest order. All homage paid to the sex in general … is to be regarded as romance and folly."[130]

Clearly, the chivalry which Burke champions is not the social institution of the Age of Chivalry, but an imaginative ideal and "moral attitude which, however moribund at present, may be brought to life…"[131] In this moral attitude, the deference toward women is merely the external sign of an inward grace, under which all human relations are transformed, for:

> Without force or opposition, [chivalry] subdued the fierceness of pride and power; it obliged sovereigns to submit to the soft collar of social esteem, compelled stern

---

[128] Edmund Burke, *Correspondence of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke, vol. VI* (London: Francis and John Rivington, 1844) 88-92.
[129] Winston Churchill, *Marlborough: His Life and Times* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993) 47.
[130] Burke, *Reflections*, 75.
[131] Dowling, "Burke & Chivalry," 113.

> authority to submit to elegance, and gave a dominating vanquisher of laws to be subdued by manners.[132]

Implicit in Burke's lament is the chivalric code's submission of strength to weakness, power to authority, symbolized by the "knight's service to his lady."[133] As David Hume writes in his *Essay on Chivalry and Modern Honour*:

> A Mistress is as necessary to a Cavalier or Knight-Errant as a God or Saint to a Devotee. Nor would he stop here, or be contented with submiss[ive] reference and adoration to one of the Sex, but would extend in some degree the same Civility to the whole, and by a curious Reversement of the Order of Nature, make them the superior.[134]

While Burke's call to chivalry is occasioned by the plight of the Queen of France, he also had a great deal to say about general value of time-honored customs and manners in which chivalry held a central place. His skepticism of reordering society upon a theory is contrasted with his profound belief in the customs, which have withstood the test of time:

> When ancient opinions and rules of life are taken away, the loss cannot possibly be estimated. From that moment we have no compass to govern us; nor can we know distinctly to what port we steer. Europe undoubtedly, taken in a mass, was in a flourishing condition the day on which your Revolution was completed. How much of that prosperous state was owing to the spirit of our old manners and opinions is not easy to say; but as such causes cannot be indifferent in their operation, we must presume that, on the whole, their operation was beneficial… Nothing is more certain, that our manners, our civilization and all good things which are connected with manners and with civilization, have…depended for

---

[132] Burke, *Reflections*, 81.
[133] Dowling, "Burke & Chivalry," 112.
[134] David Hume, *An Historical Essay on Chivalry and Modern Honour*, MP (August, 1947) 60. The Scottish Enlightenment in general must be exempted from the excesses, and my general criticism, of the *philosophes* of France. Much later in Hume's life he would return to the subject of chivalry in his *History of England* and bless us with this description of the institution: "The feudal institutions, by raising a set of men to a kind of sovereign dignity, rendering personal strength and valor so requisite, and making every knight and baron his own protector and avenger, begot that military pride and sense of honour, which cultivated and embellished by the poets and romance writers of the age, ended in chivalry. The virtuous knight fought not only in his own quarrel; but in that of the innocent, the helpless, and above all, of the fair, whom he supposed to be forever under the guardianship of his valiant arm." Hume, *HOE*, 142.

> ages upon two principles… I mean the spirit of a gentleman, and the spirit of religion.[135]

There can be no doubt that for Burke, the chivalric knight was the embodiment of both of those twin pillars of civilization. The charms of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment are lost upon this bold champion of the Age of Chivalry:

> Four hundred years have gone over us; but…we still bear the stamp of our forefathers. We have not… lost the generosity and dignity of the fourteenth century; nor as yet have we subtilized ourselves into savages. We are not the converts of Rousseau; we are not the disciples of Voltaire…Atheists are not our preachers; madmen are not our lawgivers…we still feel within us, and we cherish and cultivate, those…sentiments which are faithful guardians, the active monitors of our duty, the true supporters of all liberal and manly morals. We have not been drawn and trussed, in order that we may be filled, like stuffed birds in a museum, with chaff and rags, and paltry, blurred shreds of paper about the rights of man…We have real hearts and blood beating in our bosoms. We fear God; we look up with awe to kings; with affection to parliaments; with duty to magistrates; with reverence to priests; and with respect to nobility.[136]

Burke's *Reflections* crystallized and catalyzed a latent spirit of heroism in the hearts of English manhood. The controversy over England's response was settled by degrees as Burke's prophetic claims about the Revolution were vindicated by the course of events. The French royal family's attempt, in 1792, to escape from custody of the Jacobites was quickly followed in rapid succession by the execution at the guillotine of first the King and then the Queen of France. The "ten thousand swords" which had remained dormant in the scabbards of French cavaliers would now be drawn by English infantry in the form of bayonets as England declared war on the Revolutionary Republic of France. From the precipice of the cold and unfeeling rationalism of the Age of Enlightenment, a neo-chivalric renewal was underway.[137]

---

[135] Burke, *Reflections*, 76.
[136] Burke, *Reflections*, 81.
[137] A short timeline of the French Revolution: the French Royal family was taken prisoner in October, 1789. Burke published *Reflections* in 1790. The French royal family attempted to flee the country in June

While a Burkean-inspired England led the Grand Alliance against the regicide French Republic and later Napoleon, a much quieter and gentler literary source was equally expressing the English embrace of neo-chivalric values. Into this epic clash of chivalric and modern value systems, far away from the guillotines of Paris or the bayonets of Waterloo, the novels of Jane Austen may seem an unlikely combatant. From the heated rhetoric of statesmen and philosophers, it certainly seems an abrupt turn to find oneself on the quiet and bucolic footpaths of Highbury or Pemberley, making calls and planning balls, but Jane Austen's male protagonists have arguably won over more devotees to chivalry than those of any other single author. Mr. Darcy, Colonel Brandon, Mr. Dashwood and the aptly named Mr. Knightley represent a model of chivalric virtue, not as a social institution certainly, but as the imaginative ideal of which Burke spoke so eloquently. To take one of many instances, George Knightley is a shining example of a man embracing the spirit of chivalry and all that goes with it. He is courteous to everyone, but especially to those below him in class and privilege. The "generous loyalty" he demonstrates toward Mrs. Bates helps her maintain a sense of dignity endangered by her financial circumstances.[138] His chivalry is what sparks his anger at Emma when she mocks Mrs. Bates and it is his chivalry that prompts him to ask Harriet to dance when she is snubbed by Mr. Elton. As the Squire of Highbury, Mr. Knightley happily and naturally stands up for the women that so happily populate Austen's rural English countryside. Men, on the other hand are usually the recipients of Mr.

1791 only to be recaptured within days. Austria and Prussia invade France in July 1792 and are defeated at Valmey in September. Louis XVI is tried in December of 1792 and executed on January 21, 1793. Three days later the English government withdrew their Ambassador and Declarations of War between France and England are issued by both governments within weeks. Marie Antoinette follows her husband to the guillotine in October 1793.

[138] Burke, *Reflections*, 74. Jane Austen wrote male characters who practiced what Burke had been preaching two decades before.

Knightley's stern judgment. He expects other men, most notably Frank Churchill, to live up to the standards he has set for himself. Mr. Knightley sees other gentleman of his class and station as his fellow knights to whom he owes the obligation of recalling them to their duty. But, as Matthew Kopp writes: "Frank embodies a new generation of men more interested in their personal affairs than attending to their duty."[139] Frank Churchill's "maneuvering and finessing" to conceal his engagement to Jane Fairfax is antithetical to Mr. Knightley's chivalric world view: "There is one thing, Emma, which a man can always do, if he chooses, and that is his duty; not by maneuvering and finessing, but by vigor and resolution."[140] As Burke does so well, Austen wields chivalry as cultural short-hand for an entire, if you'll forgive me, sense and sensibility of the obligations of a man. It is not simply good manners or female dignity that Mr. Knightley protects but an entire class structure. As Jane Austen's England begins to endure the changes and dislocations of the Industrial Revolution, Mr. Knightley stands for tradition, continuity and a sense of communal responsibility.

The Age of Enlightenment, which had once threatened to overturn the entire structure of European society, had been stymied. Militarily, England under the Duke of Wellington had ended the French Revolution at Waterloo in 1815, restored the French Monarchy and, at the Congress of Vienna in 1818, redrawn the map of Europe. These military and political accomplishments would create almost a century of stability.[141] What England performed politically and militarily, she had also accomplished culturally

---

[139] Matthew Kopp, "Mr. Knightley, Gentleman-Savior, As Seen Through Emma and "Reflections on the Revolution in France," *Ampersand* (Spring, 1999) 4.
[140] Jane Austen, *Emma* (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1886) 94.
[141] The royal houses of Europe, having learned from the example of the unfortunate Louis XVI, crushed the uprisings of 1848 and autocracy helpfully combined with the economic growth of industrialization led to a century of general progress and peace.

as well. Edmund Burke and Jane Austen had contributed greatly to a neo-chivalric renaissance where duty and responsibility stood as widely accepted cultural values. The Victorians were worthy inheritors of that tradition and would fiercely defend that legacy for the remainder of the nineteenth century, an Indian summer of chivalry.

VIII.

Eminent Victorians

"Some say that the age of chivalry is past, that the spirit of romance is dead. The age of chivalry is never past, so long as there is a wrong left unredressed on earth."

– Charles Kingsley

Queen Victoria ascended to the throne in 1837 and the nineteenth century was referred to as the Age of Victoria only in retrospect. But for a little over a century, from Burke's *Reflections* to the Great War, England was the indispensable nation. Militarily, politically, financially and culturally England wielded her hegemonic power across the globe. Uniquely for a hegemon, she enacted her policies with a high-minded seriousness that became synonymous with the young girl who became their Queen and sovereign, and who reigned over the largest empire mankind has ever known.[142] Victorians possessed a reputation for soundness of thought and action, an earnest dedication to duty and honor, and a deep-seeded belief that national destiny overrode personal predilection. Into this reputation, chivalry was a natural ally and in the literature of the Victorians we discover a marked preference for the notions of duty, obligation and self-sacrifice.

---

[142] For skeptics of the power of chivalry, they may want to consider that the most successful sovereigns of England have all been women. Queen Elizabeth I, Queen Anne and Queen Victoria enjoyed long and victorious reigns as sovereigns and their histories are replete with great statesman and commanders who served their respective female sovereign with a zeal that is difficult to account for apart from chivalric devotion. Queen Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen, could play the role of courtly love to perfection. Lord Robert Dudley, Lord Cecil, Francis Walsingham, Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Francis Drake all fit the role of knightly devotion. For Queen Anne, it was the great John Churchill, the first Duke of Marlborough who spent his life, his wealth and his reputation in service to his Queen in her wars against Louis XIV of France. Queen Victoria had at her disposal the victor of Waterloo, the Duke of Wellington; was insulted by cries of Mrs. Melbourne, due to her close relationship to her first Prime Minister Lord Melbourne; enjoyed a relationship of mutual servitude and devotion with Prince Albert; and in her later years was the recipient of her Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli's chivalric devotion which included making Queen Victoria the Empress of India, for no better reason than it bothered him to see the Tsar of Russia higher in heraldic order than his beloved Queen. It would seem that the gentlemen of England were at their very best when they had the pleasure of drawing their swords in the service of a Queen.

Charles Dickens was arguably the greatest novelist of the Victorian Age, both popularly and critically. His novels are a sharp contrast to those of Jane Austen. From her pleasant pastoral scenes of English country life, Dickens thrusts his readers into the stews and slums of London. Urban settings have never been particularly amenable to a chivalric disposition. Dickens also differs sharply from Austen in the way he attacks the existing Victorian class structure. *Oliver Twist* was a sharp critique of the conditions of poverty and crime of the London poor, and just one of a steady stream of social conscience that is found throughout Dickens' novels. But while those great social problems have led many thinkers and writers to doubt and attack traditions such as chivalry as fanciful nonsense, Dickens was not among them. Throughout his novels there is deep and steadfast attachment to not only the ideals, but often even the form of chivalric literature.

Dickens' first notable success was *The Pickwick Papers*, published in serial form from 1836 to 1837. The stories center on the adventures of Samuel Pickwick and three other members of the Pickwick Club as they roam the English countryside in search of "curious" and "improbable" phenomena.[143] Though comedic, the stories certainly can be seen as nineteenth century updates of medieval tales of knight-errantry. If the character of Samuel Pickwick is in some degree an updated Don Quixote, then his cockney manservant Sam Weller is perfectly cast in the role of Sancho Panza. With *Oliver Twist*, Dickens combines not only biting social commentary, but a true changeling tale where Oliver is revealed in the end to be of gentle birth. This element of the story is strikingly similar to Chretien de Troyes' *Conte del grail* (*The Story of the Grail*). In this thirteenth century poem, a young Percival is brought up in ignorance of his august lineage, but his

[143] Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers* (London: The Amalgamated Press, 1905) 61.

noble nature still shines through in the end.[144] Dickens recognized the shortcomings of existing Victorian class structures without becoming their enemy.

The most notable of Dickens' chivalric novels is *A Tale of Two Cities* and especially the character of Sydney Carton. The novel sharply contrasts the arrogance of power to a chivalric concern and sympathy for the welfare of French peasants. When Charles Darnay expresses concern for the poor and weak, his uncle, a French Marquis, retorts, "Repression is the only lasting philosophy. The dark deference of fear and slavery, my friend…will keep the dogs obedient to the whip, as long as this roof…shuts out the sky."[145] Though Darnay does express concern for the downtrodden and does place himself in danger to rescue an old family retainer in Paris, it is Sydney Carton who truly scales the heights of chivalric heroism and self-sacrifice. Carton is hopelessly in love with Darnay's wife Lucy, and in this courtly, unrequited love Carton is inspired to transform and redeem his dissolute life. He formally pledges his devotion to Lucy early in the story, promising to "embrace any sacrifice for you and for those dear to you."[146] Carton will fulfill that pledge by taking Darnay's place in prison as Darnay is sentenced to the guillotine. His sacrifice and noble martyrdom are the ultimate act of servitude to Lucy and his last unspoken thoughts capture the quintessence of the chivalric code and its duties to God, comrades and, ultimately, to the idealized woman:

> I see the lives for which I lay down my life, peaceful, useful, prosperous and happy, in that England which I shall see no more. I see Her with a child upon her bosom, who bears my name. I see her father, aged and bent, but otherwise restored, and faithful to all men in his healing office, and at peace. I see the good old man, so long their friend, in ten years' time enriching them with all he has, and passing tranquilly to his reward. I see that I hold a sanctuary in their hearts, and

---

[144] Barber, *Reign*, 68.
[145] Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (Philadelphia: Courage Books, 1992) 91. The Marquis gets his comeuppance in the end as the peasants he calls "dogs" burn down his chateau around his ears.
[146] Ibid, 110.

> in the hearts of their descendants, generations hence. I see her, an old woman, weeping for me on the anniversary of this day. I see her and her husband, their course done, lying side by side in their last earthly bed, and I know that each was not more honoured and held sacred in the other's soul, than I was in the souls of both. I see that child who lay upon her bosom and who bore my name, a man winning his way up in that path of life which once was mine. I see him winning it so well, that my name is made illustrious there by the light of his. I see the blots I threw upon it, faded away. I see him, fore-most of just judges and honoured men, bringing a boy of my name, with a forehead that I know and golden hair, to this place—then fair to look upon, with not a trace of this day's disfigurement—and I hear him tell the child my story, with a tender and a faltering voice. *It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known.* [my italics][147]

No troubadour poetry ever written has surpassed the emotional extravagance of Carton's noble sacrifice to Lucy and to her posterity. Dickens also gives dramatic voice to chivalry's role as an "entailed inheritance" passed from one generation to the next.[148] The chivalric hero's only reward for fulfilling his duty is, in Pope's phrase, "the eternal sunshine of the spotless mind" but he can at least hope that his sacrifice will be remembered and honored. Dickens makes a glorious knight of a dissolute English barrister and demonstrates that the chivalric code was indeed alive and healthy as an imaginative literary ideal.

The idealization of the female by the chivalric male is certainly an intrinsic part of the chivalric literature of the Victorians, but it would be a mistake to believe that such idealization simply took place in the pages of novels. Sociological studies of Victorian culture have discovered numerous examples of the same sort of overwrought "profusion of emotion" in private letters, journals and diaries as well. One of these personal tributes came, in 1854, from Coventry Patmore in the form of a poem to his wife Emily, titled

---

[147] Dickens, *Two Cities*, 259.
[148] Burke, *Reflections*,

Angel in the House. Though, it did find its way into publication, its essence is that of husband describing his beloved wife:

> Man must be pleased; but him to please
> Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf
> Of his condoled necessities
> She casts her best, she flings herself.
> How often flings for nought, and yokes
> Her heart to an icicle or whim,
> Whose each impatient word provokes
> Another, not from her, but him;
> While she, too gentle even to force
> His penitence by kind replies,
> Waits by, expecting his remorse,
> With pardon in her pitying eyes;
> And if he once, by shame oppress'd,
> A comfortable word confers,
> She leans and weeps against his breast,
> And seems to think the sin was hers;
> Or any eye to see her charms,
> At any time, she's still his wife,
> Dearly devoted to his arms;
> She loves with love that cannot tire;
> And when, ah woe, she loves alone,
> Through passionate duty love springs higher,
> As grass grows taller round a stone.[149]

Further examples are to be found in the diaries of Dr. John William Springthorpe who from 1897 writes daily in his diary for nearly fifteen years of nothing but his beloved deceased wife Annie. The sustained length of his grief was not atypical of the Victorian culture, but it is the extraordinary idealization of his wife, which demonstrates the intensity of Victorian elevation and adoration of the female:

> I scarcely know how to begin this saddest of sad matters…Dead – dead – my Annie – that for ten years was my constant companion, inspiration and ideal – a perfect mother…Dead – what does it mean…my constant upholder, my best

[149] Coventry Patmore, "Angel in the House," *Cassell's National Library*, ed. Henry Morley (London: Cassell & Co., 1897) 75.

> inspiration, my own true-hearted pure, whole-souled and absolutely devoted sweetheart and wife…what can I say when I think of her loss?[150]

The example of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert certainly exercised a powerful influence over Victorian sexual roles and Springthorpe's intense grief is very reminiscent of Victoria's long mourning after the death of her beloved Albert. It could be argued that Victoria's mourning demonstrates that "mordant sentimentality" was not the exclusive province of the Victorian chivalric male, but the fact that Victoria as sovereign held the role of superior in her relationship with Albert certainly complicates the situation.[151] It could even be argued that Victoria is exhibiting Victorian male characteristics in her idealization of Albert, her heraldic inferior.

In addition to the literature of the Victorian period, we see the embrace of chivalric values and its concordant Medieval era in countless other ways. From the revival of Gothic architecture, to the Earl of Eglington's attempt to revive the medieval tournament in 1839, to the founding of the Boy Scouts, the Age of Victoria treasured the notions of selfless service and strived to mimic the trappings as well as the spirit of chivalry.[152] In an age of rapid industrialization and social change, perhaps the Victorians sought refuge in the ideals and manners of an idealized past, armoring themselves with the belief that no matter how much the outside world may alter, our inner virtues and graces may remain inviolable. Yet for every example of attachment to the tradition, continuity and control symbolized by chivalry, the Age of Victoria was pressed by historic trends it could not fully arrest. The decline of agriculture, the rise of industrialization with its accompanying rise of the proletariat, and the rise of the women's

---

[150] Stephen Garton,"The Scales of Suffering: Love, Death and Victorian Masculinity," *Social History* 27, no. 1, Jan. 2002, 41
[151] Ibid, 42.
[152] Barber, *Reign*, 172.

suffrage movement, all demonstrate that beneath the surface of the Victorian neo-chivalric renewal, seismic pressures were beginning to build.[153]

The ongoing neo-chivalric renewal and its accompanying problems both find voice in the poetry of Alfred Lord Tennyson, the poet laureate of England for almost the entirety of Queen Victoria's reign. The images of knights bravely riding into battle is certainly present in many of his poems, explicitly in *Charge of the Light Brigade*, but his *Idylls of the King* most clearly reveal his struggles to reconcile Arthurian chivalry with the tensions lying just under the surface of Victorian society. *Idylls of the King* retells the Arthurian myth and was published in twelve volumes from 1856-1885. Consuming almost three decades of Tennyson's life, they demonstrate an evolution of his attitudes toward Victorian values as his society struggled to grapple with enormous social changes, especially the role of women in society.

Idylls is often read as a straight forward *apologia* of Victorian values. As Stephen Ahern argues, "with few exceptions recent critics contend that Tennyson's lyrics reinscribe and thereby reinforce the gender ideology of his time."[154] This view has great merit, for clearly Tennyson portrays a view of women that equates their worth with their degree of loyalty to a male character. On this spectrum women can occupy either the Madonna figure of selfless loyalty and devotion or the whore figure of cunning self-interest.[155] The male figures are confined to much more narrow ethical range and their success or failure is often directly related to the ethical quality of the woman they choose as their courtly love. This construction directly echoes the late troubadour poetry of the

---

[153] Even among its adherents there was a recognition that tide of history was not on the side of chivalry, for according to Dickens, "the age of chivalry is past, bores have succeeded to dragons."
[154] Stephen Ahern, "Listening to Guinivere: Female Agency and the Politics of Chivalry in Tennyson's *Idylls*, *Studies in Philology* 101, no. 1 (Winter, 2004) p. 89.
[155] Ibid.

Age of Chivalry, by placing the knight in servitude or at least dependence on the woman he chooses to love. It also perfectly mirrors the Victorian view of woman "as a symbolic repository of social values."[156] Explicit in this view is an elevated role for women as moral exemplars to their men, even to the extent of associating femininity with the answer to the most fundamental existential questions. Ahern notes:

> Codified initially by the medieval courtly love tradition, the myth of romantic love permeated western literature with a conviction that union with the beloved will enable sexual, emotional, and spiritual fulfillment. The ideal of women as ennobling influence gained especial force in Tennyson's era, which saw a revival of interest in the culture of chivalry.[157]

When the woman deviates from this role, when she ceases to be a moral exemplar and the completion of a male identity, as Guinevere betrays Arthur, the kingdom suffers dissolution and chaos.

This predominant view of the *Idylls* as a full-throated endorsement of Victorian gender roles has recently been questioned. It has been argued that not only are Tennyson's *Idylls* not a defense of those values but that his "texts subvert gender ideology."[158] Some critics believe that while the large-scale structure of the *Idylls* appears to endorse Victorian gender roles, Tennyson actually recognizes and explores the problems resulting from the constraining nature of the pedestal upon which women are placed. Ahern suggests that:

> …throughout the poem there is pattern of…criticism of the ways Arthur and his knights exploit the women of Camelot for their own ends. The exploitation follows a common trajectory: the knight idealizes his female counterpart and when the women does not live up to the demands such a role dictates, she is blamed for his failure to succeed in the world. Within the allegorical schema of

---

[156] Ahern, "Listening to Guinivere," 89.
[157] Ibid, 90.
[158] Linda Shires, "Rereading Tennyson's Gender Politics", *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse: Renegotiating Gender and Power* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990) p. 49

> the Grail quest, attainment of the ideal woman becomes, like the attainment of the Grail itself, a figure for the fulfillment of desire.[159]

In this view, it is not the failure of the quest to find the Grail of the idealized woman, but the quest itself that causes the overthrow of Camelot, by placing pressures on the woman that she cannot possibly live up to in reality. The relationship of Arthur and Guinevere is seen as a microcosm of Victorian gender roles and their consequent problems. Arthur's idealization of Guinevere is so complete that she is threatened with a loss of identity as a unique subject and faces the possibility of simply being an object in Arthur's vision of Camelot. Arthur's conception of Guinevere is at once adoring and possessive:

> To her that is the fairest under heaven,
> I seem as nothing in the mighty world,
> And cannot will my will, nor work my work
> Wholy, nor make myself in mine own realm
> Victor and lord. But were I joined with her,
> Then might we live together as one life,
> And reigning with one will in everything
> Have power on this dark land to lighten it
> And power on this dead world to make it live.[160]

She would be an adored object, no doubt, but an object nonetheless and her eventual betrayal of Arthur, according to this view, should be seen as an act of resistance. The need for this resistance is born out when Arthur's response to Guinevere's betrayal is to simply declare "Thou has spoilt the purpose of my life."[161] She is not a real person to be either loved or hated, but simply a disobedient instrument frustrating him in the exercise of his sovereign will.[162] Tennyson's true feelings about the nature of chivalry as it

---

[159] Ahern, "Listening to Guinivere," 90.
[160] Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*, "The Coming of Arthur", *Tennyson's Poetry*, ed. Robert W. Hill, Jr. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1971) 381.
[161] Ibid.
[162] The more recent critique of the patriarchal domination of *Idylls* stands in sharp contrast to its reception when published. Many critics found Arthur to not be patriarchal enough, verging on being a feckless cuckold. Swinburne condemned the reduction of King Arthur to a "sordid domestic quarrel" and "rather a

manifested itself in Victorian gender roles can only be inferred, but it seems reasonable to say that while he did not reject those values, he certainly recognized the enormous tensions building beneath the quiet façade of Victorian society.

No discussion of Victorian chivalry could be complete without at least touching on the topic of the British Empire. If chivalry was thought of as code to instruct the strong on the care and protection of the weak, then the Victorians certainly saw this moral imperative as a signature of their brand of imperialism. One need only thumb through the pages of Rudyard Kipling to see that the proponents of Empire easily grafted the code of chivalry on to their colonial enterprises around the globe. I hasten to add that I am in no way offering a defense of the British Empire, though I am quite fond of tilting at windmills, but only that many of the practitioners and theorists of the British Empire earnestly believed that they were performing a service, often thankless, to the indigenous populations of their colonies. That this point of view of benevolent colonialism, much like the chivalric resistance to the Enlightenment, can be traced back to the person of Edmund Burke reveals the deep connection between the two ideas. Burke undertook an impeachment in the British House of Lords against Warren Hastings, the former Governor-General of the British East India Company for his crimes against the people of India. Though the topic is far from the chivalric lament for the Queen of France, Burke still explicitly calls for the most basic of chivalry's dictates, the subordination of power to legitimate authority. In the words of Burke:

> Law and arbitrary power are in eternal enmity. Name me a magistrate, and I will name property; name me power, and I will name protection. It is a contradiction in terms, it is blasphemy in religion, it is wickedness in politics, to say that any man can have arbitrary power. In every patent of office the duty is included. For

---

case for the divorce court than for poetry." Eliot Gilbert, "The Female King: Tennyson's Arthurian Apocalypse", *PMLA* 98, no. 5 (Oct. 1983) 864.

> what else does a magistrate exist? To suppose for power is an absurdity in idea. Judges are guided and governed by the eternal laws of justice, to which we are all subject. We may bite our chains, if we will, but we shall be made to know ourselves, and be taught that man is born to be governed by law; and he that will substitute will in the place of it is an enemy to God…
> …I impeach Warren Hastings, Esquire, of high crimes and misdemeanors
> …I impeach him in the name of the Commons of Great Britain in Parliament assembled whose parliamentary trust he has betrayed.
> …I impeach him in the name of all the Commons of Great Britain, whose national character he has dishonored.
> …I impeach him the name of the people of India, whose laws, rights and liberties he has subverted, whose properties he has destroyed; whose country he has laid waste and desolate.
> …I impeach him in the name and by virtue of those eternal laws of justice which he has violated.
> …I impeach him in the name of human nature itself, which he has cruelly outraged, injured and oppressed, in both sexes, in every age, rank, situation, and condition of life.[163]

This principle of exercising authority in a responsible fashion greatly influenced the Victorians as the breadth of their colonial holdings continued to expand. The Victorians saw the choice as not between colonialism and no colonialism, but as one between their brand of responsible governance or the outright looting and oppression exemplified by the administration of King Leopold II in the Belgian Congo. In literary terms the Victorians saw the choice as between Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* or Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. It was specifically for the purpose of recruiting the United States as a fellow colonial power along the British model that motivated Rudyard Kipling to write his now famously politically incorrect *The White Man's Burden*. As objectionable as the view has now become, it is impossible to not recognize the elements of the chivalric code throughout:

> Take up the White Man's burden—
> Send forth the best ye breed—
> Go send your sons to exile

[163] Edmund Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke – Volume 10* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1901) 141-144.

To serve your captives' need
To wait in heavy harness
On fluttered folk and wild—
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half devil and half child
Take up the White Man's burden
In patience to abide
To veil the threat of terror
And check the show of pride;
By open speech and simple
An hundred times made plain
To seek another's profit
And work another's gain
Take up the White Man's burden—
And reap his old reward:
The blame of those ye better
The hate of those ye guard—
The cry of hosts ye humour
(Ah slowly) to the light:
"Why brought ye us from bondage,
"Our loved Egyptian night?"
Take up the White Man's burden-
Have done with childish days-
The lightly proffered laurel,
The easy, ungrudged praise.
Comes now, to search your manhood
Through all the thankless years,
Cold-edged with dear-bought wisdom,
The judgment of your peers![164]

This darker side of chivalry, as the moral crutch of imperial aspirations inevitably made the critics of empire into critics of chivalry. The same general trend occurred on issues of Victorian sexual politics. Feminists and suffragettes increasingly saw chivalry as merely a code for maintaining patriarchal domination. The defenders of imperial order, tradition and continuity had so successfully made chivalry emblematic of a conservatively masculine worldview that when the inevitable push back came, chivalry was swept up into the general critique of Victorian values. While these critics were

[164] Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden," *Rudyard Kipling's Verse* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co, 1919) 371.

relatively few in number, their influence was growing at the sunset on the nineteenth century. Though the Great War would forever smash the order and structure upon which the Victorians had labored with such resolution and vigor, writers and intellectuals such as the Bloomsbury Group were already expressing a savage resistance to that order long before the first shot was ever fired. Their resistance might have simply been a tempest in teacup if not for the cataclysm of First World War, but as the storm clouds of war gathered over Europe in 1914, chivalry's Indian Summer gave way to the cold bleak winds of Modernity's "winter of our discontent."[165]

[165] Shakespeare, *Richard III*, Act I, Scene I

IX.

Modernity – Extinguishing the Glory

"Chivalry is the most delicate form of contempt." – Albert Guerard

The narrative of the First World War is replete with chivalry and England certainly drew on those chivalric themes in its declaration and prosecution of the First World War. The *casus belli* for Britain was the German violation of Belgian neutrality, with England cast in the role of following the path of honor and duty to defend the defenseless. The *Daily Mirror* headlines on the day of the declaration of war ring with chivalric themes such as: "War was Germany's reply to our request that she should respect the neutrality of Belgium, whose territories we were bound in honour and by treaty obligations to maintain inviolate."[166] The King of England's message to Admiral James Jellicoe in command of the British Home Fleet echoed with calls to glory and honor:

> At this grave moment in our national history I send to you and, through you, to the officers and men of the fleets, of which you have assumed command, the assurance of my confidence that under your direction they will revive and renew the old glories of the Royal Navy, and prove once again the sure shield of Britain and of her Empire in the hour of trial.[167]

The German "ambition to dominate the affairs of the whole of Europe" was sharply contrasted with England's selfless defense of the "maiden" Belgium.[168] The editorials rang with sentiments such as "Germany tried to bribe us with peace to desert our friends and duty. But Great Britain has preferred the path of honour."[169]

---

[166] "Great Britain Declares War on Germany," *Daily Mirror*, August 4, 1914.
[167] "The King and His Navy," *Daily Mirror*, August 4, 1914.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid.

If England's entrance into the Great War was "the path of honour" her stoic fortitude in continuing four years of the brutality of trench warfare seems inconceivable in a society not inculcated with the ethic of noble self-sacrifice found in the pages of the literature of chivalry. The British soldiers in the trenches, and especially their leaders and commanders at every level, were raised in a cult of honor, where even the self-interest of survival was tainted with the white feather of cowardice. The British military would strive to be worthy inheritors of Henry V's heroic call of:

> Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more;
> Or close the wall up with our English dead.
> 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 the blood,
> Disguise fair nature with hard-favour'd rage;
> Then lend the eye a terrible aspect;
> Let pry through the portage of the head
> Like the brass cannon; let the brow o'erwhelm it
> As fearfully as doth a galled rock
> O'erhang and jutty his confounded base,
> Swill'd with the wild and wasteful ocean.
> Now set the teeth and stretch the nostril wide,
> Hold hard the breath and bend up every spirit
> To his full height. On, on, you noblest English.
> Whose blood is fet from fathers of war-proof!
> Fathers that, like so many Alexanders,
> Have in these parts from morn till even fought
> And sheathed their swords for lack of argument:
> Dishonour not your mothers; now attest
> That those whom you call'd fathers did beget you.
> Be copy now to men of grosser blood,
> And teach them how to war. And you, good yeoman,
> Whose limbs were made in England, show us here
> The mettle of your pasture; let us swear
> That you are worth your breeding; which I doubt not;
> For there is none of you so mean and base,
> That hath not noble lustre in your eyes.
> I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,
> Straining upon the start. The game's afoot:

> Follow your spirit, and upon this charge
> Cry 'God for Harry, England, and Saint George![170]

The chivalric ethic of "Once More" was the perfect slogan for the suicidal waves of manhood cast upon the unbreakable rock of enemy entrenchments and cannot be held blameless for the futility of battles like Paschendale where 60,000 British soldiers were killed in a single day's butchery. If the odds were long, those soldiers could think of the Victorian poet Thomas Babbington Macaulay's *Horatius at the Bridge* where the hero declares:

> Then out spake Brave Horatius
> The Captain of the Gate,
> To every man upon this earth
> Death cometh soon or late
>
> And how can man die better
> Than facing fearful odds,
> To guard the ashes
> And the temples of his gods.[171]

If hopes of success were nonexistent and the plans of their superiors flawed the British soldier could turn to Tennyson for solace:

> Forward, the Light Brigade!"
> Was there a man dismay'd?
> Not tho' the soldier knew
> Some one had blunder'd.
> Theirs not to make reply,
> Theirs not to reason why,
> Theirs but to do and die.
> Into the valley of Death
> Rode the six hundred.[172]

---

[170] Shakespeare, *Henry V*, Act 3, Scene 1.
[171] Thomas Babbington Macaulay, *Horatius at the Bridge* (London: Isidore Smith, 1921) 28.
[172] Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Charge of the Light Brigade," *Tennyson's Poetry*, ed. Robert W. Hill, Jr. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1971) 307.

And if death was their fate, the English soldier could always turn to Alexander Pope for comfort, for by knowing that they had done their duty they would at least have the "eternal sunshine of the spotless mind."[173]

From the trenches emerged a very different style of poetry. The trench poets who saw the reality instead of the "pleasing illusion" of noble sacrifice offered a distinctly different portrait of the chivalric hero. Siegfried Sassoon wrote of a young soldier he had known in the trenches:

> I knew a simple soldier boy
> Who grinned at life in empty joy,
> Slept soundly through the lonesome dark,
> And whistled early with the lark.
>
> In winter trenches, cowed and glum,
> With crumps and lice and lack of rum,
> He put a bullet through his brain.
> No one spoke of him again.
>
> You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye
> Who cheer when soldier lads march by,
> Sneak home and pray you'll never know
> The hell where youth and laughter go.[174]

Sassoon even turned his pen on the dynamic of the idealized woman and the heroic man who serves her. Sassoon makes an explicit connection of between how a woman's expectations and reactions serve as just one more enforcer and guardian of a soldier's duty:

> You love us when we're heroes, home on leave,
> Or wounded in a mentionable place.
> You worship decorations; you believe
> That chivalry redeems the war's disgrace.
> You make us shells. You listen with delight,
> By tales of dirt and danger fondly thrilled.

---

[173] Alexander Pope, *Eloise and Abelhard* (London: Walter Scott) 128.
[174] Siegfried Sassoon, "Suicide in the Trenches," *Counter-Attack and Other Poems* (New York, E.P. Dutton, 1918) 31.

> You crown our distant ardours while we fight,
> And mourn our laurelled memories when we're killed.
> You can't believe that British troops 'retire'
> When hell's last horror breaks them, and they run,
> Trampling the terrible corpses - blind with blood…[175]

Other trench poets would also attempt to dispel what they saw as the patriotic fantasy of the heroic thirst for glory in battle. Sassoon's close friend Wilfred Owen would write of a young soldier he had seen who was unable to don his gas mask quickly enough when a German mustard gas shell hit their trench:

> If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
> Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
> And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
> His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
> If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
> Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
> Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
> Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,---
> My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
> To children ardent for some desperate glory,
> The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
> Pro patria mori.[176]

Yet even Sassoon and Owen, men who had seen the horror of modern trench warfare, were unable to refuse the call of battle and service to their nation. Siegfried Sassoon returned to the front lines and was seriously wounded in July 1918, but survived the war. Wilfred Owen returned to the front just weeks before the armistice and received the Military Cross for his heroism and duty. His citation reads:

> 2nd Lt, Wilfred Edward Salter Owen, 5th Bn. Manch. R., T.F., attd. 2nd Bn. For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty in the attack on the Fonsomme Line on October 1st/2nd, 1918. On the company commander becoming a casualty, he assumed command and showed fine leadership and resisted a heavy counter-attack. He personally manipulated a captured enemy machine gun from an isolated position and inflicted considerable losses on the enemy. Throughout he behaved most gallantly.

---

[175] Sassoon, "The Glory of Women," *Counter-Attack and Other Poems*, 32.
[176] Barry Spurr, "Dulce et decorum est," *HSC English Study Guide: Wilfred Owen* (Pascal Press, 2004) 37.

Wilfred Owen was killed in action four weeks later, less than a week before the armistice was declared that would end the war. Even men like Owen and Sassoon, fully conscious of the horror of war and cynical of its pretensions to honor and glory, could not refuse to take their place and do their duty. The image of the noble "band of brothers" had been succeeded by the "fellowship of death" but even men who believed that the ancient maxim "how sweet and fitting it is to die for one's country" was nothing but a lie, were unable to refuse to bleed for their own country.[177]

As the world emerged from the cataclysm of the Great War there seemed little reason to retain a generous loyalty to anything. What had earnest and upright honor accomplished except to decimate the flower of a generation? What had chivalry and duty accomplished except to serve as the impetus to launch wave after wave of humanity into unforgiving barbed wire and the murderous hail of machine gun bullets? The victors joined the vanquished in exhaustion and disillusionment and nowhere were both more in evidence than in the camp of the intellectuals. In so much of the literature of the twentieth century, that bloodiest of centuries, we encounter an anger at chivalric virtues. By making chivalry code for tradition, continuity, even establishment values, it now suffered the same loss of faith and became part and parcel of a discredited way of life. The great literature of the post war generation reflects a variety of responses to this state of affairs, ranging from defeatism, to frustration, to satisfaction. But regardless of the response, one has to look very diligently, perhaps in vain, for a chivalric hero in modern literature. After the agony of Verdun, Paschendale, the Somme and Galipoli, the

[177] Shakespeare, *Henry V*, Act 4, Scene 8.

chivalric role of warrior stood accused and the role of lover stood vacant as the very idea of male power had become suspect.

The defeatist response is certainly well represented by T.S. Eliot. It is clear from Eliot's poetry that the modern world holds little charm for him. The *Wasteland*, *The Four Quartets* and even *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* radiate an attitude toward modern culture ranging from discomfort to disdain. Eliot speaks with the tone of a defeated refugee from an age that is already gone. He may despise the present and revere the past but the only expression he can find is that of mournful elegy. He replaces the clarion call of the trumpet with the sad wistful allusions of a man without a country. As David Craig says of Eliot's *The Waste Land*:

> [It] is one of the outstanding cases in modern times of a work which projects an almost defeatist personal depression in the guise of a full impersonal picture of society… and encourage[s] in readers, especially young students, a sort of superior cynicism which flatters the educated… by letting him feel that he is left as the sole bearer of a fine culture which the new mass-barbarians have spurned and spoiled.[178]

This modern "plight" is ever present in Eliot's odes to exhaustion. If the literature of chivalry evidences emotional enthusiasm, even extravagance, then Eliot offers the polar opposite where even our vices lose their energy. Compare for a moment, Sydney Carton's unspoken hymn to Lucy at the close of *A Tale of Two Cities* with Eliot's *Wasteland*. Far from romantic and courtly love, Eliot gives us one of literature's most soulless and desiccated depictions of the act of love:

> He, the young man carbuncular, arrives,
> A small house-agent's clerk, with one bold stare,
> One of the low on whom assurance sits
> As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire.
> The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
> The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,

[178] David Craig, "The Defeatism of the Wasteland," *Critical Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (Oct., 1960) 241.

> Endeavours to engage her in caresses
> Which still are unreproved, if undesired.
> Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
> Exploring hands encounter no defence;
> His vanity requires no response,
> And makes a welcome of indifference…
> Bestows one final patronizing kiss,
> And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit…
> She turns and looks a moment in the glass,
> Hardly aware of her departed lover;
> Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:
> "Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over."
> When lovely woman stoops to folly and
> Paces about her room again, alone,
> She smoothes her hair with automatic hand,
> And puts a record on the gramophone.[179]

All is mundane and sterile, devoid of joy or even naughty fun. Chivalry's codes and its idealization of women were supposed to be restrictive and oppressive yet T.S. Eliot's female voice now concludes, "*I'm glad it's over*." [my italics] Modern literature is extinguishing the glory indeed.

While T.S. Eliot mourned, Virginia Woolf's response was to politely show the chivalric male the pathway to the dustbin of history. Throughout our discussion of chivalry as form of social control we have focused primarily on the masculine side of that equation, i.e. chivalry as a form of controlling male behavior. Virginia Woolf based her resistance to the traditional gender roles exemplified by chivalry, not for its effect on men but on women. Though Woolf certainly wrote at length about the performance of the patriarchal male, the essence of her resistance boils down to her rejection of the role chivalry enforces upon the woman. In her essay *Professions for Women*, Woolf says, with typical Bloomsbury chronological condescension, of this fictionalized ideal of

---

[179] T.S. Eliot, "The Waste Land," *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1980) 44.

Victorian womanhood, straight out of Coventry Patmore's loving poem to his wife [see page 74]:

> You who come of a younger and happier generation may not have heard of her – you may not know what I mean by the Angel in the House. I will describe her as shortly as I can. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. If there was a chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draft she sat in it – in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all – I need not say it – she was pure.[180]

Woolf offers up a brutally honest strategy for dealing with this Victorian ideal, at least in the literary sense, when she confesses the depth of her antipathy:

> I turned upon her and caught her by the throat. I did my best to kill her. My excuse, if I were to be had up in a court of law, would be that I acted in self-defence. Had I not killed her she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing. For, as I found, directly I put pen to paper, you cannot review even a novel without having a mind of your own, without expressing what you think to be the truth about human relations, morality, sex. And all these questions, according to the Angel of the House, cannot be dealt with freely and openly by women; they must charm, they must conciliate, they must — to put it bluntly — tell lies if they are to succeed. Thus, whenever I felt the shadow of her wing or the radiance of her halo upon my page, I took up the inkpot and flung it at her. She died hard. Her fictitious nature was of great assistance to her. It is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality. She was always creeping back when I thought I had despatched her. Though I flatter myself that I killed her in the end, the struggle was severe; it took much time that had better have been spent upon learning Greek grammar; or in roaming the world in search of adventures. But it was a real experience; it was an experience that was bound to befall all women writers at that time. *Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer.* [my italics][181]

In Woolf's mind the chivalric idealization that inspired Patmore to declare his wife an "angel" was deleterious to women by creating a fatal cleavage between their true self and the way the patriarchy demanded they behave. Certainly Virginia Woolf brought a particular set of predispositions and horrific personal experiences to her encounter with

---

[180] Virginia Woolf, "Professions of a Woman," *Death of a Moth and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1974) 241.
[181] Ibid, 242.

the "Angel in the House," but to simply use those experiences as the basis for why she so utterly rejected Victorian and chivalric values is to tragically minimize the nature of her critique. She is the natural descendant of Tennyson's Guinevere, resisting for no lesser reason than survival. She utterly rejects the centuries of chivalric literature as essentially artificial. For Woolf, men are no more naturally brave than women are naturally kind and to persist in playing these gender roles can only lead to hypocrisy and a loss of personal identity.

When Virginia Woolf does turn her attention to male characters her response is far more subdued. If it is patriarchal and chivalric values that have forced women into the role of "Angel" one would think there would be considerable anger for the patriarchy, yet she never seems to have an urge to "kill" the makers of the Angels. If anything she expresses enormous sympathy for what she sees as the dilemma of the male if he tries to step outside his own confined role:

> 'To fight against a real enemy, to earn undying honour and glory by shooting total strangers, and to come home with my breast covered with medals and decorations, that was the summit of my hope. . . . It was for this that my whole life so far had been dedicated, my education, training, everything. . . .' Those were the words of a young Englishman who fought in the last war. In the face of them, do the current thinkers honestly believe that by writing "Disarmament" on a sheet of paper at a conference table they will have done all that is needful? Othello's occupation will be gone; but he will remain Othello. The young airman up in the sky is driven not only by the voices of loudspeakers; he is driven by voices in himself — ancient instincts, instincts fostered and cherished by education and tradition. Is he to be blamed for those instincts?[182]

Woolf's use of Othello as her literary model in the above excerpt is an interesting choice. Othello is certainly a soldier but there would seem to be more to her choice than that. Othello occupies both of the roles that we earlier identified with chivalry, the warrior and the lover, and he is extreme in both roles. His idealization of Desdemona is an essential

---

[182] Virginia Woolf, "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid", *Death of a Moth,* 243.

element in the jealous suspicion that overwhelms him. The loftier the pedestal he places her upon the higher the fall she suffers when his jealousy overwhelms his reason. Woolf's choice of Othello could be interpreted as expressing her conviction that chivalric idealization of a woman can only end in the tragic disappointment of the chivalric male's expectations. Making a woman into an "angel" merely sets the stage for her to become a devil for simply being a complete person. For Woolf, "killing the angel" was a path to liberate not only women from the role of the fallen angel, but men from the role of Othello, the destroyer of women.

While Woolf never directly savages the chivalric male, she certainly has no qualms about demonstrating his rigidity, his dullness and his lack of imagination. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, theses qualities are perfectly represented by the characters of Hugh Whitbread and Peter Dalloway.

Hugh Whitbread stands, in many respects, as Virginia Woolf's most polished portrait of the chivalric Victorian male and, as such, is described with sweet condescension throughout the book. The extravagance of gallantry that has been noted on several occasions in our examination is immediately present in Hugh, right down to the very adverb used by Woolf when she notes:

> …who should be coming along with his back against the Government buildings, most appropriately, carrying a despatch box stamped with the Royal Arms, who but Hugh Whitbread; her old friend Hugh — the admirable Hugh!
> "Good-morning to you, Clarissa!" said Hugh, *rather extravagantly*, for they had known each other as children. "Where are you off to?"…she … felt very sisterly and oddly conscious at the same time of her hat. Not the right hat for the early morning, was that it? For Hugh always made her feel, as he bustled on, raising his hat *rather extravagantly* and assuring her that she might be a girl of eighteen, and of course he was coming to her party to-night.[183] [my italics]

[183] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (Philadelphia: Harvest Books, 1990) 16.

In a few short sentences she completely defines Hugh as possessing that vestiges of chivalric extravagance, yet always "most appropriate" and "admirable." His despatch box identifies him as the functionary of crown and empire as he "bustles on" casting a gallant compliment in his wake. Once Woolf has staked out Hugh's identity, she immediately fills in the details with Clarissa's marvelously sweet patronizing, letting the reader know that Hugh is:

> …still not a positive imbecile as Peter made out; not a mere barber's block. When his old mother wanted him to give up shooting or to take her to Bath he did it, without a word; he was really unselfish, and as for saying, as Peter did, that he had no heart, no brain, nothing but the manners and breeding of an English gentleman, that was only her dear Peter at his worst; and [Hugh] could be intolerable; he could be impossible; but adorable to walk with on a morning like this.[184]

Woolf does not even pay the compliment to the chivalric Victorian male by making him a monster, but simply pats him on his well-combed head and sends the poor fellow, the dull, unimaginative, shallow, amiable plodder on his way.

The character of Richard Dalloway is certainly different than Hugh, but only different by degree. The invariably "admirable" Richard is:

> … a thorough good sort; a bit limited; a bit thick in the head; yes; but a thorough good sort. Whatever he took up he did in the same matter-of-fact sensible way; without a touch of imagination, without a spark of brilliancy, but with the inexplicable niceness of his type. He ought to have been a country gentleman — he was wasted on politics. He was at his best out of doors, with horses and dogs — how good he was, for instance, when that great shaggy dog of Clarissa's got caught in a trap and had its paw half torn off, and Clarissa turned faint and Dalloway did the whole thing; bandaged, made splints; told Clarissa not to be a fool. That was what she liked him for perhaps — that was what she needed. "Now, my dear, don't be a fool. Hold this — fetch that," all the time talking to the dog as if it were a human being.[185]

---

[184] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 198.
[185] Ibid, 261.

Woolf takes the heroic knight, the bold yet merciful warrior, the courtly yet extravagant lover, and damning with faint praise, she shrinks him. Woolf tames him, domesticates him, and makes him "sweet", "nice," and even kind to animals.

Despite Woolf's portrayal of traditional male figures as dull and unimaginative, she does try to create some sort of balance between the shortcomings of male and female characters. If Richard Dalloway cannot quite find the words to tell Clarissa that he loves her, Woolf lets us know that Clarissa still understands the depth of feeling he has walled off behind the dam of propriety. Woolf also does not shy away from Clarissa's acknowledgment that she has failed Richard in some fundamental sexual way. Richard may not be able to express his feeling in words, but Clarissa seems unable to match his unspoken passion. Typically of Woolf, she draws attention to the physical aspects of love by alluding to them troublingly, as when Clarissa ponders:

> …she could not dispel a virginity preserved through childbirth which clung to her like a sheet. Lovely in girlhood, suddenly there came a moment — for example on the river beneath the woods at Clieveden — when, through some contraction of this cold spirit, she had failed him. And then at Constantinople, and again and again. She could see what she lacked. It was not beauty; it was not mind. It was something central which permeated; something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman…[186]

For Clarissa, and perhaps for Woolf, the male lover is something to be feared in some vague and undefined way. Woolf responds to that fear in her writing by blurring the line between male and female. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, she offers up a lesbian alternative to the traditional sexual roles. Clarissa's most exciting sexual moment is a young kiss with Sally Seaton. The aptly-named Miss Kilman desperately wants Elizabeth Dalloway, and Elizabeth perceives that without shock or dismay.

---

[186] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway,* 221.

In her novel *Orlando*, Woolf goes even further by having the title character undergo a physical metamorphosis from male to female and then blurs the sexual roles still further by having Orlando engage in cross-dressing to switch in and out of gender roles. Voluminous amounts of scholarship have been produced on the subject of Virginia Woolf and human sexuality, and there is no need to dive deeply into it in order to recognize that Virginia Woolf simply rejected the well-defined roles for men and women that chivalry encompasses. Given her outright rejection of traditional sexual roles and sensibilities, Virginia Woolf's writings are emblematic of the feminist rejection of chivalry as nothing more than a means of control, not of men but of women.

While the writings of T.S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf perfectly capture the rejection of the intellectual elite for traditional values such as chivalry, their rejection was not shared by the broader culture. In fact the twentieth century witnessed an increasingly wide divide between critically acclaimed high culture and commercially successful popular culture. This is certainly true in the visual arts, music and literature. For example, while Woolf and Eliot were publishing *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Waste Land* in 1923, Gustav Holst was putting an old Cecil Springer Rice poem to music lifted from his Jupiter Symphony to create the popular English hymn *I Vow To Thee My Country*. Released in 1922, its intense popularity made it an instant patriotic classic, which has resonated with a mass English audiences ever since. Its lyrics drip with chivalric notions of sacrifice and duty to God, King and Country:

> I vow to thee my country, all earthly things above
> Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love
> The love that never falters, the love that pays the price
> The love that makes undaunted, the final sacrifice.[187]

[187] Michael Kennedy, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 345.

Despite the best intentions of the modernist authors, the last embers of chivalry were proving difficult to fully extinguish.

One can run down the lists of the greatest novels of the twentieth century, scanning the titles, seeking in vain for one that contains a chivalric male hero. Perhaps Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird* comes close. He fights for the weak and downtrodden, but never fills the role of lover. Perhaps the twentieth century simply could not find such a character believable. The chivalric knight had become a fantasy character to be found only in the pages of children's stories. J.R.R. Tolkien conjures up a few chivalric heroes, yet even in a fantasy world, presumably safe from the skepticism and doubt of twentieth century reality, somehow that nobility of character is easier to believe when disconnected from the commonplace form of a human male. Ironically, the greatest chivalric hero of twentieth century may arguably be a Lion, named Aslan.

C.S. Lewis was a renegade of the twentieth century in his support for the values of the chivalric code. In a rising tide of doubt and alienation he argued for faith and community. He also wrote at length about how the proper male character absolutely needs an obsolete old code like chivalry. In his essay, *The Necessity of Chivalry*, he defines the chivalric knight as "not a compromise or happy mean between ferocity and meekness; he is fierce to the *n*th and meek to the *n*th." Those are certainly the characteristics he gave to the god/hero of *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*. Aslan, despite his kind, generous and loving nature, is "not a tame lion." He willingly lays down his life to save the traitor Edmund Pevensie, but when he rises from the dead he returns at the head of an avenging army and personally strikes down the White Witch to win the climactic battle. Lewis tells us that without chivalry:

> …the stern and the meek fall into two mutually exclusive classes. And never forget that this is their natural condition. The man who combines both characters – the knight – is a work not of nature but of art; of that art which has human beings instead of canvas or marble, for its medium.[188]

C.S. Lewis also fully understood why the idealization of the female, fantastical sentimentality though it may be, was a healthy thing for the man. As Burke before him understood, the reverence for a Queen is merely symbolic of a respect for all women. When that sense of reverence is lost, a light dies in the soul of man and he becomes something more rational but less complete than what he was:

> Monarchy can easily be debunked, but watch the faces, mark well the debunkers. These are the men whose taproot in Eden has been cut: whom no rumour of the polyphony, the dance, can reach - men to whom pebbles laid in a row are more beautiful than an arch. Yet even if they desire mere equality they cannot reach it. Where men are forbidden to honour a queen they honour millionaires, athletes or film stars instead: even famous prostitutes or gangsters. For spiritual nature, like bodily nature, will be served; deny it food and it will gobble poison.[189]

These words, written over sixty years ago have certainly been vindicated by events. Like Burke's dire warnings over France, C.S. Lewis's words have the added power of prophetic truth. The twentieth century was certainly a bleak period for chivalry. With a few notable exceptions, the noble code was ground under the heel of defeatism and cynicism. When chivalry was not being attacked, it was being studiously ignored. But while it may have disappeared from the pages of literature, its wounded and battered ideals survived in our cultural consciousness and in our daily lives. As C.S. Lewis said, "happily we live better than we write, better than we deserve."[190]

---

[188] C.S. Lewis, "The Necessity of Chivalry", *Present Concerns* (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1986) 15.
[189] Lewis, "Equality", *Present Concerns*, 13.
[190] Ibid, 16.

X. Conclusion

"But whatever we may do there still remains to us, in the marrow, a certain leaven of chivalry which preserves us from death. There are still in the world an immense number of fine souls – strong and upright souls – who hate all that is small and mean, who know and who practice all the delicate promptings of honor, and who prefer death to an unworthy action or to a lie." – Leon Gautier

We began our examination of chivalry by positing the idea that chivalry, for all its romantic and gilded trappings, was a system of social control over men. We turned to Western literature as the window through which we could understand different era's acceptance of or resistance to that system of social control. We identified the three major areas of chivalric duty: 1. Duties to God, 2. Duties toward our fellow man, and 3. Duties toward women. In our examination of the ancient Greeks and Romans, we identified the problems of male behavior. The Greek literary ideal of the male quest for glory and renown through violent acts was certainly not a model conducive to a stable and civil society. The Greeks did possess the second of the three areas of chivalric duty. Their warrior culture possessed strong elements of *esprit d'corps* and their conception of "fellow man" would only encompass their personal circle of warrior companions. The Greeks were notably deficient in the other two areas. The Romans were only a slight improvement, only expanding the scope of what constitutes "fellow man" to encompass Rome and fellow Romans. The Greek and Roman literary male ideals possessed only the fierce, archaic virtues of courage, loyalty and fortitude.

As we turned our examination to the rise of Christian Chivalry from the fall of Rome to the crowning of Charlemagne, we described a remarkable fusion of classic, barbarian and Christian values. From these three cultural values emerged the code we call chivalry and an entirely new male literary ideal – the knight. From the ancient world

of Greece and Rome the knight retained courage, loyalty and fortitude. From the Germanic invaders of Rome the knight added the simple virtues of honesty, honorable plain-dealing and simplicity to replace Roman sophistication, luxury and avarice. From Christianity, the knight added the beatific virtues of humility, modesty and charity. These three cultural influences evolved into the tripartite duties of chivalry as the Catholic Church propagated the ideal of the knight as a warrior for Christ to the barbarian inheritors of the western half of the Roman Empire.

The Age of Chivalry, from Charlemagne to the Renaissance, comprised six centuries of full acceptance and literary idealization of the chivalric knight. The evolution of the knight mirrored the development of Western European culture throughout the Middle Ages. The ideal knight of Charlemagne at the beginning of the period was far different from the ideal knight who encountered the Renaissance. The early medieval knight was harder, more rugged, more attuned to his duties to God and liege-lord than to his distaff obligations. From the South of France emerged a lyric poetry meant to entertain the ladies as well as the lords at court. The courtesy of the ideal knight was of equal importance to his warrior prowess. This courtesy evolved into a courtly love tradition that can only be described as extravagant. The duties of lover toward his courtly lady were idealized even beyond his duties to God and liege-lord. The female audience must have been particularly delighted with stories of strong knights placed in their servitude. The evolution of the literary ideal was also carrying the literary knight further from reality as real-life knights wrestled with all the human frailties and shortcomings that form the only true constant in life.

The Renaissance reveals the first evidence of cultural resistance to the code of chivalry. Chivalric values were not being rejected *per se* but the Renaissance's elevation of competing constructs such as humanism and neo-classicism led to a *de facto* diminishing of chivalry as a cultural marker. Castiglione's "Courtier" expresses a worryingly worldly and sophisticated evolution of the ideal literary knight, where the forms of chivalry are observed but the extravagance of spirit is gone. The outward forms draw only sly cynical smiles from those now too urbane to believe in fairy tales. For the delicate Renaissance sensibilities, the only people who still took chivalric literature seriously were cranks, eccentrics and lunatics, perfectly exemplified by Cervantes' mad knight Don Quixote.

If the Renaissance smiled at chivalry, the Enlightenment gave it nothing but a baleful glare. Chivalry, along with everything else more than five minutes old, was suspect as a pernicious relic of narrow-minded superstition and prejudice. The "new conquering empire of light and reason" threatened to sweep away the ancient values and traditions of an entire civilization but a few hardy souls, for whom the "hatred of evil-doing was still their chief, their best passion," refused to go quietly. Edmund Burke and Jane Austen rallied the scattered adherents of chivalry, reformed their lines of battle and put the cold steel, literarily of course, to the devotees of the progress of reason. Their chivalry was no longer a social institution restricted to royal courts and palaces but an imaginative ideal unleashed to roam free among the masses. In times of confidence and hubris like the Enlightenment and Renaissance, old codes like chivalry may have seemed quaint and faintly ridiculous but when the storm winds blew, it was behind the walls of chivalry that Europe sought shelter.

The neo-chivalric renewal begun by Burke flowered fully in the Age of Victoria and *Pax Britannia*. For nearly a century "the code of the gentleman" held sway over European culture.[191] Charles Dickens, Thomas Babbington Macaulay, and Alfred Lord Tennyson are typical of the Victorian preference for reform over innovation. Idealization of women at home was matched by a patronizing beneficent empire abroad and in a time of rapid changes at the commercial and industrial basis of society, chivalry was the lynchpin of a continuity of values and morals. Chivalry as an imaginative ideal flourished as a far more democratic conception than it had ever been as a mere social institution. While the Knights of the Garter were limited to only twenty-four men, hundreds of thousands of Boy Scouts were able to pledge themselves to almost an identical code.[192] In general terms, the nineteenth century was a time of widespread and deep acceptance of chivalry as a social value. Tensions and cracks in the wall were appearing but in retrospect those shrink to relative insignificance in comparison to the social, political, economic and cultural cataclysm of the First World War.

If chivalry had flourished as an imaginative ideal, the horrific reality of the First World War triggered a massive loss of faith in God, King and Country. Traditional sources of authority suffered a fusillade of attacks from their enemies and a loss of the confidence of their friends. Writers like Eliot and Woolf represented a ferocious rejection of chivalric and masculine authority. The twentieth century writers agree with the position that chivalry is a form of social control but, in an anti-authoritarian climate,

---

[191] Burke, *Reflections*, 76.

[192] The Scout Law and Oath are almost identical to the oaths sworn by chivalric knights. The Scout Law: A Scout is Trustworthy, Loyal, Helpful, Friendly, Courteous, Kind, Obedient, Cheerful, Thrifty, Brave, Clean and Reverent. The Scout Oath: On my honor, I will do my best to do my duty, to God and my country, to obey the Scout Law, to help other people at all times, and to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight.

that becomes a reason not for support but for rejection. At its nadir, chivalry in literature would be pushed to the fantasy of children's stories.

There is an argument to be made that chivalry is now enjoying another modest renewal, at least in popular culture. Writers like Toni Morrison can still be awarded Nobel Prizes for writing horrifically misandric novels like *Beloved* and *Paradise*, but Jane Austen still outsells her on Amazon.com by over a hundred to one. A television series like *Downton Abbey* enjoys tremendous success by offering a glimpse of the forgotten codes of order and decorum. Perhaps the feminist critique of chivalry as reinforcing gender stereotypes of female weakness has run its course or perhaps there is no more need to attack something that has been successfully defeated and the feminists have turned their guns on more legitimate targets like compensation inequality. But if there is any merit to my position that chivalry is a form of social control to rein in the worst aspects of male behavior then the feminist critique would always seem to have been misplaced. It is my position that chivalry was never the cause of patriarchal domination but, on the contrary, the cure for it. It is almost as if the feminists entered a room to see a sick patient taking his medicine and mistook the medicine for a poison causing the sickness. I would be the first to grant that the cure has been a slow-working one but when one examines the evolution of male literary ideals over the long term, it should be readily apparent that Mr. Knightley, priggish though he may be, or even a caricature like Hugh Whitbread are far preferable to the blood-lusting Achilles or the viciously patriotic Aeneas.

Our examination into the literature of chivalry has carried us from the walls of sacred Ilium to the fantasy land of Narnia and covered a period of nearly three thousand

years. The implements of war have evolved during that time from ashen, bronze tipped spears to thermonuclear weapons. That alone should give us reason to look kindly on the code of chivalry's attempt to quell the violent nature of man. Yet, even as technology has leapt forward, human nature seems stubbornly close to what we read in the pages of Homer. Every human emotion from exultation to grief, from lust to adoration, from tenderness to rage; all greet us at the very genesis of Western literature, and they confront us still today. The immutability of human nature should be a powerful argument for a code like chivalry. If we are not to be miraculously transformed into the selfless and rational angels of our better nature, then we must make the best of what nature has graced us with. This is exactly what the code of chivalry does. Chivalry takes our violence and aggression and channels them into the protection of home, hearth and family. Chivalry forbids the use of strength and power without responsibility and duty. And perhaps most importantly, chivalry is a possible cure for the modern malaise of consumerism, materialism and alienation, which seems to bear down on our society. Chivalry offers us:

> All the pleasing illusions, which made power gentle and obedience liberal, which harmonized the different shades of life, and which…incorporated…the sentiments which beautify and soften private society...All the decent drapery of life…All the superadded ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns and the understanding ratifies, … [which] cover the defects of our naked shivering nature and…raise it to dignity in our own estimation…[193]

Chivalry offers this by gifting us back an element of grace, those touches of extravagant generosity, which transform the mundane tasks of daily life into tiny acts of sacred ritual. The statistical record of female achievement in the post-chivalric world explodes the myth that women are materially benefited by chivalry, yet we are more than material

[193] Burke, *Reflections*, 75.

creatures.[194] There is no logical or rational purpose for men to rise when a woman enters a room, yet that simple act honors the woman, improves the man and makes every person in the room feel connected to one another in a community of shared values. It is also bloody great fun and if the merest remnant of chivalry can do that, then "what dreams may come" from the full embrace of the values of chivalry.[195] W.B. Yeats tells us we are "Slouching towards Bethlehem" and Robert Bork tells us we are "Slouching towards Gomorrah" but there seems to be little doubt that we are indeed "slouching," unable to rouse ourselves from the path of least resistance to both circumstance and appetite.[196] Chivalry offers us the inestimable gift of transforming us into those "strong and upright souls" that we always hoped we could be.

---

[194] Women now comprise the majority of college graduates, the majority of law school graduates, and the majority of medical school graduates in the United States. This issue has become so acute that many authorities believe America now faces an acute male achievement gap. Indicative of the legion of studies is: Claudia Buchmann, "The Growing Female Advantage in College Completion: The Role of Family Background and Academic Achievement," *American Sociological Review* 71, no. 4 (August 2006) 515-541.

[195] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 1.

[196] W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming," *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Scribner Books, 1989) 187.
Robert Bork, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996).

Bibliography

Ahern, Stephen. “Listening to Guinevere: Female Agency and the Politics of Chivalry in Tennyson’s ‘Idylls’.” *Studies in Philology* 101, no. 1 (Winter, 2004): 88-112.

Alan of Lille. *The Art of Preaching.* Rome: Cistercian Publishing, 1981.

Aristotle. *Art of Rhetoric*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926.

Aristotle. *Nichomachean Ethics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926.

Austen, Jane. *Emma*. London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1886.

Barber, Richard. *The Reign of Chivalry*. Rochester, NewYork: The Boydell Press, 2005.

Barzun, Jacques. *From Dawn to Decadence: 500 Years of Western Cultural Life: 1500 to the Present*. New York: Harper Collins, 2001

Bellitto, Christopher. “Chivalry: A Door to Teaching the Middle Ages.” *The History Teacher* 28, no. 4 (Aug., 1995): 479-485.

Bernard of Clairvaux. *In Praise of the New Knighthood*. London: Gorgias Press, 2010.

Bork, Robert. *Slouching towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline*. New York: Harper Collins, 1996.

Braudy, Leo. *From Chivalry to Terrorism: War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity.* New York: Random House, 2003.

Bryskett, Lodowick. *A Discourse of Civil Life*. San Fernando Valley State College, 1970.

Burke, Edmund. *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*. London: J. Dodsley, 1791.

Burke, Edmund. *Correspondence of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke, Vol. VI.* London: Francis & John Rivington, 1844.

Burke, Edmund. *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke - Volume 10*. Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1901.

Burke, Edmund. *Reflections on the Revolution in France and on the Proceedings of Certain Societies in London Relevant to that Event*. London: Seeley, Jackson and Halliday, 1872.

Byron, George. *Don Juan*, *Canto XI.* London: John Hunt, 1823.

Carroll, Berenice A. " 'To Crush Him in Our Own Country': The Political Thought of Virginia Woolf." *Feminist Studies* 4, no. 1 (Feb., 1978): 99-132.

Castiglione, Baldasore. *The Book of the Courtier*. New York: Digireads Publications, 2009.

Cervantes, Miguel. *The First Part of the Delightful History of the Most Ingenious Knight: Don Quixote of the the Mancha*. Danbury, Connecticut: Grolier Enterprises, 1990.

Childers, William. "'Don Quixote' and the War of the Alpujarras: The Historical Debasement of Chivalry as a Correlative to Its Literary Parody." *Hispania* 88, no. 1 (Mar., 2005): 11-19.

Churchill, Winston. *Marlborough: His Life and Times*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933.

Churchill, Winston. *A History of the English Speaking Peoples: The Birth of Britain*. London: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1956.

Condorcet, Jean. *Essay on the Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, trans. June Barraclough. London: Weidenfield, 1979.

Craig, David. "The Defeatism of the Wasteland." *Critical Quarterly* 2, no. 3, (Oct., 1960): 241–252.

Crocker, H.W. *Triumph: The Power and the Glory of the Catholic Church*. Roseville, California: Forum Publishing, 2001.

Dickens, Charles. *A Tale of Two Cities*. Philadelphia: Courage Books, 1992.

Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*, London: The Amalgamated Press, 1905.

Dickens, *Oliver Twist*. London: Penguin Books, 1966.

Dill, Samuel. *Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire*. London: MacMillan & Company, 1919.

Dodds, E.R. *Greeks and the Irrational*. Sacramento: University of California Press, 1962.

Dowling, William C. "Burke and the Age of Chivalry." *The Yearbook of English Studies* 12, Heroes and the Heroic Special (1982): 109-124.

Eliot, T.S. *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909-1950.* New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1980.

Felson, Richard B. "The Normative Protection of Women from Violence." *Sociological Forum* 15, no. 1 (Mar., 2000): 91-116.

Ferguson, Arthur B. *The Indian Summer of English Chivalry: Studies in the Decline and Transformation of Chivalric Idealism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1960.

Gagen, Jean. "Hector's Honor." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (Spring, 1968): 129-137.

Garton, Stephen. "The Scales of Suffering: Love, Death and Victorian Masculinity." *Social History* 27, no. 1 (Jan., 2002): 40-58.

Gautier, Léon. *Chivalry*. London: George Routledge and Sons, 1891.

Gibbon, Edward. *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Norwalk, Connecticut: Easton Press, 1947.

Gilbert, Elliot L. "The Female King: Tennyson's Arthurian Apocalypse." *PMLA* 98, no. 5 (Oct., 1983): 863-878.

Goins, Scott. "Boethius 'Consolation of Philosophy' 1.2.6 and Virgil 'Aeneid' 2: Removing the Clouds of Mortal Anxieties." *Phoenix* 55, no. 1/2 (Sprin-Summer 2001): 124-136.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Harrison, Ann Tukey. "Aude and Bramimunde: Their Importance in the Chanson de Roland." *The French Review* 54, no. 5 (Apr., 1981): 672-679.

Hooker, J.T. "Homeric Society: A Shame-Culture?" *Greece & Rome* 34, no. 2 (Oct., 1987): 121-125.

Hume, David. *History of England: Volume II - from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution of 1688.* London: Legrand, 1789.

Johnson, Carroll. *Cervantes and the Material World.* Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000.

Jusserand, J.J. "Spenser's 'Twelve Private Morall Vertued as Aristotle Hath Devised'." *Modern Philology* 3, no. 3 (Jan., 1906): 373-383.

Kaeuper, Richard W. *Holy Warriors: The Religious Ideology of Chivalry*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.

Kennedy, Michael. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Kilgour, Raymond. “Honoré Bonet: A Fourteenth-Century Critic of Chivalry.” *PMLA* 50, no. 2 (Jun., 1935): 352-361.

Kipling, Rudyard. “The White Man’s Burden,” *Rudyard Kipling’s Verse*. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co, 1919.

Knoebel, Edgar E., ed. *Classics of Western Thought: The Modern World*. 4th ed. Vol. 3 New York: Wadsworth, 1988.

Kopp, Matthew. “Mr. Knightley, Gentleman-Savior, As Seen Through Emma and “Reflections on the Revolution in France.” *Ampersand*, 1999.

Lacy, Norris J., "Character of Arthur." *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia.* New York: Garland, 1993,

Lewis, C.S. *Present Concerns*, London: Fount Paperbacks, 1986.

Livy. *History of Rome*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919.

Macaulay, Thomas Babbington. *Horatius at the Bridge*. London: Isidore Smith, 1921.

MacCracken, H.N. “The Flower of Souvenance: A Moment in the Twilight of Chivalry.” The Sewanee Review 20, no. 3 (Jul., 1912): 366-376.

Mallin, Eric S. “Emulous Factions and the Collapse of Chivalry: Troilus and Cressida.” *Representations* 29 (Winter, 1990): 145-179.

Malory, Thomas. *Le Morte d’Arthur*. London: MacMillan & Co., 1899.

Macintosh, James. *Vindiciae Gallicae: Defense of the French Revolution and its English Admirers against the Accusations of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke*. London: G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1792.

McCullough, Colleen. *Caesar’s Women*. New York: Harper Collins, 1996.

Mossner, Ernest Campbell. “David Hume’s ‘An Historical Essay on Chivalry and Modern Honour’.” *Modern Philology* 45, no. 1 (Aug., 1947): 54-60.

O’Brian, Connor Cruise. *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography of Edmund Burke*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Padel, O. J. "The Nature of Arthur." *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 27 (1994): 1–31.

Paine, Thomas. *The Rights of Man: Being an Answer to Mr. Burke's Attack on the French Revolution*. London, J.S. Jordan, 1791.

Patmore, Coventry. "The Angel in the House." *Cassell's National Library*. London: Cassell & Co., 1897.

Plato. *The Republic*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930.

Roades, Mary Teresa. " 'Don Quixote' and 'Modern Chivalry'." *Hispania* 32, no. 3 (Aug., 1949): 320-325.

Robinson, Lillian S. *Monstrous Regiment: The Lady Knight in Sixteenth-Century Epic*. New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1985.

Rousseau, J.J. *Emile*. New York: Nuvision Publications, 1992.

Rousseau, J.J. *The Social Contract*. New York, Cosimo Publishing, 2008.

Sassoon, Siegfried. *Counter-Attack and Other Poems*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1918.

Seem, Lauren Scanarelli. "The Limits of Chivalry: Tasso and the End of the Aeneid." *Comparative Literature* 42, no. 2 (April, 1990): 116-125.

Shakespeare, William. *Richard III*. London: T. Hughes, 1823.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. London: T. Hughes, 1823.

Shakespeare, William. *Henry V*. London: T. Hughes, 1823.

Shires, Linda. "Rereading Tennyson's Gender Politics", *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse: Renegotiating Gender and Power.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990.

Spalding, J.T. "Has Christianity Benefited Woman?" *The North American Review* 140, no. 342 (May, 1885): 389-410.

Spenser, Edmund. *The Fairie Queen*, Oxford: MacMillan, 1873.

Spitzer, Leo. "On the Significance of Don Quijote." *MLN* 77, no. 2 Spanish Issue (Mar., 1962): 113-129.

Squier, Susan. "The London Scene: Gender and Class in Virginia Woolf's London." *Twentieth Century Literature* 29, no. 4 (Winter, 1983): 488-500.

Spurr, Barry. *HSC English Study Guide: Wilfred Owen.* Pascal Press, 2004.

St. Augustine*, City of God, Book V*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932.

Stoll, Elmer Edgar. "Art and Artifice in the Iliad: or the Poetical Treatment of Character in Homer and Shakespeare." *ELH* 2, no. 4 (Dec., 1935): 294-321.

Symonds, John Addington. *Studies of the Greek Poets.* London: Adam and Charles Black, 1893.

Tacitus. *Germania*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914.

Tennyson, Alfred. *Idylls of the King*. London: C. Kegan Paul and Company, 1878.

The Heliand. J.E. Cathey, trans. Charleston, West Virginia: West Virginia University Press, 2002.

The Song of Roland. C.K. Moncrief, trans. New York: Kessinger Publishing, 2002.

West, Michael. "Spenser and the Renaissance Ideal of Christian Heroism." *PMLA* 88, no. 5 (Oct., 1973): 1013-1032.

Woolf, Virginia. *Death of a Moth and Other Essays.* New York: Harcourt Brace, 1974.

Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs. Dalloway.* Philadelphia: Harvest Books, 1990.

Woods, Thomas E. *How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization*. Washington: Regnery Publishing, 2005.

Yeats, W.B. *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*. ed. Richard J. Finneran. New York: Scribner Books, 1989.