

**"Men of Instinct, Impetuosity, and Action":
Chivalry and the Anglo-Norman Invasion of Ireland**



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The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland, 2

Patrick DeBrosse

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Dr. Travis Glasson

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Introduction

The European Middle Ages were a time of strife – from civil wars and revolts to invasions and crusades. Of all these conflicts, the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland in the late 12th century had some of the longest lasting effects. As a result of the invasion, Ireland, previously a hodgepodge of independent and competing native polities, became a possession of the English Crown.¹ Anglo-Norman lords displaced native rulers, erected a series of fortifications throughout the island, and introduced their language and culture to Ireland. It took centuries for the English to secure total political and cultural domination of Ireland. All the same, Ireland remained an English (later British) possession until 1921 and the northern part of the island remains, controversially, a part of the United Kingdom to this day. If we wish to understand more recent Irish history – including the political violence that took place in living memory – it is useful for us to examine the relationship forged between Ireland and England during the initial Anglo-Norman invasion. This medieval invasion is all the more important to understand because some scholars assert that Ireland provided the model for Britain’s later, world-altering imperialist activities.²

To begin, we must first establish who the Anglo-Normans were. “Anglo-Norman” is a controversial term amongst scholars. It is an intentional hedge, designed to acknowledge the fact that, beginning in 1066, the Norman Conquest had displaced most of the indigenous nobility of England and introduced a new, Norman ruling class. By the 12th century, the Norman lords of England had become acclimated to English culture and language to varying degrees. Many of the great noble families, however, continued to hold fiefs in both England and Normandy; and the consolidation of territory under King Henry II (known to scholars as the “Angevin Empire”) brought Anglo-Norman lords into

greater contact with other parts of modern-day France. Complicating matters of identity further, a great many of the Anglo-Norman invaders of Ireland had spent time subjugating and ruling the Welsh. Some of these men married into Welsh families, but all of them gained unique experience from their wars and from their habits of independent rule in Wales.³ Although some scholars of the invasion have moved away from the term “Anglo-Norman,” pointing out that contemporary sources refer to the invaders as the “English,” I will use “Anglo-Normans” throughout this paper, as I wish to stress the cultural connections between the invaders and France.⁴ Overall, the invaders drew their identity more from a sense of class and from shared military experience than from allegiance to a particular Western European nation.

The basic course of the invasion is easily reconstructed from contemporary accounts. It began as a struggle between indigenous Irish nobles. In 1167, Diarmait (Dermot) Mac Murchada, the exiled king of Leinster, brought over Anglo-Norman mercenaries to help him retake his throne. Upon Diarmait’s death in 1171, one of these Anglo-Normans, Richard “Strongbow” fitz Gilbert, lord of Strigoil, installed his followers as tenants in Leinster. That same year, Henry II personally led an army into Ireland, received submissions from Strongbow and various Irish kings, and granted the kingdom of Meath to Hugh de Lacy. Ruaidri Ua Conchobair, king of Connacht, initially led the resistance to Henry’s invasion, but in 1175 he agreed to a peace treaty with Henry. This treaty, the Treaty of Windsor, divided Ireland into spheres of influence for each of the two kings, but acknowledged Henry as titular overlord of the island. Soon afterwards, in 1177, Henry designated his son John as the hereditary lord of Ireland. Eleven years later, when John unexpectedly became king of England, he reunited the English and the

Irish thrones. He led an expedition into Ireland in 1210 to ensure the obedience of his vassals and he began to introduce English law into Ireland.⁵

While historians of the invasion do not dispute this basic overview, they do debate the reasons that the Anglo-Normans decided to take control of Ireland. Explanations have included economics, religious tensions, Angevin strategic interests, cultural imperialism, and the material interest of the knightly class.⁶ There is probably some truth in all of these explanations – invasions are, after all, complicated affairs. There is a factor that these scholars have not spent sufficient time exploring, however: the impact of knightly chivalric culture upon the invasion. To some extent, this is an understandable oversight. As R. R. Davies points out in his acclaimed book *Domination and Conquest*, most of the medieval sources for the invasion were written by rationalizing clerics. Furthermore, “Historians for their part are quiet people, much given to contemplation and explanation[...] they are thereby ill-fitted to come to terms with the Anglo-Norman conquerors – men of instinct, impetuosity, and action.”⁷ I agree with Davies’s warning, “We should not underestimate the impact of military values and ambitions in shaping the lives and aspirations of their [i.e. the Irish and the Welsh] conquerors,” and I think that we should incorporate the effects of such military values into any explanations for the Anglo-Norman invasion.⁸ While we can never, in an academic paper, fully capture the range of emotions present in the mind of a warrior, we can look for reflections of such emotions in our available sources.

To this end, I will turn to two vernacular French poems, written at the time of the invasion. The first is *The Song of the Dermot and the Earl*, a poem well-known to scholars of the invasion. It narrates the coming of Strongbow to Ireland in 1170 to aid

Diarmait Mac Murchada and several important subsequent events of the invasion. It is the work of an unknown, secular author, writing around the last decade of the 12th century, with information given by Maurice Regan, a companion of Diarmait Mac Murchada.⁹ The second poem is *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal [The History of William Marshal]*, an almost 20,000 line biography of William Marshal (c. 1147-1219), an Anglo-Norman knight who served in the inner circles of several Angevin monarchs and, important for our purposes, inherited Strongbow's extensive holdings in Ireland. The poem, which makes use of both written and oral sources, was probably completed late in 1226 on behalf of Marshal's eldest son by an author named John.¹⁰ While most of the lines of *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal* are not focused upon Ireland, it does describe a civil war amongst the Anglo-Norman knights who held land in Ireland immediately after the invasion's success.

To study *The Song of the Dermot and the Earl* and *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal*, I turn to the two most recent scholarly translations of the poems into modern English. The Anglo-Norman text society published the *History of William Marshal* in 2006, with the original French facing an English translation by S. Gregory. A. J. Holden edited the three volumes and D. Crouch provided extensive historical notes.¹¹ Evelyn Mullally translated *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* under the title *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland* in 2002. Her translation, like the *History of William Marshal*, places the original French alongside her translation and contains comprehensive notes and commentary.¹² These translations are ideal because they allow me to provide intelligible quotations to my readers, while also enabling me to examine the original French in passages where the exact phrasing may carry significance. Since both publications date to

within 15 years of this paper's writing, they both represent the most refined translations available and, in their introductions and notes, the most recent scholarship upon the invasion. On occasion I have also consulted Goddard Henry Orpen's 1892 translation of *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* for his commentaries and for comparison of his reading of the French with Mullally's.¹³ Though I give precedence to Mullally in most matters, I have chosen to use Orpen's title for the work, both because "*The Song of Dermot and the Earl*" is the title still used by much of the secondary literature and out of respect for Orpen, who was the first person to offer a scholarly translation of that previously untitled work.¹⁴

For this paper, I have decided to focus upon these two poems because they give a unique perspective into the minds of the Anglo-Norman knights who went to Ireland. The poems transmit eyewitness testimony from the knights involved in the invasion and thus reveal which aspects of the invasion were important to these knightly sources. Since the knights' cultural priorities shine through so clearly in the poems, they will also allow us to contribute to a second historical debate: whether or not chivalry – an abstracted concept of "knightliness" – affected the real world behavior of knights.¹⁵

As we shall see, *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* and *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal* will provide evidence demonstrating that chivalric culture did in fact influence a real-world conflict – the invasion of Ireland by the Anglo-Normans. Its general effect was to perpetuate conflict in Ireland, both during and after the initial invasion. It did so, however, in ways unique to chivalric culture: encouraging feudal landholding patterns, battlefield impetuosity, property seizures, loyalty to liege lords, reprisals against oath breakers, solidarity amongst the Anglo-Normans, and the objectification of women. The

following close reading of these poems will reveal that these aspects of 12th century chivalry were powerful enough to spur knights into battle and to forever alter the trajectory of Ireland and its people.

Questions of Genre

It is profitable, before beginning a close reading, to consider where the poems fit into the broader trends of French medieval literature. As it turns out, this is no easy task. Pre-Renaissance writers did not draw as firm a distinction between genres such as history and fiction as modern scholars do. Romances are a particularly difficult genre to define since scholars employ inconsistent criteria, varying from the subject matter, to authorial intent, the intended audience, or the historical credence of the authors.¹⁶ This is important for our purposes because romances, however defined, typically present their heroes as chivalrous. Authors such as Chrétien de Troyes (writing c. 1165 - c. 1185) emphasized traits such as *prouesse*, *loyauté*, *largesse*, *courtoisie*, and *franchise* to demonstrate the chivalric nature of their characters.¹⁷ We shall examine these traits – which have more specific meanings than their English equivalents of prowess, loyalty, largess, courtesy, and franchise – in greater depth later in this paper. For now the important point is that if the authors of *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* and *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal* attempted to evoke the themes and styles of works of romance, then it follows that they must have intended their audiences to see their protagonists as models of chivalry.

Many scholars are reluctant to categorize our poems as romances. For example, Ruth J. Dean's *Anglo-Norman Literature: A Guide to Texts and Manuscripts*, a comprehensive catalogue of extant Anglo-Norman texts, groups both *The Song of Dermot*

and the Earl and *William the Marshal* in the “Historiographical” section rather than in the “Romance” section.¹⁸ Evelyn Mullally, the most recent translator of *The Song of Dermot and the Earl*, is quite emphatic in her introduction that the poem should not be considered a *chanson de geste* (a genre similar enough to romance that the boundary between them is porous) because that category describes fictitious works about legendary heroes. She also points to *The Song of Dermot and the Earl*’s rhyme scheme of octosyllabic rhyming couplets as evidence that the poem does not belong with other *chansons de geste* as those works are in assonating *laissez*.¹⁹ Four lines from *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* that quote the war cry of Raymond le Gros, an Anglo-Norman leading an assault against the Irish, provide a sense for the poem’s overall metric pattern:

Original	Translation
<i>“Ore vus fetes tuz armer,/</i>	“Now arm yourselves, all of you,/
<i>Chevaler, serjant e archer,/</i>	Knights, foot-soldiers and archers,/
<i>Si nus mettrum en plein champ/</i>	And we shall take to the open field/
<i>Al non del Pere tut pötant.”</i>	In the name of the Almighty Father.” ²⁰

One can find, however, examples that undermine the logic of Mullally’s classification criteria. There are, for example, numerous poems with octosyllabic rhymed couplets listed in the “Romance” section of Dean’s guide.²¹ Moreover, *The Song of the Cathar Wars*, a 13th century French and Provençal historical narrative of the events in Languedoc between 1204 and 1218, is in alexandrine *laissez*.²² Meter is, therefore, not a dependable criterion for classification. Even attempts to classify literary characters as fictitious or

historical can be misleading, however, as the authors of medieval romances believed in the historicity of characters such as King Arthur. Though the authors of romances fabricated elements of their stories, they genuinely believed that their tales were rooted in historical fact.²³

None of this is to suggest that there is no difference between works such as *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* and *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal* and more fantastical romances. Our poems are distinct from pure romance in that they deal with contemporary historic events and because their authors seem to have made genuine efforts to base their poems upon documentation and eyewitness accounts. Nevertheless, Mullally's suggested uses of *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* – as a tool for checking Giraldus Cambrensis's *Expugnatio Hibernica*, for learning about the subinfeudation of Meath, and for gaining detail about an attack on the castle of Trim – seem to be too narrow in focus.²⁴ It would be better to emphasize, not downplay, any connections between the poems and romance literature. These are many.

For example, aspects of *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal* are identifiably fictional. David Crouch observes that John, the author, emphasizes themes that seem to be drawn from the works of Chrétien de Troyes and, furthermore, that many of the phrases in *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal* also appear in more fictitious works such as *The Song of Roland* and *Gui de Warewic*.²⁵ An example of John's intentional use of tropes from the romantic literature of Chrétien de Troyes is his focus on tournaments throughout *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal*. Benson argues that the repeated reoccurrence of tournaments in the poem is part of a conscious effort on John's part to emphasize the aspects of Marshal's life that had precedents in chivalric romances and to

devote less attention to aspects of his life that did not have such literary precedents.²⁶

This supports Crouch's claim that the existence of a biographical poem such as *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal* is evidence that knights and barons worked to cultivate their public images.²⁷

John Leyerle argues that the distinction between fact and fiction in *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal* – a work he classifies as the first example of an emerging genre of “the chivalric biography” - is less important to the author than is his ability to exemplify chivalry to his readers.²⁸ When we examine the way that *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal* presents its story to the reader, we can see that the facts have been arranged so as to evoke the patterns of chivalric romances. For example, the poet digresses to describe the single combats of Marshal in great, heroic detail:

“He [William Marshal] dealt so many blows right and left/
 With the sword that he held in his right hand/
 That those inside fell back/
 [...]
 The Marshal dealt such a blow at him [an enemy]/
 That he cut through his helmet,
 Separating the coif from the hauberk/
 And piercing his flesh.”²⁹

Compare the passage to another, from one of Chrétien de Troyes's romances:

“In the thickest of the fighting he [the knight Alexander] goes to strike a rogue so hard that his shield and hauberk were not worth a button to him as he was flung to the ground.[...] he meets with a third, dealing a very noble, dashing knight such a blow through his flanks that the blood spurts out on the other side[...] they break them up and scatter them like a confused rabble.”³⁰

John, the author of *L’Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal*, did not have to go into such hyperbolic detail. His decision to do so, however, creates links in his readers’ minds between his historical subject and the knightly characters of romances. This and other evocations of romance support David Crouch’s assertion that John gained the ability to draw on romance-epics by writing in French verse.³¹

The Song of Dermot and the Earl performs similar evocations. The opening action of the poem revolves around Diarmait, the rightful king, who is forced by his enemies to flee into exile. After a journey to gather strength through many locations, Diarmait returns to reclaim his kingdom.³² Other, more fictitious romances such as *The Romance of Horn* and *Lai d’Haveloc* also revolve around princes who go into exile and then return.³³ This common theme may seem to be coincidental, as Giraldus Cambrensis’s *Expugnatio Hibernica*, the major prose account of the invasion, also begins with Diarmait’s exile. The tone of Giraldus’s account is entirely different than that of *The Song of Dermot and the Earl*, however. Giraldus depicts Diarmait in negative terms, as a king who “oppressed his nobles, and raged against the chief men of his kingdom with a tyranny grievous and impossible to bear.”³⁴ In contrast, *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* depicts Diarmait as an admirable figure. The poem introduces him:

“In Ireland at this time/
 There was no king as worthy as he [Diarmait]./
 He was very rich and magnificent;/
 He loved the generous, hated the mean.”³⁵

Thus, even though *Expugnatio Hibernica* and *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* both describe the same historical events and must necessarily overlap in content, they radically differ in their interpretations of the historical persons involved. The author of *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* discards the telling of the story, found both in Giraldus and in the Irish monastic *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, that blames Diarmait for his own exile. Instead, the poem paints Diarmait as a victim, “abandoned/ by foster kindred, cousins, and friends,” whose enemies include an “evil traitor” (“*malveis traitur*”) and “a wicked rebel” (“*un mal felun*”) who deals in “treachery” (“*traisun*”).³⁶ In other words, the Diarmait of *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* becomes much more like the chivalric heroes of *The Romance of Horn* and *Lai d’Haveloc*. This recasting is also evident in the author’s use of specifically chivalric terms such as “*larges*” and “*curteis*” to describe Diarmait.”³⁷ It is somewhat confusing that the poem treats Diarmait as chivalrous since he was an Irish king, not an Anglo-Norman knight. Nevertheless, this portrayal was desirable to the Anglo-Norman patrons of the poems because it granted their support for Diarmait the appearance of chivalric solidarity. If King Arthur’s chivalry gave purpose to the knights who followed him, then Diarmait’s chivalry could only reflect well upon the invaders of Ireland.

There are critics of the idea that *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal* and *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* exploited the form and the tropes of romance literature. As noted above, Mullally reproaches attempts to treat *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* as literature instead of non-fiction. Likewise, A. J. Holden claims that *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal* lacks the literary conceit of courtliness, arguing that John uses concrete and specialized language, rare for pure romances, to distinguish his poem from that genre.³⁸ Nevertheless, the similarities between the poems and uncontroverted romances are too great to be coincidental. The authors' use of tropes such as epic combat and the exiled prince encouraged their audiences to recognize the historical protagonists of the poems as heroes in chivalric romances. This modeling is important to recognize because it makes sorting between accurate reporting and artistic license more difficult than might be the case with non-poetic primary sources. Even more important, however, is the fact that the poems' forms betray their reason for existence. John wrote *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal* on behalf of Marshal's son, so the Marshal family must have intentionally cultivated the public image of the chivalric hero for William. The patron of *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* is unknown, but given the author's close connections with Maurice Regan and his consistently positive portrayal of the invaders, it seems likely that his poem also presents the public image that those invaders desired.

Therefore, the invaders of Ireland and their families commissioned poems as a form of propaganda, intended to justify their conduct by comparing their behavior to that found in romances. This does not mean that the facts related in the poems are untrue. Indeed, independent sources verify many of the poems' narrative details. Diarmait's exile, discussed above, is a good example of an event that appears in Latin and Irish

clerical sources, corroborating the story told in *The Song of Dermot and the Earl*. The poems' authors do not, then, invent incidents. Rather, they select and rearrange facts so as to emphasize the parallels between their historical protagonists and the characters of romances. Since chivalry is at the heart of romance literature, chivalry must also have been a central concern for the invaders, as they had their memories of the conflict recorded and disseminated through the poems. In sum, the invaders were so concerned that society see them as chivalrous that they self-consciously cast all of their actions as glorious deeds – deeds that they expected readers of the poems to admire and emulate.

Chivalry in *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* & *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal*

Historically, it is a fact that Anglo-Norman knights went to Ireland to perform acts of violence. While these men undoubtedly had complicated reasons for choosing to go to war with the Irish and, later, with one another, their obsession with proper chivalric conduct seems to have been inseparable from their actions. A close reading of *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* and the section of *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal* set in Ireland will make this concern for chivalry quite clear. Chivalric culture placed specific obligations upon knights to fight for their feudal rights, their lords, their honor, and their women. Anglo-Norman knights fought the campaigns, battles, and sieges of the invasion of Ireland so as to fulfill those obligations.

It is difficult to trace the development of chivalry, or even to provide a comprehensive definition of the term. The concept emerged gradually, encompassed different values to different contemporary authors, and shifted meaning over time. Modern scholars variously use the term to mean rationalized knightly practices and

comradeship, manners at court, rules of war, or violent honor codes.³⁹ These scholars cannot be fully faulted, however, for medieval authors were also guilty of such inconsistency. An author such as Chrétien de Troyes might, for example, laud contradictory behaviors as chivalrous.⁴⁰ As for chivalry's origin, all that can be said without controversy is that the French word "*chevalrie*" originated as a collective term for a group of knights, as the plural of "*chevalier*." Both are cognate with "*cheval*" - "horse."⁴¹ In France, the concept of horsemanship eventually evolved into a broader ethos. The Norman Conquest imported this ethos into England.⁴²

Since navigating the subsequent history of the concept comprehensively would take more space than the present scope allows, this paper will follow Maurice Keen's conclusions, as his 1984 book on the subject remains the most influential, best researched, and most compellingly argued treatment available.⁴³ In spite of the fact that thirty years have elapsed since the book's publication, recent scholars still cite it routinely.⁴⁴ Keen's ability to articulate a concept of chivalry based on overarching traits stressed in a variety of primary source-types makes his conception of chivalry much more satisfying than those of scholars such as Aldo Scaglione, who examines chivalry only as it relates to the manners of court-culture, or Constance Brittain Couchard, who rejects the existence of a unified chivalric ideal altogether.⁴⁵

Keen described chivalry as "an ethos in which martial, aristocratic, and Christian elements were fused together."⁴⁶ He specifically singled out *franchise*, *loyauté*, *prouesse*, *largesse*, and *courtoisie* as defining traits of chivalry by the time of our period. While other secondary sources on 12th century chivalry will supplement Keen's analysis, the following close reading hinges upon the five fundamental traits he identified. The

remainder of this section will examine each trait in turn by defining them, explaining their significance within chivalric culture, and identifying evidence in the poems that the traits influenced the behavior of Anglo-Normans in Ireland.

Franchise

Franchise is a good starting point because several of Keen's other traits assume its existence. On a fundamental level, *franchise* meant a free and frank bearing. This testified to a man's virtue and good birth.⁴⁷ *Franchise* was closely linked with nobility, as noble men were unambiguously free in status, they received instruction in virtue, and they possessed impressive lineages. The concept of nobility – like that of chivalry – is difficult to define. Medieval writers used a variety of terms to describe the class of people scholars call “nobles.” Contemporary use of the term “noble” itself changed significantly over time in the medieval period. Scholars generally agree, however, that after the 9th century, noble status depended upon the possession of some noble ancestry, political power over a defined region, and wealth.⁴⁸

Knights were not originally accorded noble status. Indeed, knights seem to have belonged more to the peasantry than to the nobility. This started to change in the 12th century as the knightly class became more coherent.⁴⁹ Indeed, by the end of the century, knightly status had become equated with the noble class. Contemporary texts show this in their increasing use of the Latin term “*dominus*,” “lord,” for knights and by their concurrent use of “*miles*,” “knight” for nobles. Members of the nobility through the highest ranks also began to receive knightly dubbing ceremonies.⁵⁰ By 1200, the act of

knighting a man automatically conferred noble status upon him. Thereafter, the ranks of the knighthood became restricted to those already considered to be noble.⁵¹

The equivalence between knights and nobles was still recent enough by the time of the Anglo-Norman invasion, however, that it behooved the Anglo-Norman knights to stress their noble status. Throughout *The Song of Dermot and the Earl*, Anglo-Normans address their comrades-at-arms as “*sengurs baruns*” - “noble barons.”⁵² Titles to specific lands are emphasized: Strongbow is referred to as “the earl,” and the specifics of how he and his fellow Anglo-Normans divided the lands of Ireland amongst themselves are given prominence in the account.⁵³ Indeed, the Anglo-Normans come to be defined in terms of the lands that they hold. After their initial success, the Anglo-Normans become the “barons from Ireland” - “*baruns de Yrlande*” – and, more simply, “the Irish.”⁵⁴ Since dominion over a geographic territory was one of the defining characteristics of nobility, the account’s decision to stress landholding and the knights’ eagerness to fight for those holdings, ought to be interpreted, at least partially, as a quest for status. This seems all the more likely because many of the invaders were younger or illegitimate sons who did not stand to inherit their fathers’ estates.⁵⁵

Similarly, the author occasionally emphasizes the wealth, another marker of nobility, of individual knights:

“[...]Raymond le Gros/
 He was a valiant baron,
 A brave and victorious vassal./
 He was very rich and powerful/

And the most mighty among his peers.”⁵⁶

Noble heritage, the final marker of nobility, played an important part in *L’Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal* as Marshal’s right to Leinster came through his wife’s bloodline. We shall examine that passage below, when looking at chivalry and women, but bloodlines also did much to set the initial Anglo-Norman invasion into motion. In the *Song of Dermot and the Earl*, King Diarmait tries to garner support to reclaim his kingdom, saying,”

“I was born a lord of Ireland,/

In Ireland I was acknowledged king,/

But my own people have wrongfully cast me out/

From the kingdom.”⁵⁷

It may be objected that Diarmait was not an Anglo-Norman, but his attitude towards blood-rights is not at issue. Rather, the important fact is that his appeal to blood-rights resonated with his Anglo-Norman audience. They took Diarmait’s status so seriously that they undertook a risky military campaign to restore his rights to him. It is irrelevant that blood-rights also seem to have been important to the Irish Diarmait. Different cultures can value the same concepts. Diarmait, however, was clever enough to recognize and exploit the overlap between his cultural values and those of the Anglo-Normans. Since Diarmait later offered to transfer this blood-right to Strongbow, inherited status would remain central to the invasion. All the concern over nobility in the poems –

the knights' focus upon title, land, wealth, and bloodlines – are important for our topic because if nobility implied *franchise*, and *franchise* was a part of chivalry, then nobility was – at the very least – a precursor of chivalry.

Loyauté

While *franchise* had to do with the social status of individual knights, *loyauté* depended upon the relationships between members of the noble/knightly class. Such relationships were formal and hierarchical. Together all these various relationships composed the so-called “feudal system.” Unfortunately, the term “feudal” poses yet another dilemma of definition. Many scholars now avoid discussions of “feudalism” because past writers have used the term so inconsistently. The spread of the term into popular culture has only confused matters further. Narrowly defined, however, as the practice of vassals holding fiefs, i.e. of nobles ruling units of land, owned by another noble, in exchange for a formal promise of loyalty to that lord, feudalism is an important phenomenon to understand.⁵⁸ In the French-speaking world the form of this exchange, known as homage, had become relatively standardized by the 12th century. The personal relationship between the lord and the vassal was at the center of these acts of homage. The vassal knelt while making oaths of fidelity. He might offer a symbolic gift to his lord. Then the lord put his hands around the vassal's hands, drew him up, and kissed him as a symbol of the two men's equality. On the whole, the ceremony balanced displays of equality of the men's social status with demonstrations of their inequality in political status.⁵⁹

In *The Song of Dermot and the Earl*, homage plays a crucial role. Time and again the poem describes acts of homage such as the one Strongbow performs for Henry II:

“To the king of England/
 The valiant earl/
 Did homage to his lord/
 The mighty king granted him/
 Leinster in fee.”⁶⁰

Strongbow’s followers, in turn, do homage to him for possessions within Leinster:

“The noble earl also gave twenty fiefs/
 In Uí Muiredaig/
 To the warrior/
 Walter de Riddlesford.”⁶¹

These acts of homage mattered for practical, legal reasons. Lords had the legal right to call upon their vassals to provide military service: *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* specifically mentions this “*venuz de feffement*” as a source of manpower for the Anglo-Norman army.⁶² The revenue vassals owed as feudal dues was also important for medieval lords – possibly even more important than direct military service was.⁶³ Socially, acts of feudal homage bound the entire body of Anglo-Norman invaders into a series of interlocking, sometimes conflicting, relationships. Since the Norman Conquest,

the nobles of England had moved in small circles where social, as well as political, power, was in the hands of local lords.⁶⁴ Now Ireland too possessed these socio-political hierarchies, along with their attendant dependency on *loyauté*.

While the *loyauté* that lords expected of their vassals and retainers was in some ways equivalent to our modern concept of loyalty, it also, crucially, required that a man faithfully adhere to his sworn oaths.⁶⁵ Since, as we have seen, oaths of homage were pervasive in the Anglo-Norman knighthood, a knight displayed *loyauté* largely by carrying out his feudal duties as promised. Though this may sound formulaic and contractual, contemporaries were quite emotional about the importance of *loyauté* for chivalric culture. We see this in *Lancelot*, a romance, when a character says, “Disloyalty turns a good knight into a bad one, and a knight who is true fights well and confidently even if he has never done so before.”⁶⁶ The character assumes, in other words, that a knight’s *loyauté* directly correlates with that knight’s effectiveness in combat.

The knights of the Anglo-Norman invasion were under similar pressure to show *loyauté*. When, for example, the king’s counselor confronted William Marshal with awkward questions about his *loyauté*, Marshal responded:

“[...] There is no man in this world who,
 If he sought to take Ireland,
 Would not see me going with my forces/
 To the side of him whose liegeman I am.”⁶⁷

One of Marshal's own vassals in Ireland was even more emphatic in his *loyauté*. During a time of crisis during the civil war, John of Earley gave a passionate speech to his fellow knights, urging them to remain faithful to Marshal:

“My lords, it would a most disgraceful thing/
 To leave the earl's land,/

Land which he has committed to us to guard./

One should be concerned with his honour,/

So that no tale of our wrongdoing can be told;/

Shame lasts longer than destitution./

If the land is abandoned in this manner,/

Our own honour will be diminished./

So we are in a trap, for, on the one hand,/

We lose honour and land, and, on the other,/

We lose land and honour/
 And the love of our lord as well.”⁶⁸

Earley's *loyauté* is all the more remarkable as a source of motivation because it was not bolstered by pragmatism. He risked much by siding with the Marshal, who was at a severe disadvantage at this point in the conflict, and even after the final victory, Earley gained little materially for his service.⁶⁹ Earley thus provides a good example of a knight whose desire to behave chivalrously had a huge effect upon his behavior while in Ireland.

It is possible, of course, to downplay the impact of *loyauté* upon the Anglo-Norman knights in Ireland. David Crouch, a scholar of William Marshal, does just that when he cautions his readers not to assume that John of Earley's loyalty was typical of the age, since others vassals of Marshal joined Meilier fitz Henry's rebellion.⁷⁰ Crouch speculates that Meilier resented Marshal because Marshal was a newcomer, who had not participated in the conquest of Leinster with Strongbow's *mesnie* (warband).⁷¹ There may be some truth to this, but we should be cautious of trusting the hostile depiction of Meilier in *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal*, as the Marshal family commissioned the poem. After all, Meilier was the royal justiciar in Ireland, and he may have acted in good faith out of *loyauté* to King John when he:

“Sent a message to the King in England,
 Saying that if he allowed him [the Marshal] to stay long/
 In Ireland, it would be a bad thing,
 [...]
 For the King's own share of power would be worth nothing.”⁷²

Rather than arguing, however, about whether or not a certain knight behaved with *loyauté*, perhaps it would be easier to gauge Anglo-Norman attitudes towards *loyauté* from their reactions towards its opposite, treason. When, for example, Strongbow captured men whom he believed guilty of treason against Diarmait, he offered them little mercy:

“Because this rebel had betrayed/

Diarmait, his rightful lord [*sires dreiturel*],/

The earl had him beheaded/

And his body thrown to the dogs./

The dogs devoured him/

And ate his flesh.”⁷³

It is worth noting that even after Diarmait’s death, the enemies of the Anglo-Normans continue to be referred to as “*traitres*.”⁷⁴ Their treason remains embedded as their defining characteristic to the Anglo-Normans and, as Strongbow had inherited Diarmait’s authority over Leinster, he treated any of Diarmait’s former vassals who fail to transfer their *loyauté* to him as traitors.

Anglo-Norman knights hated being called traitors as much as they hated being the victims of treason. When William Marshal landed in Ireland following the civil war, two of his vassals who joined the rebellion tried to convince him (and perhaps themselves) that they were innocent of treason: saying, “We here are/ Two of your loyal [*leials*] men.” Marshal’s curt reply, “You didn’t show it/ As regards me, and I give you no thanks for that,’ made it abundantly clear that he did not accept their posturing.⁷⁵ Marshal was, himself, so concerned about the possibility that his *loyauté* would be compromised if he did homage to multiple lords for Leinster that he risked angering the English king:

“The Marshal replied:/

‘I shall not [perform homage to the king], so God help me!/
I shall never be so unjust as to allow myself/

To be marked by treachery./

I have already paid homage [humage] to your brother/

For the land I hold from him.”⁷⁶

Overall, chivalric devotion to *loyauté* did much in shaping the conflicts in Ireland, as Anglo-Normans sought to protect the lords to whom they owed *loyauté*, punish traitors for their transgressions, and navigate dangerous conflicts of allegiance.

Prouesse

Loyauté was all the more important for the Anglo-Norman invaders because it gave them an excuse to display their *prouesse*. In the words of Richard W. Kaeuper, “Loyalty functioned as the rudder which steered the great vessel of prowess into acceptable channels.”⁷⁷ “*Prouesse*” – meaning achievement at arms - derives from “*preud*” – “worth” – and is cognate with “*preudomme*” – an idealized, respected nobleman of vigor, discretion, loyalty, and honor.⁷⁸ In Kaeuper’s judgment, *prouesse* – which he colorfully calls “the demi-god in the quasi religion of chivalric honour” - was the most important chivalric trait for knights, as chivalric literature stresses it more than any other trait.⁷⁹ Chivalry’s emphasis on *prouesse* probably owed much to older European traditions of warrior heroism; but the specific form of knightly combat – with small armies using melee weapons – also did much to encourage individual feats of courage, since such feats had the potential to affect the outcome of a battle.⁸⁰ For knights, *Prouesse* was closely linked to honor – a knight’s self-value and the display of that value – as honor depended upon the ability of a knight to secure his peers’ attention and

approval. This naturally led to aggression when knights sought opportunities to affirm their honor by challenging the honor of another.⁸¹

Throughout our poems, we can find many instances where Anglo-Normans attempt to solidify their honor through acts of *prouesse*. *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* takes particular delight in the martial strength of the invaders:

“But the English in the end/
By their strength [*force*] and vigour [*vigor*]/
Forced back the traitors,/

[Forced them back] by strength and power [*poësté*].”⁸²

The poem also follows chivalric literature in considering wounds to be a sign of honor:

“But Meilyr fitz Henry/
Bore away the prize that day,/

[...]

Meilyr, the brave and strong man [*le bier menbré*]/
Was, moreover, stunned by a blow/
From a stone in that battle/
So that he stumbled and fell to the ground.”⁸³

Parallels between the actions of the knights and chivalric literature go beyond the narrator’s editorial comments, however. Anglo-Norman knights engage in behavior that

seems suspiciously similar to the actions of knights of literature. Consider, for example, the following passage:

“The brave baron Miles de Cogan/
 Was exasperated/
 That negotiations should be so prolonged/
 Between the king and all his men./
 Miles shouted out before anyone else:/
 ‘Barons! Knights! Cogan!’/
 Without either the king’s orders/
 Or the earl’s,/

The brave [*ber*] Miles attacked the city/
 [...]

Miles, who was so valiant [*valur*],/
 Won great fame that day.”⁸⁴

We ought to compare this passage with a fictitious 11th century poem, *The Song of Roland*, whose titular hero refuses to summon assistance before engaging with an enormous enemy army. De Cogan’s reckless charge has a much happier outcome than the reckless stand of the fictionalized Roland, but a similar impatience motivates both Miles and Roland. Neither knight is willing to wait for assistance from his lord. Both men covet the honor of winning a conflict unassisted.⁸⁵ Whether or not de Cogan consciously modeled his behavior upon the knights of literature, it seems clear that same chivalric

concerns that drove the plot of *The Song of Roland* also motivated de Cogan to make his charge.

Quotes provide the most compelling evidence that the Anglo-Norman knights in Ireland took seriously their chivalric duty to perform feats of *prouesse*. Maurice de Prendergast, for example, gives a speech to his followers wherein he reminds them that their reputations hinge upon their ability to perform in battle:

“For most of us bold [hardis] and warlike [combaturs] vassals/
 Are armed/
 [...]
 We shall go and strike bravely/
 And all together./
 Everyone will strike together,
 [...]
 For if they are defeated/
 We shall always be feared./
 Flight is now out of the question:/
 We either live or die here.”⁸⁶

Similarly, Raymond le Gros inspires his men to leave their defenses by saying, “It would be more honourable for you/ To be killed or captured out there than in here.”⁸⁷ The Anglo-Normans were, then, quite conscious about the cultural importance of *prouesse*

and honor when making decisions on the battlefield and when persuading their comrades to follow advice.

We should be careful not to take this stance for granted. Though soldiers of all ages must be brave, show fighting spirit, and follow some sort of honor system, the Anglo-Norman concept of *prouesse*, with its encouragement of spontaneous decisions, individual initiative, and untempered energy, would not be acceptable in all military cultures. Indeed, one imagines that if a 21st century U.S. soldier behaved in this manner, he would swiftly find himself court-martialed (if he managed to survive the enemy). That the invaders of Ireland were able to prevail says something about the military technology and organization of the 12th century, but even more about their cultural priorities.

Displays of *prouesse* placed knights in considerable personal danger, as the fate of the legendary Roland clearly showed. Nevertheless, the invaders bore the risks time-and-again because *prouesse* was so important to them, both in itself and in its ability to help them achieve other chivalric traits. One can see this in the request of William Marshal to King Richard, “To ask/ His brother to agree/ To hand over his land in Ireland,/ And this was a reasonable request/ Of his, in my [John the author’s] opinion,/ Since his ancestor had conquered that land.”⁸⁸ In other words, *prouesse* had legitimated the *franchise* of Strongbow and his heirs to the extent that they could make demands of kings. Below, we shall also see examples of how *prouesse* aided knights’ quests to display *largesse* and *courtesie*. It is small wonder, then, that literature almost depicts prowess as the goal of a knight’s life.⁸⁹

Largesse

One of the benefits *prouesse* gave to the Anglo-Normans was the fact that the resultant spoils of war made it possible for knights to display *largesse*.⁹⁰ *Largesse* meant a generous attitude, expressed through feats of giving. To display *largesse*, however, a knight first had to achieve a lavish lifestyle. Poverty was only acceptable amongst formerly wealthy knights who had impoverished themselves by enriching others.⁹¹ One can see the strains that the unfeeling demands of *largesse* placed upon the invaders of Ireland by looking at William Marshal's experience hosting the king:

“He [the king] arrived in Kilkenny with his army,
 Where he was given a most lavish reception,
 For I can assure you of this,
 That the whole army, no more nor less,
 Was that day lodged at the earl's expense,
 Nor was thought given for a single minute
 To setting a guard on the gate or forbidding entry.”⁹²

Of course, Marshal only had the means to display this *largesse* because he had inherited Strongbow's Irish conquests. Indeed, throughout the knightly class, warfare was the obvious way to gain the means necessary for *largesse*. We see this in *chansons de geste*, whose knightly characters are quite anxious to capture spoils of war. Successful characters then receive praise for their *largesse* after they generously split these spoils with their comrades.⁹³ Ireland offered the real-life Anglo-Normans similar opportunities to enrich themselves and their followers. A mere glance at the *Song of Dermot and the*

Earl's account of how Hugh de Lacy split vast tracts of “good and pleasant land,” “rich fief[s],” and towns amongst his followers encourages us to believe that he received an incredible amount of prestige for this *largesse*.⁹⁴ His followers, in turn, gained the means to perform further acts of *largesse* with the proceeds from their new holdings.

Underlying *largesse*, like many of the other chivalric traits, was the knightly desire to achieve *franchise*. *Largesse*, especially when distributing the spoils of war to one's followers, allowed knights to distinguish themselves from lower levels of society, where such *largesse* was impractical.⁹⁵ Furthermore, the trappings of courtly life could not exist without clients who depended upon their knightly patron's *largesse*.⁹⁶ Therefore, since *largesse* reinforced so much of a knight's chivalric identity, it provided powerful incentive to knights to seek out profitable conflicts. The connection between *prouesse* and *largesse* is particularly clear in a passage of *The Song of Dermot and the Earl*:

“Miles, who was so valiant [*valur*],/
 Won great fame that day,/
 [...]
 And the renowned barons/
 Found plenty of wealth [in the city].”⁹⁷

While greed is always present as a motivation for human conflict, the peculiar demands for *largesse* within chivalric culture (ironically) increased the desire for wealth amongst Anglo-Norman knights and made Ireland a tempting target.

Courtoisie

The value that the Anglo-Norman invaders placed upon *courtoisie*, the final chivalric trait this paper will examine, is quite clear in the poems. Both poems explicitly praise knights for possessing *courtoisie*, as *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal* does when describing William Marshal: “[...] The courtly [“*corteis*”], wise, / and loyal [“*plein de lealté*”, literally “full of loyalty”] man he was.”⁹⁸ Note that Marshal’s courtliness is placed alongside his loyalty. *Courtoisie* is, however, a more difficult concept to grasp than *loyauté* or, indeed, any of the other traits thus far examined (except, perhaps, for *franchise*). The word derives from the Vulgar Latin *cortis*, from the Latin *cohors* - “court of justice.”⁹⁹ According to Aldo Scaglione, *courtoisie* has ancient roots in classical, especially Stoic, ethical systems, which stressed prudence, fortitude, justice, and temperance. After these values became Christianized, they became part of a civic curial ethos, transmitted by courtiers and grafted onto the system of manners at court. Eventually, knights adopted these values, but they redefined them so that prudence encompassed knowing what to do and acting accordingly (sometimes cunningly), temperance became moderation from both excess and pride, fortitude involved valor, bravery, and adventurousness, and justice meant serving the weak and needy.¹⁰⁰ *Courtoisie*, it should be noted, only became important in chivalric literature after clerics became a fixed feature in knightly courts. Scaglione argues that chivalry itself – mixing, as it does, hard social realities, literary ideals, civic ethics and courtly manners - owed much to the education these clerics provided to knights.¹⁰¹

Anglo-Normans in Ireland turned to the practices of *courtoisie* to moderate disputes between themselves. When, for example, Maurice de Prendergast found himself accused of wrongdoing, he responded with proper courtly protocol:

“Then Maurice folded his glove/
 And gave it to his lord/
 To show that he would defend himself in court/
 Regarding any wrong he had done.”¹⁰²

The proper display of *courtoisie* could be absolutely crucial for Anglo-Normans who wished to avoid misunderstandings or undesirable wars. This was the case when William Marshal was held captive at King John’s court while a civil war raged in his lands in Ireland. King John tacitly supported the efforts of Marshal’s enemies, but Marshal avoided an open breach with the king (and the potentially fatal consequences of such a breach) by displaying proper *courtoisie*. When King John angrily announced that Marshal’s side had won a victory, Marshal responded:

“But not for a moment did I think, on the day/
 I left my land, that I had/
 An enemy who would wage war on me.’/
 After this, the King, previously ill-disposed towards him,
 Began to treat him in a friendly manner.”¹⁰³

The reason for King John's change in comportment was that Marshal had maintained a friendly manner in the face of provocation. This was in accordance with codes of conduct such as Daniel of Beccles's *Liber Urbani*, written during Henry II's reign. Beccles urged his readers to practice courtly restraints such as keeping their tempers in check, avoiding threats, not rising at threats, and keeping words cheerful and courteous.¹⁰⁴ In this example, then, the chivalric emphasis on *courtoisie* helped ameliorate conflict and heal divisions amongst the Anglo-Normans.

Before we leave off of *courtoisie*, we ought to briefly consider the related concept of courtly love. This topic is as fascinating as it is controversial. Since the days of C. S. Lewis, many scholars have identified a unique pattern of romantic relationships between knights and women in romances: adultery, secret correspondence, knightly devotion to the woman, and the woman's inheritance are all important components of this alleged pattern. The relationship of such a literary trope to reality is highly contentious and some scholars such as C. Stephen Jaeger see little evidence for the existence of such a "cult" at all.¹⁰⁵ While Constance Brittain Bouchard is also critical of the term "courtly love," she does assert that elements of what scholars call courtly love were real and made their way into noble society. For example, by the 12th century, noblemen received training in speaking to, or even flirting with, young noble women.¹⁰⁶

Before turning to what literature can teach us about the Anglo-Norman knighthood's relationships with women, a brief description of the status of women in the 12th century is necessary. Simplifying grossly a whole subfield of medieval history, the noblewomen in post-Conquest Britain appear to have had less political and economic power than their Anglo-Saxon precursors or, even, their contemporary counterparts in

France had. They could only inherit land if there was no male heir. A woman's husband, however, would automatically take control of that land. In addition, the higher the woman's rank, the more likely it was that her male relatives would choose a husband for her without her consultation.¹⁰⁷

Chivalric culture encouraged patriarchal and exploitative interactions between men of the knightly class and women. This comes across clearly in romances, whose plots frequently focus upon the love of a princess for the hero.¹⁰⁸ In Anglo-Norman romances in particular, the men's motives for pursuing relationships are cynically self-interested. Often the romance revolves around a daughter who is the sole heir to her father's kingdom.¹⁰⁹ The men seek to gain access to the woman's inheritance, making the women of the stories pawns in the machinations of their relatives and lovers. The men of the romances thus reduce women to little more than chattels, valued in terms of their usefulness to male characters.¹¹⁰

Our two poems indicate that this way of looking at women had pervaded its way into the chivalric culture of the invaders. *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* begins with a secret (and illicit) correspondence between Diarmait and the wife of Ua Ruairc. Giraldus Cambrensis describes this relationship in wholly negative terms, comparing it to other "catastrophes" ("*mala*", literally "evil") such as the downfall of Mark Antony and the Trojan War.¹¹¹ When we read *The Song of Dermot and the Earl's* version of the story, it is natural to share Giraldus's sense of outrage (though not his misogyny):

“King Diarmait of Leinster,/

Whom this lady loved so greatly,/

Made a fair show of loving her,/

But he did not really love her at all,/

And only wanted, as far as possible,/

To avenge, if he could, the great shame/
Which the men of Leth Cuinn had previously inflicted/
On the men of Leth Moga in his territory./

King Diarmait often sent word/
Both by letter and by messenger/
To the lady who loved him so much./

The king informed her repeatedly/
That indeed she truly was/
The person he loved most in the world,/

And he secretly asked her many times/
For her true love;/

And the lady sent word to him/
By private messenger/
That she would do everything she was asked/
By the king who was so highly esteemed;/

And she asked him furthermore,/

Both by word of mouth and by letter,/

To come for her in this way:/

With all the Leinster army.”¹¹²

The author of the poem, however, does not act as though Diarmait's conduct was improper. Diarmait receives coveted chivalric titles such as "*larges*" and "*curteis*" throughout the remainder of the poem, implying that his treatment of his lover was in accordance with the demands of *courtoisie*.¹¹³ While Diarmait is not an Anglo-Norman, his behavior was enough in accordance with the treatment of women in romance literature that the poem treats his party as the wronged one in the subsequent conflict, thus justifying the Anglo-Normans' decision to fight for him. His adulterous manipulation of a woman inspires no rebuke from the Anglo-Normans of the poem, as it does from his Irish countrymen.

Harkening back to the romances' concern with property, marriage alliances and inheritance are central to the treatment of women by the Anglo-Normans throughout Ireland. Strongbow's marriage, for example, is a direct property reward for a military victory:

“[...] He[, Strongbow, told Diarmait that he] had come to Waterford/
 And had won the city,
 [...]
 He [Diarmait] also brought his daughter/
 And gave her to the noble earl./
 The earl married her with due ceremony/
 [...]
 King Diarmait then gave Leinster/
 To the highly reputed earl/

Along with his daughter/
Whom he loved so much,”¹¹⁴

Knights are quite open in expressing their hopes for material gain from marriage alliances and quite vocal when such hopes are frustrated:

“This very worthy baron [Raymond le Gros]/
Asked the earl/
To give him his sister as a wife,/br/>As a loved one and mate,/br/>Along with the constabship of rich Leinster/
[...]
Then[, denied by Strongbow] Raymond departed/
With all his followers./br/>Full of resentment.”¹¹⁵

Occasionally a woman, such as Isabel, the wife of William Marshal, shows herself to be active in the poems, as when she helped organized her husband’s forces in Ireland. Her most prominent scene, however, is a quite passive one:

“The Marshal said: ‘My lords,/br/>Here you see the countess whom I have brought/
Here by the hand into your presence./

She is your lady by birth,
 The daughter of the earl who graciously,
 In his generosity, enfeffed you all,
 Once he had conquered the land.
 She stays behind here with you as a pregnant woman.
 [...]

I ask you all to give her unreservedly
 The protection she deserves by birthright,
 For she is your lady, as we well know;
 I have no claim to anything here save through her.”¹¹⁶

She is brought out as a prop to remind Marshal’s followers of their duty to him. Her status comes from her bloodline, not her actions, and Marshal exploits her pregnancy to make her a vulnerable figure, in special need of knightly protection. It is significant that Marshal gives this speech. It is even more significant that the speech works in keeping some (though, admittedly, not all) of his followers loyal to him during the civil war. Marshal and Diarmait alike successfully appropriated the attitude of romances, where love inspires prowess and prowess inspires love, for their own purposes.¹¹⁷

Women were essentially excluded from being practitioners of chivalric culture, however, as they were not allowed to partake in warfare and, thus, could not display *prouesse*.¹¹⁸ Indeed, so gendered was chivalric writing that “manliness” was sometimes used as a synonym for courage, and as an antonym for cowardice.¹¹⁹ Notably, when a woman (who, also notably, is mourning her slain lover) performs acts of violence in *The*

Song of Dermot and the Earl, it is a servant who executes prisoners for the Anglo-Normans. They employ her explicitly, “To shame the Irish.”¹²⁰ This violence does not threaten the male culture of the Anglo-Norman invaders because it is totally divorced from chivalry: its practitioner lacks *franchise*, she faces no dangers, and she is thus unable to gain *prouesse*.

Analysis and Conclusions

“What, then, is chivalry?/
 Such a difficult, tough,
 And very costly thing to learn/
 That no coward ventures to take it on./
 Is every knight really such?/
 Not at all, for .../
 There are many who do nothing with their arms,
 But that does not prevent them from boasting./
 Any man seeking to achieve high honour/
 Must first see to it/
 That he has been well schooled.”¹²¹

This quote is from *L’Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal*. John, the author, goes on to speak about the Battle of Lincoln as a school of chivalry for knights. Though this passage of the poem is not concerned with Ireland, the question it raises is important for our understanding of the Anglo-Norman takeover of that island. Constance Brittain Bouchard

has criticized scholarly discussions of chivalry, saying “It seems clear[...] not only that there was no “real” code of behavior to which all knight and nobles adhered but also that there was no single “ideal” of chivalry.[...] Even if knights and nobles had wanted to behave perfectly chivalrously on all occasions, there was no agreed-upon standard for such behavior.”¹²² I acknowledge her point, but reject her nihilism. It is true that the model of chivalry I have used here, taken from Maurice Keen, is somewhat artificial. It groups together complicated concepts gleaned from a plethora of sources, over stretches of time and geography. Nevertheless, simplifications and generalizations are a necessary evil in any kind of cultural history. It is actually somewhat surprising how often our abstracted traits of *franchise*, *loyauté*, *prouesse*, *largesse*, and *courtoisie* do come up unambiguously in both *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* and *L’Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal*. The fact that two poems contain so much evidence proves their usefulness as sources. Certain passages of their passages even go so far as to group multiple chivalric traits of into the description of one knight:

“This man [Strongbow]/ was a brave earl,
 Courtly [*curteis*], generous [*larges*], and liberal [*despendant*].”¹²³

Keen’s five abstracted traits of chivalry are, therefore, not mere scholarly fancy. Knights self-consciously sought to embody these traits, which are linked together since there is significant overlap between each trait. *Loyauté* sometimes demanded *prouesse*. *Franchise* went hand in hand with *courtoisie*. *Largesse* reinforced *loyauté*. These permutations could go on to take up considerable space: suffice it to say that individual

chivalric traits were not merely isolated tropes taken from literature – rather, they fit together to steer knights into a coherent and recognizable lifestyle.

As for what these chivalric traits meant for the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland, it is clear that chivalry spread violent conquest and upheaval over the island. True, the precepts of *courtoisie* could occasionally restrain dangerous rivalries such as that between William Marshal and King John but, overall, restraint was the junior partner to ambition. *Franchise* meant that Anglo-Norman knights needed wealth and titles to maintain their (recently-acquired) position in the noble class, especially if they did not stand to inherit these from their fathers. The invaders of Ireland found that warfare was a straightforward way to solve this problem. *Largesse* similarly required wealth and similarly encouraged Anglo-Normans to resort to conquest and pillaging. *Prouesse* needed a violent outlet, so its effect of encouraging violence and high-risk, high-reward battlefield tactics should come as no surprise. The use of *courtoisie*, generally a restraining force, was somewhat surprising, as leaders such as William Marshal used the knightly urge to protect women as a literal call to the banners. *Loyauté* dragged subordinates into the conflicts of their lords, expanding the scale of conflict.

None of these observations, I should note, necessarily contradict earlier scholars' broad claims about why the Anglo-Normans invaded Ireland. Many have recognized that the desire for land and wealth, for example, was an important motivation for the Anglo-Normans. This analysis from the perspective of chivalry does not so much take away from those explanations as it adds to them by explaining *why* such things as land and wealth mattered for the men who invaded Ireland. It has also helped us to understand the links between the Anglo-Norman's initial urge to invade, their conduct during the

invasion, and their subsequent choices while ruling in Ireland. None of the knights' choices make any particular amount of sense unless we understand the heroes they admired, the stresses in their lives, and the types of men they aspired to be.

Perhaps the most significant fact about chivalric culture for Ireland was that it provided little guidance for peacetime behavior. John, the author, asked what chivalry was and he answered entirely in terms of battle. The Anglo-Norman knights seem to have put little social value upon peaceful rule. Both of our poems highlight acts of chivalry in warfare, but they do not tell us how the Anglo-Normans treated the vanquished. Indeed, *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal* glosses over everything that happened in Ireland until the outbreak of civil war. Not only had the Anglo-Normans' obsession over warfare helped spark a second conflict in Ireland, then, it had left them too bored with peace to even read about it in Marshal's biography. This disinterest in Ireland when things were peaceful shows up in the Marshal's tardiness in visiting his extensive holdings:

“[...] The Marshal sought leave/
 To go and visit his fine, extensive holdings/
 In Ireland;/
 He had held land there for a very long time/
 But he had never seen it.”¹²⁴

It might be going too far to speculate that Irish antagonism towards the English proceeded from the chivalric disinterest of the Anglo-Norman invaders towards the lives of their Irish subjects, but it boded poorly for the future. Marshal's epitaph, as recorded

by Matthew Paris, read: “I am he who was a Saturn to Ireland.” Paris explains that this, in other words, meant that his legacy was that of a “devastating conquistador” of Ireland.¹²⁵

This epitaph is fitting, not just for Marshal, but for all the Anglo-Norman invaders: they came as Titans, determined to rule the universe but, in the end, they only set the stage for the children of their conflict to rise against them.

¹ For a brief summary of Ireland’s pre-invasion politics, see James Lydon, “Ireland: Politics, Government, and Law,” in *A Companion to Britain in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. S. H. Rigby (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 336.

² This sentiment can be found in, amongst other works, John Gillingham, “Images of Ireland: 1170-1600: The Origins of English Imperialism,” *History Today* 37, no. 2 (1987): 16-22.

³ For a good example of a specific noble family with holdings in England, Wales, Normandy, and Ireland, see Colin Veach, *Lordship in Four Realms: The Lacy Family, 1166-1241* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014).

⁴ See Marie Therese Flanagan, “Anglo-Norman Invasion,” in *Medieval Ireland: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Sean Duffy (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 17-19 for a brief discussion of the controversial term “Anglo-Norman.”

⁵ For a basic overview of the invasion, see *Ibid.*

⁶ The historiography on this topic is vast. Some representative examples will suffice for our purposes here: For various economic interpretations of the invasion, consult Benjamin Hudson, *Irish Sea Studies, 900-1200* (Cornwall: Four Courts Press, 2006), *The Manor in Medieval and Early Modern Ireland*, ed. James Lyttleton and Tadhg O’Keeffe (Cornwall: Four Courts Press, 2005), Steve Flanders *De Courcy: Anglo-Normans in Ireland, England, and France in the eleventh and twelfth centuries* (Chippenham: Four Courts Press, 2008), 134-137, Linda Doran, “Lords of the River Valleys: Economic and Military Lordship in the Carlow Corridor, c. 1200-1350: European Model in an Irish Context,” in *Lordship in Medieval Ireland: Image and Reality*, eds. Linda Doran and James Lyttleton (Cornwall: Four Courts Press, 2007), 99-101, and Brian Graham, “Ireland: Economy and Society,” in *A Companion to Britain in*

the Later Middle Ages, 149-151. For interpretations that place the invasion within the broader political context of the Angevin Empire, see Brendan Smith, *Colonisation and Conquest in Medieval Ireland: The English in Louth, 1170-1330*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 28-52, Sean Duffy, "Henry II and England's Insular Neighbours," in *Henry II: New Interpretations*, eds. Christopher Harper-Bill and Nicholas Vincent (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007), 129-154, and W. L. Warren *Henry II* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), 187-206. For the sometimes heated debate over the role Church politics played in the invasion, see Warren, *Henry II*, 187-206, Sean Duffy, "The British Perspective," in *A Companion to Britain in the Later Middle Ages*, 165-183, Lydon, "Ireland: Politics, Government and Law," in *A Companion to Britain in the Later Middle Ages*, 335-357, Henry A. Jefferies, "Ireland: Religion and Piety," in *A Companion to Britain in the Later Middle Ages*, 430-449, Marcus Bull "Criticism of Henry II's expedition to Ireland in William of Canterbury's miracles of St Thomas Becket," *Journal of Medieval History* 33 (2007): 107-129, and Anne J. Duggan "The Making of a Myth: Geraldus Cambrensis, *Laudabiliter*, and Henry II's Lordship of Ireland," *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 4, no. 3 (2007): 107-169. For the impact of concepts of civilization, ethnic "othering," Anglo-centrism, and xenophobia, see R. R. Davies, *Domination and Conquest: The Experience of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales 1100-1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), Rhonda Knight "Werewolves, Monsters, and Miracles: Representing Colonial Fantasies in Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hibernica*," in *Studies in Iconography* (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 2001), 55-87, and Duffy "The British Perspective," in *A Companion to Britain in the Later Middle Ages*.

⁷ Davies, *Domination and Conquest*, 27-28.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁹ Evelyn Mullally, "Introduction," in *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland (La Geste Des Engleis En Yrlande): A New Edition of the Chronicle Formerly Known as The Song of Dermot and the Earl*, ed. Evelyn Mullally (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), 37.

¹⁰ A. J. Holden, "Textual Introduction," in *History of William Marshal, Volume III*, trans. S. Gregory, ed. A.J. Holden (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 2004), 3-4.

¹¹ *History of William Marshal, Volumes I-III*, trans. S. Gregory, ed. A.J. Holden (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 2004).

¹² *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland (La Geste Des Engleis En Yrlande): A New Edition of the Chronicle Formerly Known as The Song of Dermot and the Earl*, ed. Evelyn Mullally (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002).

¹³ *The Song of Dermot and the Earl*, trans. and ed. Goddard Henry Orphen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892)

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¹⁴ An example of a recent work to use Orphen's title is Ruth J. Dean, *Anglo-Norman Literature: A Guide to Texts and Manuscripts* (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1999), 37.

¹⁵ For an overview of chivalry and the debate see the introduction to Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), especially 3-5.

¹⁶ Lister M. Matheson, "Vernacular Chronicles and Narrative Sources of History in Medieval England," in *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources: Using Historical*

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¹⁷ Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), 2.

¹⁸ See Ruth J. Dean, *Anglo-Norman Literature: A Guide to Texts and Manuscripts* (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1999), 37 and 39.

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²⁰ *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland*, 90.

²¹ See Deans, *Anglo-Norman Literature*, 88-102.

²² Janet Shirley, "Introduction," in *The Song of the Cathar Wars: A History of the Albigensian Crusades* (Aldershot, Burlington, Singapore, and Sydney: Ashgate, 2000), 2.

²³ Keen, *Chivalry*, 113-114.

²⁴ Mullally, "Introduction," 9.

²⁵ David Crouch, *William Marshal: Knighthood, War and Chivalry, 1147-1219* (London: Longman, 1990), 9-11.

²⁶ Larry D. Benson, "The Tournament in the Romances of Chrétien de Troyes & *L'Histoire de Guillaume Le Maréchal*," in *Chivalric Literature: Essays on Relations Between Literature & Life in the Later Middle Ages*, eds. Larry D. Benson and John Leyerle (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1980), 19-20.

²⁷ Crouch, *William Marshal*, 191.

²⁸ John Leyerle, "Conclusion: The Major Themes of *Chivalric Literature*," in *Chivalric Literature*, 131-133.

²⁹ *History of William Marshal, Volume II*, trans. S. Gregory, ed. A.J. Holden (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 2004), 58-61.

³⁰ Chrétien de Troyes, "Cligés," in *Arthurian Romances*, trans. D. D. R. Owen (London: Everyman, 1991), 116-117.

³¹ Crouch, *William Marshal*, 4.

³² *Deeds of the Normans in Ireland*, 58-63

³³ Judith Weiss, "Introduction," in *The Birth of Romance in England: Four Twelfth-Century Romances in the French of England*, trans. Judith Weiss (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2009), 20.

³⁴ Giraldus Cambrensis, *Expugnatio Hibernica: The Conquest of Ireland*, trans. and ed. A. B. Scott and F. X Martin (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1978), 25.

³⁵ *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland*, 53.

³⁶ *The Annals of Clonmacnoise: Being Annals of Ireland from the Earliest Period to A.D. 1408*, trans. Conell Mageoghagan, ed. Denis Murphy (Dublin: University Press for the Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, 1896), 206-207. *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland*, 56-57.

³⁷ *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland*, 58.

³⁸ Holden, "Textual Introduction," 6-9.

³⁹ Nigel Saul, *Chivalry in Medieval England* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011), 3-4.

⁴⁰ Constance Brittain Bouchard, *Strong of Body, Brave & Noble: Chivalry & Society in Medieval France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), 113-115.

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- ⁴¹ Saul, *Chivalry in Medieval England*, 14.
- ⁴² *Ibid*, 7.
- ⁴³ Keen, *Chivalry*.
- ⁴⁴ For an example of an author who cited Keen within the last five years, see David Crouch, *The English Aristocracy, 1070-1272: A Social Transformation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 293.
- ⁴⁵ Aldo Scaglione, *Knights at Court: Courtliness, Chivalry, & Courtesy from Ottonian Germany to the Italian Renaissance* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), 6. Bouchard, *Strong of Body, Brave & Noble*, 113.
- ⁴⁶ Keen, *Chivalry*, 16.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 2.
- ⁴⁸ Bouchard, *Strong of Body, Brave & Noble*, 1-10.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 10-13, 23-25.
- ⁵⁰ Saul, *Chivalry in Medieval England*, 17-18.
- ⁵¹ Crouch, *The English Aristocracy, 1070-1272*, 52-53.
- ⁵² See, for example, *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland*, 70.
- ⁵³ See, for example, *Ibid*, 131.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 129.
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- ⁵⁶ *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland*, 139.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 56.
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- ⁶³ Saul, *Chivalry in Medieval England*, 25-27.
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- ⁷¹ *Ibid*, 102-104.
- ⁷² *History of William Marshal, Volume II*, 173.
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- ⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 98.
- ⁷⁵ *History of William Marshal, Volume II*, 200-201.
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- ⁷⁷ Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, 185.
- ⁷⁸ Saul, *Chivalry in Medieval England*, 178. Scaglione, *Knights at Court*, 66. Crouch, *William Marshal*, 186-190.

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- ⁷⁹ Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, 130, 135.
- ⁸⁰ Saul, *Chivalry in Medieval England*, 183-185. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, 139.
- ⁸¹ Saul, *Chivalry in Medieval England*, 187.
- ⁸² *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland*, 67.
- ⁸³ *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland*, 104; For wounds as a sign of honor, see Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, 151.
- ⁸⁴ *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland*, 98.
- ⁸⁵ See *The Song of Roland*, trans. W. S. Merwin (New York: Modern Library, 2001).
- ⁸⁶ *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland*, 70.
- ⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 90.
- ⁸⁸ *History of William Marshal, Volume II*, 486-487.
- ⁸⁹ Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, 133-135.
- ⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 196-198.
- ⁹¹ Keen, *Chivalry*, 154-155.
- ⁹² *History of William Marshal, Volume II*, 214-215.
- ⁹³ Keen, *Chivalry*, 26.
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- ¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 55.
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- ¹⁰⁴ Saul, *Chivalry in Medieval England*, 191.
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¹¹⁴ Ibid, 92.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 125-126.

¹¹⁶ *History of William Marshal, Volume II*, 176-179.

¹¹⁷ For the romances, prowess, and love, see Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, 220-222.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 219-220.

¹¹⁹ Saul, *Chivalry in Medieval England*, 185.

¹²⁰ *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland*, 91.

¹²¹ *History of William Marshal, Volume II*, 344-345.

¹²² Bouchard, *Strong of Body, Brave & Noble*, 113.

¹²³ *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland*, 61.

¹²⁴ *History of William Marshal, Volume II*, 166-167.

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