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# Knightly Bird Vows: A Case Study in Late Medieval Courtly Culture

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Knightly Bird Vows: A Case Study  
in Late Medieval Courtly Culture

Liel Boyce

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

### Knightly Bird Vows: A Case Study in Late Medieval Courtly Culture

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In the late Middle Ages, there was a series of instances wherein knights vowed upon birds. Two of these, the first and the last, are historical events: The Feast of the Swans with Edward I in England on 22 May 1306 and the Feast of the Pheasant with Philip the Good in the duchy of Burgundy on 17 February 1454. Edward I held the Feast of the Swans as part of his son's dubbing ceremony, including the entire court taking vows on two swans. The Feast of the Pheasant was an elaborate banquet that Philip the Good used to gather support for a crusade. The other three are literary texts: the *Voeux du paon*, the *Voeux de l'épervier*, and the *Voeux du héron*. The *Voeux du Paon* contains an account of a group of nobility connected to Alexander the Great at a truce banquet. One of the prisoners accidentally kills a lady's peacock and the group decides to take vows on it before recommencing battle. The *Voeux de l'épervier* concerns Henry VII of Luxembourg en route to Italy to claim the title of Holy Roman Emperor. One of his knights accidentally kills a sparrowhawk and they decide, as a court, to take vows on it. Lastly, the *Voeux du héron* depicts Robert d'Artois inciting Edward III to initiate the Hundred Years' War over a heron. Each of these instances creates a sub-set, the bird vow cycle, within medieval vowing tradition.

The origin of the bird vow cycle lies within that vowing tradition. John L. Grigsby has declared these instances as a crystallization of the *gab* convention of medieval literature. However, Grigsby ignored the Feast of the Swans and the Feast of the Pheasant since he was concentrated on defining a literary genre. This thesis attempts to show the bird vow cycle as connected to this literary tradition, but also a crystallization of the courtly culture that had developed in the late Middle Ages. It also attempts to show the origins of this cycle—it not only came out of a vowing tradition, but also is tied to King Arthur traditions. The culture of the late Middle Ages was nostalgic and looking back towards an idealistic version of the past—whether in legends like Arthur or historical figures like Alexander. Thus, the knightly bird vow cycle was a particular example of that fantasy in their culture.

In conclusion, this thesis not only gathers together what literature there is on the knightly bird vow cycle, but it places it within a literary and historical context. The knightly bird vow cycle would not have been possible without a culture obsessed with fantasy and idealistic courtly culture.

Keywords: [Voeux du paon, Voeux de l'épervier, Voeux du héron, Feast of the Swans, Feast of the Pheasant, Knightly Bird Vow]

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## Knighly Vows on Birds: an Introduction

In the late Middle Ages, there was a series of curious events wherein a group of knights would take vows on birds. Typically, the knights would be gathered in a banquet hall. The vowing ceremony always pertained to a battle, either one already impending or one being planned. The five main instances are the Feast of the Swans, the *Voeux du Paon*, the *Voeux de l'épervier*, the *Voeux du héron* and the Feast of the Pheasant. The Swans and the Pheasant were each historical instances. The *Paon*, *Épervier*, and *Héron* were literary texts placed in historical contexts. They make up, collectively, the knightly bird vow cycle.

It is not totally clear where the knightly bird vow comes from. It has clear roots in both medieval vowing tradition and knightly literature, however. This vowing tradition in turn takes its roots in Norse sagas. The Norse sagas depict a warrior culture wherein vowing was somewhat commonplace. These vows never took place over birds, however. Instead, these Norse vows were often taken in the middle of a battle. If a vow was taken over food or an animal, it was mostly likely a boar. These Norse vows often concerned battles, but there were also commonly vows about religion or marriage. For instance, in *Flores och Blanzeflor*, the two main characters vow never to be parted. In the *Eriks Saga Viðforia*, Eiríkr, the son of the king of Norway, makes a vow on Christmas to find the Norse mythical paradise (Odiins akr). He eventually converts to Christianity after a trip to Constantinople and learns that this paradise is identical to Christian earthly paradise<sup>1</sup>. The knightly bird vows clearly descend from the Norse saga vowing tradition, though they do not completely imitate the scenarios or the vowing rituals.

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<sup>1</sup> These stories, as well as other information on the Norse Sagas, were taken from *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopaedia*. Ed. Phillip Pulsiano, Kirsten Wolf, et al. New York: Garland, 1993. Since an in-depth look into Norse Sagas does not seem relevant to the rest of this thesis, a more-indepth research was not included.

The knightly bird vow cycle came out of the Norse saga tradition at least in part through a literary genre that John L. Grigsby calls the *gab*. The *gab* tradition is one of boasting, bragging and vowing in French literature. The *gab* takes a significant portion of its inspiration from the Norse sagas, and Grigsby even includes some Norse texts in his definition of the genre. In fact, the Norse sagas and French literature were tied together and drew inspiration one from the other. There is a series of Norse sagas that are basically translations of French texts. The *gab* genre includes a lot of the same features that are found in the knightly bird vow cycle—indeed, the knightly bird vow cycle can be considered as a sub-set within that genre (Grigsby considers it the crystallization of the *gab* genre, in fact). The *gab* tradition revolves around a group of knights or warriors who boast and brag at some kind of gathering—often involving food or alcohol—after which the text often follows through to the action portion wherein the characters complete or fail their vows. Understanding the *gab* tradition sheds light on the knightly bird vow cycle, and understanding one leads to a greater understanding of the other.

The knightly bird vow cycle also takes its literary roots from another French (as well as English and German) literary tradition—that of King Arthur. The Arthurian tales and legends often include scenes that are quite reminiscent of the bird vow texts. In fact, the Feast of the Swans is most often attributed to Edward I's love of Arthurian legends. The Chrétien de Troyes texts often include scenes with birds, such as the battle with the sparrow hawk in *Erec et Enide*, or the Swan Knight in *Perceval*. The Arthurian legends were very popular in the late Middle Ages, inspiring round tables and tournaments, as well as the knightly bird vow cycle. This is explored in more depth later, in the last chapter of this thesis. The Arthurian legends are a large part of the inspiration behind the knightly bird vow cycle.

This thesis covers the knightly bird vow cycle, revealing each text on its own as well as comparing them with each other. A short introduction to the Feast of the Swans follows in this section. Following, the next four chapters cover each of the other four knightly bird vow instances, giving a summary and short interpretations. The last chapter compares each instance with each other and explores the origins and cultural significance of the cycle. While much of the literature on the knightly bird vow cycle refers to a lot of what is presented in this thesis, much of the research is difficult to find, or left with holes in the arguments. In particular, Grigsby covers the cycle most in depth of the scholarship I have found, but he does not consider the knightly bird vow cycle as its own literary genre. For Grigsby, the knightly bird vow cycle was simply the final and most crystallized form of the *gab* genre. This is in part because Grigsby was most concerned with the literary significance—he was concerned with defining a new literary genre—and not with the historical cultural significance at large. Indeed, Grigsby more or less ignores the Feast of the Swans and the Feast of the Pheasant for this reason (they are not literary works). This thesis not only brings together some of that literature and research into one place, but adds to the discussion of the cultural interaction and significance of the knightly bird vow cycle. It is a cultural phenomenon that reflects the late medieval mindset stuck in a fantasy world.

On Whit Sunday, 22 May 1306, Edward I held a great ceremony to bestow knighthood on his son and heir, the future Edward II. Edward I decided to dub his son while staying in Winchester. He heard the news of the murder of the Red Comyn, and with his failing health he was unsure he could exact vengeance against the Bruce. Thus, he decided to knight his son and immediately ordered preparations for the ceremony. He also issued that “all persons of suitable

position who wished to be knighted at the same time were told to make proper application” (Loomis, 171).

At the ceremony, Edward I dubbed his son (Edward II, the Prince of Wales) and invested him with the Duchy of Aquitaine. Then Edward dubbed the rest of the candidates, who had kept a traditional vigil the night before in the Temple church. After the dubbing service finished, a banquet closed the ceremony—as was tradition. However, the banquet itself created a new tradition when two swans were brought out covered in a network of gold and little bells. Edward I vowed—by the God of Heaven and the swans—that he would avenge the Comyn’s death and the treason of the Scots in life or death. He then called upon his nobles to swear that, if he died, they would carry his body with the army and not bury it until vengeance was exacted (Loomis, 171). Additionally, Edward vowed that he would head straight to the Holy Land once vengeance was complete. Then, Edward II vowed that he would not sleep two nights in the same place until the Scots had been defeated. The rest of the knights followed suit. “The feast was evidently magnificent, with a multitude of minstrels paid to perform, and each knight uttering his vow over two specially prepared golden swans. These, it seems, were an innovation, but one that set a fashion for swearing oaths on birds for the next two centuries”<sup>2</sup> (Morris, 355).

A century and a half later, Philip the Good, the Duke of Burgundy, held another feast: The Feast of the Pheasant. This feast was primarily an elaborate propaganda piece to recruit an army for Philip’s crusading desires. At the end of this ceremony, Philip had an ornately dressed

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<sup>2</sup> Additionally, L. Graeme Ritchie proposed his own theory on the origin of the bird vow cycle. He thought that “vowing to a bird of mystic or heraldic significance to perform some high deed became a knightly custom in the early fourteenth century,” also adding that it has “roots in human nature.” He ties the trend to Norse *heistrenging* as well as the *Voyage de Charlemagne*, both of which are part of a knightly vowing tradition in medieval literature. For more on this subject, see L. Graeme Ritchie, ed. *Les Voeux du Paon* in *The Buik of Alexander by John Barbour*, l:xxxix, as well as John L. Grigsby’s *The Gab as Latent Genre in Medieval Literature*.

pheasant brought out, after which he took a vow to go on a crusade. More than one hundred vows were collected afterward, both at the feast that day and later throughout Philip's duchy. This Burgundian imitation of an English ceremony stands at the end of a series of similar imitations, all of which together comprise the knightly bird vow cycle.

The cycle of knightly bird vows begins with the Feast of the Swans, but is followed by a series of literary occurrences and ends with the Feast of the Pheasant. The first imitation is the *Voeux du Paon*. The *Voeux du Paon* follows a group of knights associated with Alexander the Great who, at the center of the story, take vows upon a peacock. Two more literary instances follow. The *Voeux de l'Épervier* is a short text featuring Henry VII of Luxembourg and his court who take vows upon a sparrowhawk before his venture to Rome. The third instance is that of the *Voeux du Héron*, wherein Robert d'Artois incites the Hundred Years' War by instigating Edward III's court to vow on a heron and invade France to claim its throne. The last instance is not literary, but an historical banquet thrown by Philip the Good. The Feast of the Pheasant is a fitting end for this cycle, which places courtly culture in the realm of fantasy and spectacle. The court at Burgundy exemplified the medieval imagination and obsession with fantasy, corresponding perfectly with the world created in the cycle where knights vow upon birds before battle.

All together, the series of knightly bird vows create a cycle that shows the imitation and ritual so characteristic of the late middle ages. Indeed, the Feast of the Swans initiated the knightly bird vow cycle, followed by the *Voeux du Paon*, the *Voeux de l'Épervier*, the *Voeux du Héron*, and ending with the Feast of the Pheasant in Philip the Good's court. Their intertextuality and interconnectedness is complicated by the *Voeux du Paon* replacing the Feast of the Swans as the credited originator for the cycle. The rest of the knightly bird vow cycle

attribute their origins to the *Voeux du Paon* rather than the Feast of the Swans, which is curious since the Feast of the Swans, chronologically, is the first incident. This paper will explore the connections between each event in order to create a better picture of the origins of the cycle.

## Les Voeux du Paon

The *Voeux du Paon* was written, at the latest, in 1313. It is comprised of 8500 lines and survives in thirty-four manuscripts, five fragments as well as a fifteenth-century prose adaptation, and in two modern transcriptions. It has been translated into Dutch, Scottish, and possibly Spanish (Barbour, introduction). There are two parts to the poem itself: the prelude to the vows, and then the vows and their completion. Two sequels followed later: *Restor du Paon* was completed before 1338; it details the accomplishment of the vow to forge a golden statue of the peacock, as well as vows upon the new image. *Parfait du Paon*, written in 1340, has only 2 manuscripts, though it is missing 100 verses at the end of one, and contains a different completion to *Voeux du Paon* as the characters take vows as prisoners (Grigsby, *Heron*, introduction). There are two editions of the manuscript that are prepared: R. L. Graeme Ritchie's *Buik of Alexander* and Camillus Casey's 2<sup>nd</sup> edition for his Columbia University doctoral dissertation in 1956. This paper takes its research from Ritchie's version.

There are two parts to the poem. The first is from lines 1-3811, and can be considered a sort of prelude, tying the text into the pre-existing Alexander canon. It also creates the context in which the vowing session will take place. The action begins in the second part of the poem (lines 3812-8784). The story essentially revolves around Cassamus, though it is complicated with the intrigues of battle and love. It begins with Alexander having defeated the Duke Melcis, and he is marching back to Tarsus with his troops. He stops by a river on his way and gives thanks to the gods that all has been given to him, save Babylon. An old man in mourning also shows up and replies that he is going to the temple of Marcus to mourn for Gadifer of Larris, his brother and a knight second only to Alexander who was recently slain by the emperor's troops. Alexander says that he, too, mourns for Gadifer—as well as his own soldiers who died in battle.

The old man is Cassamus of Larris, and when he realizes that this man is Alexander, he first responds with anger but then declares that he wants vengeance on Emenidus—at whose hands Gadifer was slain.

Alexander replies that he should make peace with both liegelord and liegeman in battle, and Cassamus decides to forgive Alexander and Emenidus, letting go of his vengeance.

Cassamus then explains that Gadifer left two sons and a daughter: Gadifer of Epheson, Betis and Fesonas. Clarus, the king of the Inds, wants to dispossess the sons and wed the daughter to gain Gadifer's inheritance. Alexander offers his help in the matter, and Cassamus returns to Epheson. On the way, he learns that Clarus is already besieging Epheson, and he gathers knights at Epheson and goes to battle. In this battle, Cassiel the Baudrain—on Clarus' side, an Indian—boasts that he will take the city and the damsel Edeas. Edeas watches the battle from the sidelines and prays for the Baudrain to be taken captive. The Baudrain is indeed taken captive and Cassamus presents him to Edeas.

On Clarus' side, only his son Porrus—the bravest but not the most handsome of his sons—comes to fight with him. Cassamus returns to Alexander's camp, where five of Alexander's soldiers—Aristé, Perdicas, Caulus, Lyoné and Floridas-- join Alexander to come to Epheson's aid. Meanwhile, in the *Chambre de Vénus*, the court at Epheson and the Baudrain participate in games. Edeas and the Baudrain fall in love, and when Cassamus returns, he releases Edeas from a vow he made her take to always obey him. Then, another battle ensues. This time, Porrus is taken prisoner, and as Fesonas watches the battle, she falls in love with his bravery. Betis, from the court of Epheson, is taken prisoner by the Indians. A four-day truce is called, a feast is declared, and the Indians sit to dine with Betis.

Within Epheson, the court and the two Indian prisoners gather together in the banqueting hall. In the courtyard on his way, Porrus sees a peacock strutting about and decides to shoot it with a bow he has borrowed from a varlet. Fesonas reproaches Porrus, and Porrus responds by proffering his loyal service to her. Cassamus declares that, as is custom in the land, the peacock should be roasted and the court should take vows on it. The peacock is sent to the kitchens to be prepared for the feast. At the banquet, Porrus and Fesonas sit next to each other.

This leaves the reader of the *Voeux du Paon* with a lot of names and allegiances to remember. The following chart clarifies the characters up to this point:

<b>Greece</b>	<b>Epheson</b>	<b>Ind</b>
Alexander the Great	Cassamus	Clarus
Aristé	Gadifer of Epheson	Cassiel the Baudrain (prisoner)
Perdicas	Fesonas	Porrus (prisoner)
Caulus	Betis (prisoner)	
Lyoné	Edeas	
Floridas	Elyos	
	Ydorus	

Twelve of these characters will vow; Clarus, Alexander, and Betis are not present at the banquet and Elyos (a damsel in Gadifer's house) presents the participants with the peacock, forgoing her own vow. The vows commence with Cassamus, who ensures that the peacock is roasted and dressed. Elyos presents the dressed peacock to the knights and ladies and asks each to pronounce a vow upon it. She introduces the peacock to the banquet along with a minstrel and musicians who create such a show as to make Cassamus fall on his knees and declare, "C'est la viande as preux, a ceulz qui ont amie!" (Barbour, 3940).<sup>3</sup> Then, Elyos confronts first Cassamus, declaring that he is the oldest and thus she commands him to vow. His vow is to put Clarus back on his horse if he is ever dismounted during battle. Although it is odd to vow to help the enemy, Cassamus explains that he would do this favor for the love of Porrus, Clarus' son.

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<sup>3</sup> "It's the meat of the brave, to those who have lovers!"

Elyos next singles out Aristé, a knight known for wisdom, valiance and courtesy. She asks him to promise to the peacock its use and rights (Barbour, 3970).<sup>4</sup> Aristé vows in turn to serve Fezonas until her wrongs are made right. Elyos responds by proclaiming that Aristé's body should be blessed by his vow. Then she turns to Perdicas, complimenting him by noting his high station ("vous qui estes de la gent si prisie, de vaillance et d'onnour et de grant signorie...")(Barbour, 1987-8)<sup>5</sup>, and asks him to give the peacock the right of vowing next. Perdicas' vow is that he would dismount in battle and stand among the footmen. This vow elicits Cassamus to declare that Perdicas' vow proves that he is no coward.

Elyos next turns to Fesonas, who is the first woman to vow. Her vow is to would marry whomever Alexander the Great chooses for her to wed, and none else. Elyos next stops in front of Porrus, asking him to pay the peacock the right of adventure. Porrus initially responds that he cannot make a vow since he is a prisoner of Epheson. However, Floridas convinces him to vow, and Porrus finally vows that he will take Emenidus' horse in battle. This prompts Lyoné to interrupt the procession of vows, responding that he will pay fifty times the horse's weight in battle if Porrus brings it to market after capturing it.

Edea is next to be visited by Elyos. She vows to restore the peacock in gold after the battles are over, to remind everyone of the feast upon the peacock that day. Elyos then moves to the knight on Edea's left, the Baudrain, and asks him to pay the peacock the right of vowing. Baudrain vows that he will take Alexander's sword from his own hands in battle. This provokes Caulus to vow that he will take the Baudrain's helmet if he accomplishes his vow. Ydorus is then moved to vow that she will remain loyal to her lover, Betis, whom she has deemed brave.

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<sup>4</sup> "Prometés au pauon son usage et ses droits!"

<sup>5</sup> "You who are so liked among people, valiant, honorable and of grand seigniory."

Elyos then proceeds to Lyoné, asking him to vow next. He vows that, after they have finished eating at the banquet, he will go to Clarus' tent and demand to joust the king's oldest son. Floridas vows next, still reacting to the Baudrain's vow, and he in turn vows that, if the Baudrain takes Alexander's sword, he will immediately capture him and take him to Alexander. Gadifer vows last, promising that he will smite down Clarus' standard in battle.

After the vows, Gadifer, Ydorus, Edea and Elyos decide to present the peacock to the bravest knight in the room. They kneel and present the peacock to each knight in turn, until finally Aristé receives the peacock, receiving as well the title of bravest of the brave knights present. They feast upon the peacock, and as soon as they finish, Lyoné arises to fulfill his vow and heads out to Clarus' tent. The course of the rest of the text follows more battle scenes, with each participant fulfilling their vow (except Edea, whose vow will be accomplished in a later text, the *Restor du Paon*).

The vows, for clarity, have been represented in the following chart:

<b>Person Vowing</b>	<b>Allegiance</b>	<b>Vow</b>
1. Cassamus	Epheson	Put Clarus back on horse
2. Aristé	Greece	Serve Fesonas in battle
3. Perdicas	Greece	Fight among footmen
4. Fesonas	Epheson	Marry whom Alexander says
5. Porrus	Ind	Joust Emenidon and take his horse
6. Edea	Epheson	Restore peacock in gold
7. The Baudrain	Ind	Take Alexander's sword
8. Caulus	Greece	Take the Baudrain's helmet
9. Ydorus	Epheson	Love Betis, her lover
10. Lyoné	Greece	Demand joust from Clarus' oldest son
11. Floridas	Greece	Capture the Baudrain and take to Alexander
12. Gadifer	Epheson	Smite down Clarus' standard

At first glance, the vows can be divided into three main categories, which John L. Grigsby describes: 1. The normal and expected vows, which fit into the general context of the siege of Epheson and conflict with the enemy; 2. The feminine wishes; and 3. The adversarial

vows that disrupt the harmony of the ceremony, but also disrupt the structure of the vows (typically in the three-part form of invitation, vow and comment) (Grigsby, *Gab*, 196-7). This structure is the first apparent pattern within the vows, though there are many more to be analyzed as well.

A prominent pattern in these vows is the emphasis placed upon the value of being “preux.” Cassamus repeats the idea frequently throughout the poem, initially noting that there is an old custom in the land, in which the most valiant (preux) men take vows. He also declares that not only are outrage and spite seated at the table, but also are prowess and boldness (proësce et hardemens). After the peacock is presented to the banquet, he again declares that peacock is “la viande as preux!” (The meat of the valiant. Barbour, 3944). Floridas also visits the idea of the preux on a couple of occasions throughout the poem: he convinces Porrus to take a vow by telling him, “qui poroit proësce en .x. pars desmembrer, on en feroit .x. preus pour grant painne endure de la haute proësce que Diex vous vot donner!” (Barbour, 4036-9).<sup>6</sup> Then, later in the story, as he takes his vow, he declares that “proësce et hardemens embrasé de fierté” (Barbour, 4203).<sup>7</sup> Elÿos, after the vows, declares that the peacock must be presented to the most “preux” knight in the room, using the word “preux” three times in her speech. While trying to award a knight as the most valiant, Gadifer is described as, “si biaux que fin souhait—je que plus en diroie? – et si preux qu’après lui nul plus preu ne querroie” (Barbour, 4329-30).<sup>8</sup> Aristé later

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<sup>6</sup> “He who can dismember the valiance God has given you into ten pieces, we will make of that ten valiant men.”

<sup>7</sup> “Prowess and boldness embraced with pride.”

<sup>8</sup> “So handsome that at last I wish—what more can I say?—and so valliant, that beside him, no other brave man can argue.”

also describes the room as having twelve or thirteen of the most valiant men he knows.<sup>9</sup> From these examples, the theme of “preux” is sufficiently demonstrated.<sup>10</sup> The vowing session and prowess are inextricably linked in a very explicit way through the author’s emphasis. The ideal of prowess (proësce) is so important that the participants nearly forget their rivalry and allegiances on the battlefield to boast in their vows and show how courteous they can be.

Several patterns within the vowing poem appear that are difficult to interpret, though interesting. One such pattern is the theme of declaring the right to vow upon the peacock—Elÿos asks four separate people to permit or pay to the peacock the right of vowing.<sup>11</sup> Another one is the pattern of the vows revolving around objects, typically battle-related equipment. If we include horses as objects, there are five vows that fall into this category. Cassamus vows to put Clarus back onto his horse if dismounted, Porrus vows to take Emenidon’s horse, the Baudrain vows to take Alexander’s sword, Caulus vows to take the Baudrain’s helmet, and Gadifer vows to smite down Clarus’ standard. While not related to battle, Edea also may be included in this category as she vows to restore the peacock as a golden statue.

While not necessarily patterns, the *Voeux du paon* sets up some interesting themes that carry throughout the other three vowing stories. The first is that the peacock is presented as a spectacle in and of itself. It is a noble lady who presents the peacock to each knight and lady in

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<sup>9</sup> “A ceste table en siet, se je bien les contoie, .vij. ou .viiij. de plus preus que je ne soie.” “At this table are seated, if I dare say, are seven or eight of the most brave men” (Barbour, 4342-3).

<sup>10</sup> This theme is particularly interesting given that the author, Jean de Longuyon, is credited with inventing the “neuf preux,” known as the “nine worthies” in English.

<sup>11</sup> The four instances are: “prometés au pauon son usage et ses drois!” (“promise to the peacock its use and its rights!”) (Barbour, 3971), “prometés au paön le doit de vouerie!” (“promise to the peacock the right of vowing!”) (Barbour, 3989), “Si payés au paön le doit d’aventurer!” (So pay to the peacock the right of adventure!) (Barbour, 4019), “quar payés au paön le doit de voëment!” (“Pay to the peacock the right of vowing!”) (Barbour, 4086).

the ceremony, followed by musicians. In addition, the bird itself is stuffed, roasted and dressed to be an attractive dish. The bird becomes a spectacle and entertainment to accompany the vows.

The vows between the men and the women also set up an interesting contrast within the vows themselves. Longuyon could have easily kept the vowing exclusive to men, but he included women. He does, however, keep the women's vows inherently different than the men's vows. Fesonas vows to marry whomever Alexander tells her to, Edeas vows to recreate the peacock in gold, and Ydorus vows concerning her loyalty to her lover. These vows are completely different in tone and objective. The men vow concerning battle and prowess, where the women vow concerning love, marriage and the peacock itself, providing a further example of the spectacle of the bird at the center of the vows. In fact, a sequel to the *Paon* story, the *Restor du Paon*, follows the plotline around Edea creating a replica of the peacock in gold.

Another interesting question is raised by including women's vows—Longuyon could have not included women in part because they are not knights. The vowing culture revolves around a warrior culture, which is inherently a masculine culture in the Middle Ages. Women's vows would therefore be entirely different, and it is a little surprising that they are included in the *Voeux du Paon* when one considers the social status of women in the Middle Ages. However, this is also recitified in part by considering that courtly culture—in which the *Paon* is entirely set and revolves around an idealistic courtly culture—is the realm of women. The medieval court was run by women, and its culture therefore steeped in feminine touches, since at least the Crusades, when the men were largely absent. Indeed, courtly culture as we recognize it today did not fully develop until the men were more or less absent and women created the culture at court.

The men's vows themselves set the stage for two interesting themes throughout the vowing cycle. There is a clear theme of competition between vows, exemplifying the third category of vows that Grigsby elucidates. In the *Voeux du paon*, eight of the vows (by the men alone) concern another person. Of these eight, two are to help the person mentioned: Cassamus vows to put Clarus back on his horse and Aristé vows to fight until Fezonas' wrongs are righted. Of the other six, three are in direct competition with each other. The Baudrain vows to take Alexander's sword, to which two other knights reply in their vows: Caulus vows to take the Baudrain's helmet; Floridas vows to capture the Baudrain and deliver him to Alexander if he succeeds in his vow. Two of the vows deal with men who are not in attendance at the banquet: the Baudrain's vow includes Alexander the Great, and Porrus' vow includes Emenidon. Lyoné's vow also fits into this category by inciting a joust from Clarus' eldest son.

This vow also sets up the second theme of jousting instead of vowing about battle. Including jousting into the vows is an interesting turn as the joust is in some sense a practice for battle, but actually a distraction and a danger for the participants in the actual conflict. Lyoné's vow brings up the question of why the nobility has jousts, as well as why a joust would be started before an imminent battle. Jousting always includes the risk of serious injury, so jousting before a battle would be risking the soldiers who could otherwise participate. Vowing to start a joust seems like it would be vowing disloyalty to the court at Epheson, even though it includes knights on the opposing side. The joust also recalls the motif of courtesy as more important than anything else—even loyalty—within the courtly culture of the *Paon* story. Jousting, in the courtly realm, represented an honor for the knights and their armies. The tension between the various motives of a joust in the *Voeux du Paon* exemplifies the new courtly culture emerging in the late Middle Ages, wherein reputation relied upon tradition and ceremony rather than loyalty

## Les Voeux de l'Épervier

The *Voeux de l'épervier* chronicles a short history of Henry VII of Luxembourg. Henry inherited the title of Count of Luxembourg, and was raised at the French court. After King Albert I was assassinated in 1308, Henry became the next King of the Romans (*Rex Romanorum*), which eventually both propelled him to be distanced from the French court (Philip II wanted his cousin to be elected King), and to become the Holy Roman Emperor in 1312—taking over the title from Frederick II, who had died in 1250 (there were therefore sixty-two years without an emperor). Henry turned his attention towards unifying his lands. He travelled throughout his territories in Germany before being called to Rome by the pope in 1312, after which Henry endeavored to reunite Italy. At that time, Italy was divided into city-states and politically torn between the Guelphs (anti-imperial) and the Ghibellines (pro-imperial). Henry's efforts to unify Italy never came to fruition—he died in 1313 while besieging Siena, after having struggled against Robert of Naples in the year since being crowned emperor by the pope.

The poem takes place right before Henry travels to Rome to be crowned Holy Roman Emperor. It begins with his victory in Metz. Henry has a nightmare in his own castle at Luxembourg, after which his wife comforts him and he goes to mass. He crowns himself king at Aix-la-Chapelle, conquers much of Germany, and gathers together his men, princes, marquises and barons. He sets out to Rome, and one night in May, settles down in Milan with his barons. He is sitting down with a dozen of these knights and his wife when his brother, Wallerand, comes into the room. He is carrying his much beloved sparrowhawk, but trips over the threshold because he is one-eyed. The strings tied to the bird break, and it flies over to the table with the twelve peers, and dies in the ensuing collision. The bishop of Liège, Thiébaud, responds by calling for each knight to take a vow upon the bird: “Et j’oÿs ja pairler que Porrus si tuait ung

pawoncel ansi que a lorrier trouvait; li chevaliers de giete chescun d'iaulz envoiait. Vowons a l'esprivier: dehai ait qui l' lairait!" (lines 117-120, page 24).<sup>12</sup>

With this call to vows, Thiébaud references the *Voeux du paon*. He speaks of the events in that poem as if it were history—a legend he has heard rather than a poem that he has read.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the *Voeux du Paon* was supposedly written for Thiébaud by Jacques de Longuyon, meaning that the bishop would have known of the poem (which was written in 1313 at the latest).<sup>14</sup> The question remains, however, whether the bishop could have read the poem by the time that the *Voeux de l'épervier* was written. The *Voeux de l'épervier* covers events that take place in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, and the only extant manuscript dates to the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century. This manuscript, unfortunately, was destroyed in 1944 and the only edition remaining now is a critical edition prepared by Wolfram (Grigsby, *Heron*, introduction). Wolfram suggests that the author is most likely Simon de Marville, Treasurer of the Cathedral Chapel at Metz, and who died in

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<sup>12</sup> "I've heard of Porrus who similarly killed a peacock he had found in a laurel tree; each knight took a turn pronouncing his vow. Now, let us vow on this sparrowhawk; bad luck to he who abstains!" An interesting comparison, since Porrus kills another's peacock with an arrow he has also borrowed, where Wallerand trips and accidentally kills his own bird as a result.

<sup>13</sup> "La légende du Paon et des voeux prononcés sur cet oiseau, était donc bien répandu à Metz; elle était familière chez les écrivains et les trouveurs. Pour nos ayeux des XIV<sup>e</sup> et XV<sup>e</sup> siècles, la chair de paon était un mets fort recherché, un morceau de baron: "C'est la viande aux preux!" s'écrie le vieillard Cassamus, et d'après lui la reine Blanche-flour alors que Huon Chapet va formuler son voeu" (The legend of the Peacock and the vows pronounced upon that bird were thus well known at Metz; it was familiar among the writers and troubadours. For our ancestors of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the flesh of the peacock was a sought-out meal, fit for a baron: "it's the meat of the brave!" cried the old man Cassamus, and after him the queen Blanche-flour that thus Huon Chapet would form his vow.) (Bonnardot and Wolfram, 65).

<sup>14</sup> "Thiébaud seems to have had so strong a fixation on this theme [of knightly bird vows] that he also commissioned a poem, the *Voeux de l'Épervier*, in which he himself and Emperor Henry VII are represented as making vows on a sparrow-hawk during a banquet at Milan" (Loomis, 125). See also *The Buik of Alexander*, I, xxxviii, n. 2.

1326. Thus, the text itself must have been composed between 1310 and 1326 (Bonnardot and Wolfram, 15-16),<sup>15</sup> which is more or less contemporary to both Henry VII and to the Paon cycle.

Understanding the identity of the author of the *Voeux de l'épervier* is important in part to categorize the text between historical chronicle (it was part of the *Chronicles of Metz*) and literary trend (fitting between the *Voeux du Paon* and the *Voeux du héron*).<sup>16</sup> Simon de Marville, if he is indeed the author, was familiar with Henry VII's court though he was likely not in Henry's court during the events of the *Voeux de l'épervier*. Thus, his merit as historian comes more readily as a contemporary familiar with Henry, his court, and the political environment rather than as a witness. The poet also has employed some artistic license in his account of Henry VII's journey to Rome. As mentioned earlier, the poem sets Henry's court in Milan during the month of May, but historically we know that Henry had already left Milan by April (Bonnardot and Wolfram, 11-12). Other aspects of the poem also reveal details that stray from the events as they occurred in reality.<sup>17</sup> The poem is not historically accurate and cannot therefore be interpreted as a historical chronicle. However, it has great value as a literary source (an epic). It also retains historical value by highlighting contemporary attitudes towards Henry VII and the political atmosphere.

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<sup>15</sup>Wolfram's argument for Marville as the author seems to be accepted by later scholars of the *Épervier* without contest. Thus, this thesis will accept his argument for Marville as the most likely author, as well.

<sup>16</sup> The author is also particularly important for understanding certain topics not relevant to our argument, such as the account of Henry VII's death by poisoning, and some inaccuracies concerning Henry's knights in the poem. Additionally, Grigsby explains that, "even though the daily details of the actual trip are recorded in a journal, the heart of the narrative, the vowing session, is not part of this historical record and thus was created as a fiction, but one reported by alleged witnesses of the event." (Grigsby, *Gab*, 205).

<sup>17</sup> Another difference that may seem relevant to our argument is that the poem specifies King Robert residing in Rome, while instead his brother John was there.

Now that we understand the cultural and literary framework of the text, we must turn to the vows at the center of the poem. The vows begin with Thiébaud, bishop of Liège, who also drives the rest of the vows by presenting each knight with the sparrowhawk and asking him to pronounce a vow, in turn, to Henry VII. Thiébaud's vow sets the context for the rest of the vows: he promises to serve Henry so well that he will become emperor, and then be able to go across the sea to battle the Sarassins, conquer their land, and then establish a patriarchy in the Holy Land. Thus, Thiébaud's vow is political and religious—he advocates and supports Henry as Holy Roman Emperor, but also supports Henry as a leader capable of leading a crusade to Jerusalem. His vow ends with a condition, however: he will accomplish this vow in person, so long as he does not die.

Thiébaud then turns to Guyon de Namur, herald of Flanders, who responds that he is unable to make a vow. His family, the heirs to the throne of Flanders, undertook a war against the French such that they have lost their fief. Not possessing land makes Guyon reluctant to vow, possibly because he does not feel that he has the economic capability to back up any vow. There is also the possibility that he is of a lower stature than the other knights, and therefore doesn't feel worthy enough to make his own vow. Whatever the case, Thiébaud does not let Guyon get away without vowing, however, and tells him that he sees him marrying the daughter of the duke of Lorraine (to whom Guyon was, in fact, already married) and that he will be the father of a hundred valiant men. These words give Guyon confidence by promoting his love of his lady, and he vows to be the guard at Henry's table, tasting each of his dishes to ensure that no one will poison him. In addition, if Henry and his court ever besiege Brescia, he will go and break four lances on the doors without supporting troops or company. Perhaps in response to

Thiébaut's condition, Guyon includes in his vow that he would prefer to die for Henry as his taster than have Henry, such a great man, die.

After Guyon vows, Thiébaud presents the sparrowhawk to Henry de Namur, who is also Flemish. However, Henry responds that he is too poor to make a vow—he is just a soldier without a city, castle, wall, building or even an acre of land to call his own. How and why would he vow anything being so lowly? He does end up vowing, however, to follow Henry VII to Brescia, if he indeed goes. Henry vows to bring his sword and other men with him. Like Guyon, he admits that he will willingly die for Henry to conquer the fortified city.

Thiébaud is already moving on to call upon the captain of the guard at Melinotto. This man is from Lombardia, and Thiébaud ascribes Henry's peaceful entry to Milan to the captain's work. He vows, in response, that the next morning at dawn, with 300 of his men all fully armed, he will throw a tournament in Henry's honor. If he is defeated at the end of the day, he vows to pay the price of Henry's voyage to Rome.

Wallerand, holding his sparrowhawk at this point, cries out that anyone, more or less, could do this vow. Paying for Henry's expenses on this voyage means that he must be rich enough to afford such great expense. Wallerand then vows that he will bring 200 Germans to the tournament, and if the captain guard wins, he vows that Henry will return to Luxembourg (at the end of the journey) without even stepping foot in Lombardia. The captain responds to this obvious injury by saying that Wallerand should not be angry, but that all the soldiers around his round table should be united in joy. If he has misspoken, then Wallerand has a right to be upset, but he is ready to commence the tournament otherwise. The Count of Savoy hears them opposing vow against vow, and responds that he must double his vow. He thus vows that he will

put himself in the middle without others' company and force them out of the tournament and win whoever gets mad about it.

The king responds by showing the queen that each knight is well behaved if he carries out his vow. He vows that he will make Thiébaud pope, as well as go on a crusade against those across the sea unloved by God (a reference to Muslims). He also includes in his vow that he will hang whoever throws a tournament until he has made up his mind to go to Brescia. Most of all, he wishes his knights to be of one accord in order to help him in all of his campaigns.

Thiébaud responds to the king's vow by assuring him that he will have Brescia and all of Lombardia if God saves Guyon, Henry de Namur, and Wallerand and all of their soldiers. He then turns to Leopold, the duke of Austria, to banish all melancholy from his heart and vow upon the sparrowhawk. Leopold responds that he vows to take Henry and his numerous barons to Rome, and if Robert (presumably of Naples) wishes to fight, he will fight him and either Leopold or Robert will die in the ensuing battle.

Next, Thiébaud calls upon the duke of Bavaria, who vows in courtly language that he will take Henry to Rome, much like Leopold vowed, to be crowned emperor. If Henry dies and the duke lives, additionally, he vows to be king of Germany, or die and have his entire family line destroyed.

The last knight to vow upon the sparrowhawk is Jean de Bar. He almost cannot vow as he is poor and cannot thus brag in front of Henry's round table. However, he vows that if Henry goes overseas, he will be in the rearguard of his army, and fight with sword and fist against the enemy. If the king loses even four deniers, additionally, he will have his four limbs cut off.

The end of the *Voeux de l'épervier* comes after Henry has left Milan—he and his knights set off for Rome. He besieges Florence, and takes communion with the Jacobins. They plot

Henry's death by poisoning the Host, and though Henry forgives them, he dies at Buon Covento. Coming full circle to the comparison to Porrus and the *Voeux du paon* at the beginning of the text, the barons lament Henry's death and declare that there was never a greater emperor besides Alexander the Great.

Person Vowing	Vow
1. Thiebaut	Serve Henry
2. Guyon de Namur	Serve as Henry's taster, break four lances at Brescia
3. Henry de Namur	Serve at Brescia
4. Captain at Melinotto	Throw a tournament with 300 of his men; if loses at tournament, will pay for Henry's expenses
5. Wallerand	Bring 200 Germans to tournament
6. Count of Savoy	Fight in tournament by himself and win
7. King Henry	Make Thiebaut pope; go on a crusade
8. Leopold, duke of Austria	Take Henry and his barons to Rome; fight Robert of Naples
9. Duke of Bavaria	Take Henry to Rome; if Henry dies, will be king of Germany
10. Jean de Bar, knight	Rearguard of army on Henry's Crusade

There are ten vows pronounced, as laid out in the chart above. Of these ten vows, only six are spoken by the Henry VII's peers. The silent peers are the two sons of the Count of Savoy, the Dauphin of Vienna, the Archbishop of Trier, Gauthier de Montferrane, and Régnier de Brabant. Four outsiders make up the difference: the Captain of Melinotto, Wallerand, Henry VII himself, and the knight of Bar. The middle third of the vows revolve around the Captain's vows (the Captain, Wallerand and the Count of Savoy), and three of the vows were spoken without being invited (Wallerand, the Count of Savoy and the King). The only knight to break the protocol of the vowing ceremony is Wallerand, responding angrily to the Captain's vow of a tournament. The majority of the vows are simple, with most knights vowing to support Henry through men, arms, or money, as needed for his expedition. However, there are a few themes

and patterns from a basic interpretation of the *Épervier* text that also place the *Épervier* in its own position within the bird vow cycle.

The *Épervier* text corresponds in many ways to the *Paon* story. As mentioned above, it shares a common patron (Thiebaut). There are references to the story in the *Paon* throughout the poem. Additionally, some scholars<sup>18</sup> have put forth that the *Voeux de l'Épervier* was written as a *consolatio* for Henry VII's followers after his death in Italy. Linking Henry's death to Alexander the Great calls to contemporary readers' minds that Alexander was also poisoned in his prime. The historiography of Alexander the Great and Henry VII are interwoven together permanently through the center of this text: the vows. Thus, bringing together the *Paon* story with Henry VII of Luxembourg's expedition could have been Thiebaut's way of mourning Henry's death.

Interpreting the vows as a *consolatio* to Henry's death also helps to explain one of the stronger themes throughout the poem. The knights frequently mention death throughout their vows. Thiebaut's vow contains a condition that he will only complete it if he does not die. Guyon and Henry de Namur, as well as the Captain guard at Melinotto and Leopold of Austria, include in their vows that they are more than willing to die for Henry, almost in response to Thiebaut's seeming reluctance towards death. The poem begins with Henry's victory at battle, but it ends with his poisoning and death in Italy. Thus, the poem may not revolve around death, but it is a central theme found at the core of the vows. The entire text points towards Henry's death, with the vows foreshadowing his poisoning—Guyon de Namur's vow specifically foreshadows Henry's eventual poisoning by declaring that he will act as his taster at meals to prevent such a death from happening. The theme of death, specifically that of Henry's, pervades the entire text—and is even at the heart of the vows.

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<sup>18</sup> Notably, Renate Blumenthal-Kosinski and John L. Grigsby. See Grigsby, *Gab*, 212 for a concise summary of some scholarship on this.

The Captain at Melinotto's vow combines two elements: imitation of the *Paon* story and the theme of death. The Captain's vow imitates the jousting vow that Porrus makes (to declare a joust with Clarus' oldest son).<sup>19</sup> Wallerand and the Count of Savoy join in the tournament by each vowing to participate as well. While adding an interesting twist to the plot—adding conflict and intrigue—the tournament also subtly introduces another form of the death theme already explained above. The tournament is quickly turned down by Henry, who vows to hang anyone who participates in one before they leave for Rome. While the jousting in the *Paon* story remained uncontested by the other participants, Henry VII realizes the threat that a tournament poses: “they [those who vowed on a tournament] constitute a threat to the king, because of the loss of knights in jousting would jeopardize his expedition to Brescia and Rome”(Grigsby, *Gab*, 210).<sup>20</sup> Henry is more reticent of the risk inherent to his expedition, and unlike the court at Epheson, courtesy and courtly games do not take precedence over politics and battle. Henry's mission is more important than courtly culture, placing the *Voeux de l'Épervier* in direct contrast with the *Voeux du Paon*.

The sensibility of the vows and Henry's denial of a tournament show that the *Épervier* story does not portray an idealistic court. Several of the knights are hesitant to vow: Guyon,

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<sup>19</sup> This is also an interesting difference between the *Paon* and the *Épervier* texts, since Thiébaud specifically references Porrus earlier in the text, but Henry denies the parallel vows to Porrus' at his own ceremony.

<sup>20</sup> Additionally, tournaments and jousting were seen as dangerous in the earlier period of their existence: “If one remembers that Philip Augustus made his sons Louis and Robert promise not to take part in tournaments because of the danger of then [sic], and, furthermore, if one remembers the general feeling against the barbariteis [sic] of the tournament, one will not find it difficult to imagine that in order to establish a better regulated tournament, nobles appeals to the tradition of Arthurian chivalry. In fact, more and more as men realized that feudalism was ead, did they attempt to revive the glories that they believed attended it, through an appeal to Arthurian tradition. Consequently, it may well be that the appeal to Arthurian chivalry had begun to be used for a specific purpose even as early as this” (Cline, 207).

Henry de Namur, and Jean, the knight of Bar, each provide specific reasons why they are incapable of vowing. These vows are interesting because of the myriad of interpretations the reader can make. Henry is reluctant to vow because he is not wealthy enough, which may reveal that these ceremonies were held exclusively for those of a certain social status or wealth. This implies, possibly, that the vow is not about valor alone—social status is tied into the vowing as well. Jean, the Knight of Bar, exemplifies this as well. Guyon de Namur, in a similar manner, once had land (social status) but lost it. This also implies that those who vow should hold a certain social and economic status. However, each of these knights ends up vowing (through encouragement and permission of the rest of the court), so economic and social status must not be required conditions, even if part of the cultural context.

Additionally, these vows may simply be examples of knights attempting to avoid making their vows. There are many other ways to interpret their reluctance to vow based upon economic or social status (could these men even have been fishing for gifts from wealthier men at court?). Though the reason for these vows is not apparent, a discussion of their possible meanings seems pertinent to this thesis. These knights could have been reluctant to vow because they were worried that they may not have been capable of completing their vows. Their economic or social status could have inhibited their ability to achieve their vows, in which case making a vow would have been a shallow and futile exercise. As Huizinga explains, “The meaning of a vow, as a rule, is that someone imposes on himself an austerity as a stimulant to the completion of the vow” (Huizinga, 100). Perhaps these knights wanted to take part in the courtly culture and prove their worth as knights, but simply were reluctant to actually hold themselves responsible for completing their vows. The ceremonial austerity behind the vows may have seemed a burden. Or, on the other hand, the author of the text may have been wishing to show their reluctance as a

sign of their weakness. They held back from vowing initially because of their economic and social circumstances. These two knights may thus serve as a foil for the other knights who vowed without any hesitation, in order to provide some kind of a comparison point within the courtly vowing culture.

Instead of jumping into vows to prove their prowess and braveness, as each participant does in the *Paon*, the participants in the *Épervier* realize the risk and the reality behind their vows. Instead of portraying a realistic battle between the Indians and Epheson, the *Voeux du Paon* is more concerned with depicting an idealistic courtly culture. While the *Épervier* undeniably belongs to the knightly bird vow cycle, its failure to describe an ideal court, with courtesy and games taking precedence over battle and loyalty, sets it aside from the other pieces of the cycle, giving it its own place apart from the *Paon* and the *Héron*.

## Les Voeux du héron

Little is known about the creation of the *Voeux du héron*. The author is unknown, and the text dates back to around the 1340s.<sup>21</sup> The event takes place in September 1338 at the court of King Edward III of England, though historically King Edward was on the continent. The two major sources of inspiration for the *Voeux du héron* are the *Voeux du paon* and historical events. It consists of 422 rhymed Alexandrines and eleven laisses. The first laisse contains the introduction to the poem, and each of the subsequent 10 laisses includes a different vow. There is another version of the poem, translated into French and placed in the *Chronographia Regum Francorum*. It contains a much shorter account, with a few different details.<sup>22</sup>

The text begins in autumn, in contrast to a traditional seasonal introduction for medieval poetry (which typically starts poems in the Spring). Instead of noting that life is beginning anew (leaves growing on trees and birds singing), the *Voeux du héron* begin by noting that the trees have shed their leaves and the birds have stopped singing already. Robert d'Artois is out hunting with his falcon and he catches a heron. He wants the court of Edward III<sup>23</sup> to take vows upon it, so he takes it to the kitchen to be properly stuffed and dressed. Robert also has two vielle

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<sup>21</sup> John Grigsby argues that the author must have written the poem during or after 1346, due to a reference to that year in the text, which is also the year of the Battle of Crécy (Grigsby, *Heron*, 7).

<sup>22</sup> In the *Chronographia*, the banquet is held in honor of John of Hainault (Beaumont) The king hears Robert and replies with a smile. Robert asks a maiden to carry the bird specifically in reference to the *Paon* story (Porrus vowed on a peacock carried by a maiden, as well). Only a few vows are recorded in full: the queen (who vowed only to follow her husband to France), the bishop of Durham (who vowed to guard the Scottish border, and either kill or bring the King of Scots to London if he attacked), and Robert, bishop of Lincoln (who vowed to carry the letter of defiance if Edward declared war). John Hainault had to be forced to vow, who finally vowed to fight for whoever paid him the most. Edward responded by giving him a marshal's salary (Whiting, 264-5).

<sup>23</sup> Edward III is called Edward Louis throughout the poem.

players, a lutenist, and two noble maidens accompany the heron, which is placed between two silver platters.

When Robert enters the banquet hall, he declares that the heron is the most cowardly of all birds, and as such no coward should eat it—rather, only “li preu amoureux, qui d’amours sont garnis” (Grigsby, *Heron*, 73).<sup>24</sup> However, Robert decides that he wishes to give the heron to Edward, who, as the disinherited heir to the throne of France, would not claim his right out of cowardice—in short, Robert calls king Edward the “plus couart qui soit ne qui onques fust vis” (Grigsby, *Heron*, 81).<sup>25</sup> Robert’s speech ends by calling upon Edward to vow on the heron as his response.

Edward replies readily to Robert’s challenge. He vows upon the heron, promising that he will invade France, but then will wait a month to see if the French attack. He also vows to demand a tribute (or a tax) from France greater than either youth or noble has ever before demanded, all before the year 1346 (Grigsby, *Heron*, 108-114).<sup>26</sup>

Robert responds happily that “Or ai je men avis, quant par ichel hairon que au jour d’ewy ay prins commenchera grant guerre, selonc le mien avis” (Grigsby, *Heron*, 120-122).<sup>27</sup> Then he

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<sup>24</sup> “Valiant lovers who are filled with love.” John L. Grigsby provided an English translation in his edition of the *Voeux du Héron*. This thesis uses his translations where provided. Additionally, the logic of the poem does not completely make sense (a cowardly bird must be eaten by the brave). Grigsby gives one insight by saying that “it is tempting, but highly speculative, to conclude that the author accepted the logical difficulty as a reasonable price to be paid for the reference to *Les Voeux du Paon*” (Grigsby, *Heron*, note for line 69).

<sup>25</sup> “the most cowardly one who lives or has ever lived.”

<sup>26</sup> “Se je li fis hommage de coy je fuy sousprins, /J’estoie jovene d’ans, se ne vault .ij. espis. /Je li jur comme rois, saint Jorge et saint Denis, /Que puis le tamps Ector, Acillet ne Paris, /Ne le roy Alixandre, qui conquist maint païs, /Ne fist tel true en Franche damoisiaux ne marchis /Que je li pense a faire ains l’an .xlvi.”

<sup>27</sup> “Now I have my wish, since, on this heron that I caught today, a great war will begin, I think.”

explains how he was unjustly banished from France and his family imprisoned by the King of France. He vows upon the heron to return to France and do battle.

The Conte de Salebrin (the Count of Salisbury) vows next, though he hesitates momentarily after Robert approaches him. He declares that he could not put himself at such great risk by any vow because he serves the most beautiful woman in the world, who would perfectly resemble the Virgin Mary—if she were to descend to Earth and lose her divinity (though nothing more). He asks the maiden to place her finger on his right eye, which she then agrees to do, and the count makes his vow: he will not open his eye throughout the entire war.<sup>28</sup> The maiden takes her finger off his eye, and the entire room could see that his eye still remained closed.

Next, Robert approaches the Derby's daughter, the Conte de Salebrin's lover. She vows, in response to Salebrin's vow, that she will wait for him to return from battle. If he returns safely, she will be his. The count's heart is overwhelmed in response to his lover's vow of loyalty.

Robert immediately follows this vow by approaching Wauter de Manny (Walter of Manny) and asking him to vow upon the heron, if it would please him. Walter in turn responds that he does not think he can make a vow to be accomplished, but he wishes to uphold his honor in front of so many other honorable people. Then, he vows that he will destroy a particular city, and kill all the people there and leave them with gaping mouths. Robert d'Artois is pleased by

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<sup>28</sup> This vow can be seen as a joke, since the Count is already blind in one eye. In this vow, we do not know which eye he is closing, leaving the informed reader to guess whether he was voluntarily making himself blind, or simply closing his bad eye.

this vow, responding by saying, “Fors est la cose! S’ensi estoit passee, mains preudons en morra ains que soit akieevee”(Grigsby, *Heron*, 250-1).<sup>29</sup>

The next man to vow is the Earl of Derby. He vows that, if the English king follows through on his vow and goes to France with his knights, he will seek out the count Louis de Flandres and challenge him to a joust. If Louis de Flandres does not accept the joust, he will set a fire close enough to him that he can see and observe it. Robert responds, “Si faite guerre me seroit amisté! /Encore venre li termes, si Dieux l’a destiné, /que mi enfant seront de prison delivré, /et si porai bien nuire chiaux qui tant m’ont grevé” (Grigsby, *Heron*, 280-3).<sup>30</sup>

After this, Robert turns to the Conte de Souffort (Earl of Suffolk) and asks him to vow. The earl responds that, if the English king goes to France and fights, he will battle with the son of the king of Bohemia and take his horse. Jehan de Beaumont (John of Beaumont) responds quickly that he will take the Bohemian’s side as his friend, and deliver the earl as a prisoner to the king of Bohemia. The earl responds by saying that they should not be quarreling, but rather they should unite in love as they seek to challenge France.

Robert doesn’t delay in moving on to the next vow. He asks Jehan de Fauquemont (John of Valkenberg) to vow next. Jehan vows that, if the English king goes to France through Cambrésis, he will also go and set the land ablaze. He will not spare church or altar, or pregnant woman, family or friend who stands in the king’s way. To this bold vow, the entire room responds, “Tés hons fait a amer, /qui l’onneur son signeur voelt croiste et amonter!” (Grigsby, *Heron*, 346-7).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> “This is a powerful thing; if it happens thus, many a good man will die before it is done.”

<sup>30</sup> “I would welcome such a war. The time will yet come, and God has ordained it, when my children will be released from prison and I will be able to harm those who have so grieved me.”

<sup>31</sup> “Such a man deserves love for wanting to increase and raise his lord’s honor!”

Once more, Robert takes up the heron and quickly moves on to his next vow. He approaches Jehan de Biaumont (John of Beaumont). John's initial reaction is shock that the court has talked so much by this point—there is no meaning to boasts without accomplishment. He proclaims that the room reminds him of being in a tavern with wine and women, especially the boasting and the desire for battle in that environment.<sup>32</sup> However, once on the battlefield, each man would rather stay at home in peace. His vow, then, is to serve as marshall to King Edward's armies, unless he is recalled from exile by the king of France.<sup>33</sup>

Finally, Robert takes up the heron for the last time and sets it before the queen. He asked her to take a vow according to what is in her heart. She responds that she cannot vow anything when she has a husband because he has the power to revoke the vow. The king, however, responds by giving her permission to vow, and so she does. She says that she has known for a while that she is pregnant, and that she vows that until the king has led her to France and accomplished his vow, she will not allow her child to be born. If her child is ready to be born before that time, she will kill herself so that she and her unborn child will die.

This vow distressed the king, who ends the ceremony by saying, "Certainement nulz plus ne vouera" (Grigsby, *Heron*, 429).<sup>34</sup> The heron is served, and the queen eats some of it.<sup>35</sup> Then, the king readies his ships; the queen goes aboard and the king brings with him some of his

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<sup>32</sup> This is perhaps in reference to a fairly traditional motif in Medieval literature of warriors boasting after drink. The most notable work on this motif is John L. Grigsby's *The Gab as Latent Genre*, which also describes the literature components of the knightly bird cycle as a crystallization of the boasting genre. Grigsby, on boasting, wrote, "For medieval warriors, boasting after drink had become a mutable ritual tagged with various names: flyting, *heistrenging*, *gab*, vow. I have chosen to label the phenomenon, in its tension with established literary types, as the *gab*." (Grigsby, *Gab*, 227).

<sup>33</sup> Jehan is here vowing that he will fight against the English if he were called back to France. This is reminiscent of the *Voeux du Paon* where the enemy knights make vows to fight each other.

<sup>34</sup> "Certainly, there will be no more vows."

<sup>35</sup> Whether anyone else eats of the heron is not mentioned in the poem.

knights. He stops at Antwerp, where the queen gives birth to Lionel of Antwerp, accomplishing her vow. The poem ends with the lines, “Ains que soient tout fait maint preudomme en mora, /et maint boin chevalier dolant s’en clamera, /et mainte preudefemme pour lasse s’en terra. /Adont parti li cours des Englés par dela” (Grigsby, *Heron*, 439-442).<sup>36</sup>

Person Vowing	Content of vow
1. Edouart	To invade France
2. Robert	To fight in france
3. Salebrin	To keep eye closed
4. Fille de Derbi	To remain faithful
5. Walter de Many	To burn Godemar du Fay’s town
6. Derbi	To challenge Louis de Flandres
7. Souffort	To unhorse the king of Bohemia
8. Faukemont	To destroy Cambrésis
9. Beaumont	To act as marshal
10. The queen	To bear child abroad <sup>37</sup>

The *Voeux du héron* is an interesting text in its position at the crossroads between fiction and history. The author has taken historical events and fit them into the pattern of a fictional account (the *Voeux du paon*). The poet takes some liberty with history, such as placing Edward in London in September of 1338 rather than on the continent (as he was historically). The historicity of Robert d’Artois presenting Edward with a heron and asking him to take vows upon it is nowhere confirmed in historical records.<sup>38</sup> The text itself was taken at least somewhat seriously, though, having been translated into Latin and included in the *Chronographia Regum Francorum*, as well as translated into French prose and cited in fragments of MS 11138 in the Bibliothèque Royale in Brussels (Grigsby, *Intertextualité*, 242). Thus, the main inspiration that

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<sup>36</sup> “Before the others are kept, many good men will die, and many a good knight will proclaim himself miserable, and many a worthy woman will consider herself wretched. Thus the English court set out across the sea.”

<sup>37</sup> Table taken from Grigsby, *Gab*, 225. The middle column of the table presented in that book is irrelevant to this paper (it detailed the number of lines each vow contained), so it has been taken out.

<sup>38</sup> There are some recorded references to vows taken at Edward’s court, but no records that corroborate the story presented in the *Voeux du héron*. This is discussed more in the last section of this paper.

the *héron* takes from history is that it provides the context in which the action takes place. The text also predicts several historical events through the vows, such as the queen, Philippa, giving birth to her fifth child on November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1338 (a son christened Lionel of Antwerp). Unlike the other bird vow ceremonies, the *Héron* lacks a known author. This affects the interpretation to a small degree. The text shows that the author is familiar with both Edward's court and the events in the beginning of the Hundred Years' War. Though he is anonymous, the author's attention to historical details proves that he must have known enough about the English court and the events of the Hundred Years' War to write the text. Where the author strays from historical fact is therefore easily interpreted as artistic license rather than historical error.

Some of this artistic license readily lends itself to the *Héron*'s imitation of the *Paon*; the poem follows the *Voeux du Paon* in several regards. The structure of the poem imitates the *Paon*'s: the bird is chosen<sup>39</sup> and the knights (and a couple of ladies) take vows upon it at a banquet. There are also a significant number of lines that the *héron* imitates directly from the *paon*: one instance is that both the peacock and the heron are described as being “viande as preux.” Additionally, Valkenberg responds to Robert's invitation to make a vow with the same words as Porrus does: “Je ne m'en doi merler de veu ne de promesse, car n'ai que donner.”<sup>40</sup>

One important contrast that the *Voeux du Héron* makes from the *Voeux du paon* is the choice of bird: the heron is presented as the most cowardly of all birds. The peacock and the heron are both presented as “viande as preux,” though the heron is clearly not a noble bird (as a

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<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, but possibly without interpretive consequence, the bird is chosen by an outsider to the court in both the *Paon* and the *Héron*: Porrus is a prisoner, and Robert is a Frenchman in the English court.

<sup>40</sup> Valkenberg's response is also reminiscent of a trend we've seen in the *Voeux de l'Épervier*—a reluctance to vow. He says that he must not vow or promise because he does not have anything to give. His poverty may be a way for him to try to elude making a vow; it may be an expression; or perhaps Valkenberg had some other motive for saying he was too poor to vow that is not readily apparent to the modern reader.

cowardly bird). However, Robert still presents the bird as inappropriate for a coward to eat, though he ends his speech by saying that he will give the heron to the most cowardly man in the room: Edward. John Grigsby concluded that this illogical argument was put into the poem merely to include a reference to Porrus declaring the peacock to be the meat of the valiant in the *Voeux du paon*.<sup>41</sup> The contrast between the heron and the peacock also serves to differentiate the mood of the two poems, as the *Voeux du paon* takes place in the middle of fighting at a banquet meant to be a truce meeting. The *Voeux du héron*, on the other hand, portrays the beginning of the Hundred Years' War, with Robert d'Artois inciting King Edward to war. Lastly, the opening *laisse*, where the season is introduced, serves as a direct reference (by contrast) to the *Paon*, which starts in May when winter is finally over.

Each of the vows in the *héron* establishes a pattern of swinging between serious and solemn to lighthearted and frivolous. The king's vow commences the pattern, as he makes a reasonable vow—he will go to France, but then wait a month before taking action—rather than a boast. Robert's vow follows, and it is in the same line as Edward's. He simply vows to return to France and fight. The Count of Salisbury takes the vows towards a more lighthearted direction when he vows to keep his eye closed.<sup>42</sup> The Derby's daughter vows next, promising to be loyal to Salisbury if he returns, which is a typical vow for a woman given the trends seen in the other vow cycle stories. Finally, Walter of Manny takes the vows into a serious arena by vowing not only to destroy a city, but to kill and leave people with gaping mouths in his wake. The Earl of

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<sup>41</sup> "It is tempting, but highly speculative, to conclude that the author accepted the logical difficulty as a reasonable price to be paid for the reference to *Les Voeux du paon*" (Grigsby, *Heron*, note for line 69).

<sup>42</sup> Making the vow even less serious: "William of Montacute had recently (in March 1337) received the title of Earl of Salisbury; he is called Salebrin in the poem. We know about him, among other facts, that he had lost an eye in battle four years earlier" (Grigsby, *Heron*, 9). This also recalls the *Épervier* text, with Wallerand, who has one eye—and trips, killing his favorite sparrowhawk.

Derby swings back to a less serious side by promising to challenge Louis of Flanders to a joust. The Count of Souffort and Beaumont keep a less serious tone by arguing over battling the son of the king of Bohemia (and Beaumont's vow to fight for Edward—only if he isn't recalled from exile by the king of France). The most serious vows come at the end, from Jehan de Fauquemont who vows to set Cambrésis on fire and spare no woman, child, or friend in Edward's way. The queen vows to kill herself if she gives birth to her child before going to France with Edward, which was serious enough for Edward to call off any remaining vows. The swinging between serious and silly among these vows reflects, and even lightly parodizes, the mood behind the *Voeux du Paon*. The *Paon* story describes a court setting where ideals and culture overrule reality and practicality. The *Héron* vows, by alternating between varying degrees of seriousness, play with the idealistic courtly culture created by Longuyon.

A trend perhaps more applicable to the entire knightly bird vow cycle and not just the *Voeux du héron* is brought up by the queen's vow. The queen does not necessarily have the power to vow on her own, since in the Middle Ages women were considered the property of their husband once they vowed. Thus, the king's response in taking her vow so seriously is a little odd, since it seems like a logical conclusion that he would be able to veto her vow as her husband. Recalling the question of women's vows in the *Voeux du Paon*, the queen's vow brings up the question of women vowing again, though slightly different because she is both married and royalty. Derby's daughter's vow is more reminiscent of the *Paon* vows, so merits little attention here in comparison with the queen. Perhaps the queen had a special social status because of her royalty, allowing her to vow something more seriously with fewer repercussions on her husband. In the end, it is not clear what the queen's vow implies. The response and rush following shows that Edward III took the queen's vow extremely seriously, even though it seems

as though he may have been able to disallow it by medieval rights. Additionally, the question of women making vows raises a question brought up in previous chapters. Where certain knights were reluctant to make their vows because of disinheritance or poverty, it may be a similar case of social class. Though a different social class seems not to disenfranchise the participants—they still make vows and participate fully in the ceremony. The question of social class within the knightly bird vow cycle is raised by these two particular cases (women and knights who consider themselves incapable of vowing for social reasons), though answers to these questions are not apparent, if existent at all.

Other trends in the vows include an emphasis on the ideals of love and prowess.<sup>43</sup> The Heron meat itself is presented as “viande as preux” (as previously discussed), in direct contrast to the cowardess Robert attributes to Edward. The meat is supposed to be eaten only by valiant lovers. The theme of prowess and love continues throughout the rest of the poem.<sup>44</sup> Another point of interest is that none of the vowers attributed their vows to the heron, but rather many of the knights vow to “Dieu de paradis” and the Virgin Mary.<sup>45</sup> If the speaker does not vow upon divinity, then there is no mention of anything to be vowed upon within the *Voeux du Héron*.

Lastly, Robert d’Artois often responds to the vows, revealing his scheme to start a war in France for his own interests. This is an interesting contrast to the other vowing poems. Robert’s replies drive the plot forward and establish his personality as an instigator of war. His intentions behind the ceremony and the war are laid bare in these moments, exposing one essential difference between the *Héron* text and the others in the bird vow cycle. This time, the story

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<sup>43</sup> This again recalls the idealistic courtly culture of the *Paon*.

<sup>44</sup> Grigsby analyses the connection of love and prowess in the poem in his edition of the *Voeux du héron*, in his introduction from pages 16 to 18.

<sup>45</sup> The *Paon* and the *Épervier* participants make their vows without pronouncing them on either the bird or on a diety, though the *Paon* text includes many references to “the gods” throughout the characters’ dialogues.

begins with a peaceful court and Robert d'Artois riles up Edward III and his court to start a war between two countries.

Perhaps significantly, the war that Robert d'Artois instigates is the Hundred Years' War. This same war still influenced political and cultural events during the tenure of Philip the Good (who held the Feast of the Pheasant). This war had a particular courtly culture that became associated with it—courtly culture became more focused on tradition and ideals. Jean Froissart, a Frenchman who supported the English cause, was the main historian for the war and often described the war in terms of chivalric code, a code of conduct established in earlier, feudal society. This is possibly one reason that the Hundred Years' War is described as the last war fought by the chivalric code. “Of course, chivalry was never a precise set of rules for the feudal aristocracy, but was rather an idealized code of conduct that always fell short in practice” (Cook, 263). Froissart's description of the Hundred Years' War paints a picture of a courtly culture that either did or did not follow the code of chivalry, which in turn influenced the literature of the courtly culture. The *Voeux du héron* reflects Froissart's history that solidified chivalric code, and the Feast of the Pheasant exemplifies a culture steeped in this tradition.

## The Feast of the Pheasant

In many ways, the other pieces to the bird vow cycle are more straightforward than the feast of the pheasant. The peacock, sparrowhawk and heron were each literary pieces supported by historical events. Their literary aspects are blatant and explicit, while their historical bases are the context for the texts. On the other hand, the feast of the pheasant is placed in context through its intertextuality and cultural influences, though it is primarily an historical event. Its literary aspects are less clearly influential in its analysis as with the other three texts. These differences allow for a different approach to the text, including the vows, from what we have used for the previous texts.

The vows of the pheasant are found printed in two primary accounts: that of Olivier de la Marche and of Mathieu d'Escouchy. There are four primary manuscripts containing the vows: BNF Balize, FR 5739, BNF FR11594 Bruxelles BR, and MS IV 1103. The account of the banquet and the names of the “vouhans” (those who take vows) vary among the different accounts. The version this paper uses is taken from the French manuscript BNF FR11594, which includes four parts: an account of the banquet at Lille in 1454, a “register” of the vows that followed, a transcription of the Bull from Pope Pius II for a crusade, and a letter to the house of Burgundy. The manuscript is made of velum, consists of 230 pages, and was originally housed in the library of Philip the Good. It appears to be a quick copy as there are many small mistakes (such as repeated words). The vows appear to be the emphasis of the document—if not the centerpiece to Philip the Good’s crusading efforts—based on the number of pages each section

occupies. The vows comprise 97 pages, where the letter is 37, the banquet 43, and the bull 45 pages.<sup>46</sup>

As historical event, the Feast of the Pheasant must be placed in its historical context before we can explore its possible interpretations. The previous chapters give some of the context for the literary background to Philip the Good's ceremony, but the historical background is also necessary. The Feast of the Pheasant was not only one event within the cycle presented in this thesis, but it was also part of Burgundian culture. It is both the culminating feast in the knightly bird vow cycle, but also part of Philip the Good's courtly culture.

Philip the Good took over the duchy of Burgundy at 23 years old, after his father, John the Fearless, was assassinated at Montereau in 1419. Philip thus inherited a powerful political position, though his political style was drastically different from his father's. John's approach to the French court was pushed aside to instead focus on diplomacy and marriage (Blockmans and Prevenier, 62). From this experience, Philip inherited not only a throne and an unwillingness to concede to the dauphin, Charles, but also a family tradition of crusading.

Philip "was brought up in the best crusading tradition. We are told that, as a five-year-old, he played in the park at Hesdin dressed up as a Turk. This interest or passion was maintained throughout his long life, being attested by the presence in his library of copies of contemporary works describing the eastern Mediterranean..."(Vaughan, 268). Both Philip the Bold and John the Fearless actively participated in crusades. John the Fearless was even captured by the Turks, which eventually led him to abandon a career in the crusades. Philip the Good, however, persisted in defending the Christian faith. He worked with Henry V of England and Charles VI of France to dispatch Gilbert of Lannoy as a spy to the Levant in 1421, schemed

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<sup>46</sup> All of the vows and information on this manuscript are taken from Marie-Thérèse Caron's *Les Voeux du Faison, Noblesse en Fête, Esprit de Croisade*.

against the Hussites throughout the 1420s, planned to conquer Morea with the Portuguese *Infante* in the late 1430s, and helped Rhodes against the Mamluks and again helped Constantinople against the Turks repeatedly. "Throughout, his ultimate aim remained the liberation of the Holy Sepulchre of the First Crusade" (Paviot, 72). Philip the Good's military career shows his fixation on a crusade throughout his life. He even founded a knightly order (The Order of the Golden Fleece) "for the honor and the increase of the true Catholic faith, and for the exaltation of the faith and holy Church" (Paviot, 73).<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the dukes of Burgundy seemed to be particularly attached to crusading.

The Order of the Golden Fleece was founded in 1430, in commemoration of Philip the Good's marriage to Isabella of Portugal. The Order served a variety of purposes over the years, including political cohesion and international diplomacy.<sup>48</sup> Philip required much of the members of the Order: one must be of noble birth and unstained by "illegitimacy or moral reproach," and follow his sovereign in any campaign in defense of the Church, criticize and try one's peers for "lapses in chivalric behavior," and be obligated to accept criticisms and punishments in turn. Thus Philip the Good was able to control his knights through these rules, but the effect likely trickled down to the rest of his Burgundian realm: "They must therefore have contributed something to the willingness not only of the dukes' noble subjects (for whom chivalry was a kind

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<sup>47</sup> Additionally, Philip may have been looking for greater control over his sovereignty: "Keeping in mind the great chivalric self-celebration which characterizes the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, we would like to suggest that the prince may have wished to control the knights' wish for greater autonomy by drawing them closer to their courts" (Williams, 36).

<sup>48</sup> "The order was initially intended to bind the nobles of his territories to the duke and to one another, thereby lending cohesion to his disparate dominions. By the mid 1440s, Philip began to use the order as a tool for international diplomacy, admitting kings, princes, and counts of different countries into his highly exclusive knighthood. Foreign membership echoed political alignments; it also testified to the desirability of close association and chivalric bond with the Burgundian duke" (Belozerskaya, 65).

of secular religion), but of their subjects of bourgeois and artisan rank (who admired chivalry even if they could not practice it), to identify with their dukes and the new dominial state they had created” (Boulton, 29). The Order of the Golden Fleece was created for political control, which helped Philip the Good to build up Burgundy as a nation and give it legitimacy and strength.<sup>49</sup>

The Order included in its articles of foundation that it was created “to the end that the true Catholic Faith, the Faith of Holy Church, our Mother, as well as the peace and welfare of the realm may be defended, preserved and maintained to the glory and praise of Almighty God our Creator and Saviour, in honour of his glorious Mother, the Virgin Mary, and of our Lord” (Wolfe, 350). There can be no doubt that Philip the Good intended the Order of the Golden Fleece to have religious connotations and purposes as well, especially viewed in light of his crusading ambitions. There is little doubt that the Order of the Golden Fleece was created in view of finally embarking on a crusade.

In 1453, Constantinople fell to the Turks. Philip had not yet used the Order of the Golden Fleece to obtain his lofty goal of an actual crusade. Indeed, Philip was distracted by internal troubles, and a rebellion in Ghent had barely been subdued. The Feast of the Pheasant took place only after Philip was able to gain better control over his duchy,<sup>50</sup> showing that he

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<sup>49</sup> Using a literary basis for legitimizing his court was nothing Philip the Good invented: “In early modern Europe there were several distinct groups of noblement which tried to shift the balance of power and influence in their favor having once gained access to privileged social realms by whatever means. The literature of the courts, whether in romance, epic, lyric or didactic form, presents to the noble and non-noble public of the Middle Ages and afterward a programmatic self-portrait of this privileged elite” (Williams, 27).

<sup>50</sup> “The duke’s strategy in handling these volatile cities when they were not in revolt consisted in converting the powerful urban elites into a kind of clientele in the service of the central government. He could not have eliminated them, since he needed them to achieve some social control over the craft guilds, the magistrates, and the general

cared about keeping together his territory as it was, more so than expanding it through crusades.<sup>51</sup> The Order was called together to a great feast, revolving around a pheasant presented to the Duke towards the end:

In 1453 he had inflicted a decisive defeat on Ghent, the greatest city in his territories, after years of rebellion, and in February 1454, during a sumptuous banquet given at Lille, Philip proposed to take the cross in order to regain Constantinople from the Ottoman Turks, who had captured the great city in May 1453. The banquet was called the Feast of the Pheasant, after the main representation presented to the duke, in which ‘a pheasant which had a gold collar around its neck, decorated with rubies and fine, large pearls’ had been brought in by two knights of the Order of the Golden Fleece and two damsels, who asked the duke to make a vow to undertake the Crusade. The vow was later known as the Vow of the Pheasant (Blockmans and Prevenier, 106).

Many knights from the Order of the Golden Fleece took vows upon the Pheasant as well, comprising what, combined with all of its parts outside of the vows, must have been a surreal feast: “The Feast of the Pheasant was a debauch of luxury, in a mixture of knightly values and popular amusements—some scenes could easily have been painted later by Hieronymous Bosch or Peter Bruegel” (Paviot, 73). There was a series of intricate *entremets*, as well as shows portraying Jason and the Golden Fleece. At the end of the banquet (and before the vows), Lady Church rode into the room on an elephant, announcing that she needed help from the knights to be free from the Turks.

The Feast of the Pheasant spanned eighteen days worth of events that concluded with the banquet in Lille on February 17<sup>th</sup>, 1454. Much of the feast revolved around the curious pattern of bird imagery. The festival commenced with a joust against the Knight of the Swan. He rode a

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population, which could, because of its sheer numbers, pose a threat to the Burgundian peace”(Blockmans and Prevenier, 100).

<sup>51</sup> Philip had to worry about much more than controlling just the nobility, but also the middle class that kept his duchy in order: “During the second part of the fifteenth century any discussion of the nature of nobility would inevitably have corresponded also to the ambitions of the bureaucratic middle class which was responsible for the functioning of the far-flung Burgundian territories” (Willard, 45).

horse in white damask and was followed by three page boys all dressed in white, “blanc comme des anges.”<sup>52</sup> The Knight of the Swan led a joust in the days leading up to the feast, as well as being present for the actual feast. Servants released a heron during the feast and then set free a falcon that caught the heron as a display of hunting prowess.

The *entremets* at the Feast of the Pheasant were each extremely elaborate and showed not only Philip’s cultural grandeur as the Duke of Burgundy, but also his determination to go on a crusade. One memorable example of an *entremets* is that of a nude woman (covered modestly with a veil) connected to a pillar. Hippocras poured from her right breast, and a live lion was chained to a nearby column. This column also had a shield with gold lettering that read, “Ne touchez pas à ma maîtresse.”<sup>53</sup> The imagery of this *entremet* can be read as a clear allegory for the crusades: “Il n’y a pas d’autres données pour les non-initiés: la statue représentait-elle Constantinople, pour qui le lion des Flandres voulait intervenir?”<sup>54</sup> The attendees at the Feast of the Pheasant would likely have understood the imagery Philip used in his propaganda to recruit support for his crusade.

The Feast of the Pheasant ends with the last bird to appear at this grand feast—“The *entremets* were followed by the ceremony of the vows upon a live pheasant, a re-enactment of the one in *Les Voeux du Paon*” (Paviot, 73-4). The pheasant itself appeared after one last show, featuring Lady Church pleading for a crusade. A church from the first *entremet* rang its bell, and a small choir sang a song. A bagpipe player from a pastry<sup>55</sup> also in the first *entremet* played “in a very original manner” (Brown, 45). A horse in vermilion silk entered the room with two

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<sup>52</sup>“White like the angels” (Cartellieri, 180).

<sup>53</sup> “Do not touch my mistress.”

<sup>54</sup> “ There was no other information for the uninitiated: the statue represented Constantinople, for which the lion of Flanders ran to intervene?” Cartellieri, 183

<sup>55</sup> This may be confusing, but there was a bagpipe player inside of a pie. Whether the pie was edible or not is unclear.

trumpeters facing opposite directions playing fanfare around the room. Sixteen knights led them. The organs then played, and another musician from the pastry in the first *entremet* played the cornet. A monster of some sort entered the room carrying two swords and a shield, and a man did a handstand on the monster's shoulders. The monster himself was on a boar covered in green silk, and they toured the room and then left. Then, people in the church sang and yet another two musicians from the pastry played. Fanfare played, and a figure portraying Jason read a letter from Medea. Eventually, a stag with golden antlers covered in green and vermilion silk entered the room with a young boy on his back who was dressed in crimson velvet. He sang the song '*Je ne voy onques la pareille etc.*'<sup>56</sup> as he passed along the tables and the musicians accompanied him. Then a serpent fought Jason on a stage, and Jason decapitated it and took its teeth out. Then a dragon flew across the room, breathing fire. A heron flew out of the rafters, and a falcon flew into the heron and killed it. Eventually, a giant came into the room dressed like a Saracen and led an elephant with a lady dressed in white satin with a mantle of black cloth, dressed like a nun. She tells the giant to stop so she can talk to her audience. People gather around her to figure out who she is, and she reveals that she is Holy Church. She also explains that she has asked for help from the Emperor and the king of France, and is excited to speak to the Duke of Burgundy now.

*O toy, o toy, noble duc de Bourgoigne,  
 Filz de l'Eglise, et frère à ses enffans,  
 Entends à moy, et pense à me besoingne.  
 Plaintz en ton cueur la honte et la vergoingne,  
 Les griefz remordz qu'en moi je pourte et sens.  
 Infidelles, par milliers et par cens  
 Sont triomphants en leur terre damnée,  
 Là où jadis souloye estre hounourée.*<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Translation: I've never seen anything like it.

<sup>57</sup> "Oh you, oh you, noble duke of Burgundy/ Son of the church, and brother to its children,/ Listen to me and think of my needs./ Plant in your heart shame and disgrace,/ The grief

Holy Church asked Philip to help free her in Constantinople from the Turkish invasion, but also addressed everyone in attendance.

After this, the pheasant was finally brought out, and Philip and his knights took vows over the bird. Philip was the first to take an oath, and he swore to fight his crusade. Over a pheasant, Philip took a vow to fight a crusade against the Turk, and his knights followed suit. He swore to fight, even if “the Grand Turk is willing to fight me in single combat”—he would fight him “with the help of God almighty and of his mother the most sweet Virgin Mary, whom I always invoke to my aid” (Brown, 53). There were 95 vows pronounced at the feast, including Philip’s, followed by 25 more at Artois, 4 more in Holland, 25 more in Hainneau, and 31 in Flanders—making 180 vows total.

The vows themselves take on a format reminiscent of, but not completely similar to, the previous bird vows. The vows appear to be much more uniform—much more scripted—than in the previous examples. Indeed, each of the vows is written in a particular format, and a majority of the vows begin with the same basic phrase. The two basic differences throughout the vows are in the first part—to whom each knight pronounces his vow, such as to the Virgin Mary and the pheasant—and then what the knight vows. The majority of the vows follow the same formula: 41 vows were taken upon God, the Virgin Mary, the women, and the pheasant; 24 vows were taken upon women and the pheasant; 14 vows were taken upon God, women and the pheasant; 5 vows did not mention anything upon which to vow; 3 upon God and the Virgin Mary, 2 upon each God, Our Lady, the Pheasant and Our Lady, Saint Anne, women and the pheasant; one vow each was placed upon God, Our Lady, Madame Sainte Barbe, women, the

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and remorse that I carry and feel in myself./ Infidels, by the thousands and hundreds/ Are triumphant in their damned earth,/ There where once I was the only one honored” (Cartellieri, 188).

pheasant and God, Jesus, Mary, women and the pheasant. One vow has no details explicitly written down for this section, but simply replaces it with “etc.” The vows taken at Artois, Holland, Hainneau, and Flanders did not follow this format at all.<sup>58</sup>

In part because these vows were not fictional, the large majority of the vows are practical. Most, if not all, of the vows contain some kind of conditional statement—usually declaring that the vow is dependant on the Duke embarking on his crusade or commanding his knights to go in his place. The majority of the vows also are less extreme than in the previous texts. Most participants promise to accompany Philip (often with the conditional statement of “if my body/affairs allow”) or often instead to help fund Philip’s crusading efforts. Still, there are occasional vows that hearken to the earlier examples’ moments of bragging and frivolity. For instance, Monseigneur de Pons vowed that he would serve Philip as long as his body allows, but also that he would not go to bed on Saturdays until he had killed a Turk.<sup>59</sup> Additionally, these vows do not follow any kind of narrative or plotline, a condition of being an historical event rather than a fictional text. Thus, the practicality of the vows reflects the serious nature of an actual crusade. Though some *vouhans* still maintain an attitude of bragging and levity, the majority of knights appear to take their vows quite seriously, vowing to help the duke if it is

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<sup>58</sup> This also recalls the *Voeux du Héron*, where the participants who specified vowing on anything would typically specify God or the Virgin Mary. Since the other two bird vow texts lack this aspect to their vows, there may be a compelling argument for Philip the Good being familiar with the *Héron* text. However, the pattern of vowing to both diety and the bird references more accurately the Feast of the Swans, wherein Edward I vowed on both God and the swans.

<sup>59</sup> “...je veue a Dieu comme dessus, en demy au prochainement venant ne sojourner en ville quinze jours passez jusques a temps que corps a corps j’aye comabt un Sarrasin d’icellui Turc, ou d’autre lieux, selon ce que je le porray premier trouver en leur terre et ce en leur terre laquelle jamais ne coucheray en lit le samedi jusque j’aye ce accomply.” (Le veu de Monsieigneur de Pons) (“I vow to God as above, not to sleep in Constantinople for fifteen days after I arrive until the time when, body to body, I have fought a Sarrasin of the Turks, or in another place, according to that which I can first find in their lands and that on their land, I will not sleep in a bed on Saturdays until I have accomplished this.”)

possible, rather than risk making a promise they cannot keep. Even with the overwhelming amount of practical vows, the Feast of the Pheasant still retains its imitation of the idealistic fantasy courtly culture found in the *Paon* text. Unfortunately, in the end, Philip the Good did not accomplish his great wish of a Crusade<sup>60</sup>, and each of these vows taken upon the pheasant remained unaccomplished.

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<sup>60</sup> Though Philip's failure to ever accomplish his crusade may cast doubt as to the sincerity of his plans, his form of crusading propaganda followed a form familiar and successful in the Middle Ages. Triumphal entries and other ceremonial receptions (such as at weddings) were very public and complimented the courtly ceremonies of tournaments and court assemblies. "Propaganda in favor of crusades and imperial ambitions to unify and tax the Empire, as well as aristocratic opposition against such plans, were frequently expressed and widely publicized in the language and images of chivalric ideals. [...] Nor did these ideals and their ritual invocations appeal only to the nobility; the patriciate delighted as much in the visions of courtly culture, where aesthetics and authority met so conveniently" (Williams, 27).

## Imitation in the Knightly Bird Vow Cycle

Each of these instances—literary and historical—comprises the knightly bird vow cycle. Each instance has its unique characteristics, such as different birds in each situation, different knights, different courts, and different circumstances. However, the stories are all connected by their intertextuality. They are all tied together in their imitation of each other. Taken together, they reflect medieval culture, specifically courtly culture. Grigsby, in describing the creation of the *Voeux du héron*, wrote: “It was created as the age of chivalry was waning and French knighthood was in the process of disintegrating” (Grigsby, *Gab*, 226).<sup>61</sup> All of these vowing ceremonies were created at the end of the Middle Ages. The courtly culture was changing from what it once was, though the ideals of the past were amply represented in literature—especially in Arthurian legends. Courtly culture was becoming more and more steeped in a romantic tradition based in literary legends:

Aristocratic court life in the fifteenth century became extremely stylized and immensely more expensive with the obsessive proliferation of rituals, games, pageants, and feasts. On the imagined model of King Arthur’s Knights of the Round Table, kings and duke established tightly selected orders of chivalry carrying titles like Order of the Garter and Knights of the Golden Fleece. A great deal of time, money, artistic, costuming, and culinarian ingenuity was devoted to the ceremonial activities of these privileged orders (Cantor, 537).<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Additionally, Peter Dembowski argues for strong tendencies in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries for “restor[ing] great stories of the past.” He also writes that idealization in the Fourteenth Century is symptomatic of the histories presented in courtly literature—indeed, courtly culture attempted to romanticize the Middle Ages as they read about in these stories. See “Whom and What did Galien Restore?”

<sup>62</sup>He continues: “The aristocratic chivalric displays of the latter Middle Ages were intended to give to the lifestyle of the higher nobility an intrinsic value so that the vast expense, thought, and imagination and the best artistic skills lavished on their life-style were justifiably expended. This was the way the nobility blocked status declension in the face of the disposable capital and leisure time of the great merchants and some governmental officials of plebian lineage.”

The knightly bird vows not only imitate each other, starting with the Feast of the Swans, but they were also imitating a fictive, imaginary world created in the courtly literature that idealized (and idolized) a fantasy of courtly culture.

The Feast of the Pheasant, as the last instance in this cycle, is a good example of the imitation inherent in late medieval courtly culture<sup>63</sup>. Close examination of this ceremony demonstrates the line of imitation from the Feast of the Swans through Philip the Good's elaborate feast. Given Philip's propensity towards imitation and literature-driven culture, it is no surprise that he chose to imitate the *Voeux du Paon* and the cycle that followed it. The motif of taking knightly vows upon birds fits into a mimetic culture. As Huizinga writes, "The knightly vows may have a religious-ethical meaning that places them at the same level as clerical vows; and their content and meaning can also be of a romantic-erotic sort; and, finally, the vows may have degenerated into a courtly game without any significance other than that of a pastime" (Huizinga, 97). The vows themselves were a method of escaping into the fantasy world that Philip created in his court.

If the Feast of the Pheasant imitates the *Voeux du Paon*, the *Voeux du Paon* itself is an imitation of Edward I's Feast of the Swans. That feast was held after Edward knighted his son (Edward II) and 300 other men. Edward I brought in two swans, covered with gold and bells. He proceeded to vow on the swans and call for the newly dubbed knights to follow suit.<sup>64</sup> This

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<sup>63</sup> Huizinga writes that: "What it [the *Voeux du Faisan*] still reveals of all this is not much more than a beautiful courtly form. [...] This custom has such deep psychological roots that it is bound neither to education nor faith. The knightly vow as cultural form, however, as a custom elevated to an embellishment of life, reaches its last phase in the splendid extravagances of the Burgundian court." (Huizinga, 101).

<sup>64</sup> "As the eyes of all the guests were fixed upon these swans King Edward uttered a vow, 'by the God of Heaven and these swans', to avenge the death of Comyn and the perfidy of the Scots in life or death, calling upon his son and the nobles to swear that if he died before the task was accomplished they would carry his body with the army and not bury it until

ceremony is the first recorded instance of knightly vows taken upon birds. “The feast was evidently magnificent, with a multitude of minstrels paid to perform, and each knight uttering his vow over two specially prepared golden swans. These, it seems, were an innovation, but one that set a fashion for swearing oaths on birds for the next two centuries” (Morris, 355-6). Edward I innovated the knightly ceremony of vowing on birds, though his own inspiration is less apparent.

Edward I possibly received his idea for the feast from Arthurian legends. Salzman ascribes much of Edward’s actions as king of England to his affinity for King Arthur, including the Feast of Swans.

The king’s vow combines the obligations of chivalry and piety. To dedicate oneself to the service of God against the Turks was doubtless the highest ideal; but scarcely lower and even more pressing were the obligations of honor and of feudal right. The vows of Edward and his son were surely taken in the full consciousness that thus, according to the romancers, Arthur and his knights had been wont to pledge themselves to high and perilous enterprises (Loomis, 122).

Salzman ascribes the vows on the swans specifically to Chrétien de Troyes’ *Conte del Graal*.

Perceval swears that he will not sleep two nights in the same place until he attains the goal of his quest. Salzman continues:

Evidently, then, the ceremonies of 1306 had an Arthurian background, but in none of the Arthurian texts is there anything resembling the oath by a brace of swans. So far as one can tell today, this was an innovation. Of course, the presence of the fowl on the high table was nothing new, for game of all kinds furnished a considerable, if not the major, part of a great banquet. Four hundred swans constituted only a small fraction of the provender for the installation of Archbishop Neville at York in 1567. But I have found no precedent for Edward’s taking a solemn oath on these decorative birds. Whether he was the first to do so or not, he certainly, in the modern colloquialism, ‘started something.’ For it seems pretty clear that all subsequent observances of this kind, as described in literature or recorded in history, were inspired directly or indirectly by the ceremonies of 1306 (Loomis, 124).<sup>65</sup>

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full vengeance had been wrought upon the Scots. To this demand the assembled company answered with a shout of assent and acclamation” (Loomis, 172).

<sup>65</sup>Additionally, other Chrétien de Troyes stories contain similar stories of interest to this topic. The most notable is in *Erec et Enide*: Erec participates in a contest for a

Edward I was imitating King Arthur legends when he planned the Feast of the Swans<sup>66</sup>. Edward I even took care to locate the ceremony at Whitson, where Arthur supposedly held his plenary court at Caerleon. In the end, Edward I's vow took a back seat to his son's, the future Edward II, at least as far as Arthurian tradition is concerned. Edward I vowed to take vengeance for the Comyn's death against Robert the Bruce. He then declared that, when every enemy was vanquished, he would lead his knights to the Holy Land for a crusade. His son, Edward II vowed, like Perceval, that he would not sleep two nights in the same place until the Scots were defeated (Morris, 355-6). Thus, Edward II's vow exactly imitates that of Perceval, making clear the connection between the vows and Arthurian legends. The Feast of the Swans took the imagination of King Arthur's court and reinvented it as a vowing ceremony over two roasted swans. Thus the fashion for vowing over birds in the late Middle Ages began in the English court, and then spread into French culture on the continent. Edward I used a legendary basis to establish a new tradition, which itself was a traditional method in courtly culture: "Much of the research on the development of aristocracies has shown that ruling elites establish their privileges in myth as well as in history from the very start. Resting firmly on genuinely old or recently-confected traditions, ideologies of the nobility are designed to be accepted as truth, and social hierarchies are presented as ordering principles" (Satire, 26).

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sparrowhawk. Erec declares his woman (Enide) to be the most beautiful, thus claiming the sparrowhawk, and must fight Yder—the previous owner of the bird. Erec wins and eventually married Enide. The interesting part of this story is that Erec is pursuing Yder for being rude to the Queen's servant, but it is through the sparrowhawk that he comes to confront Yder and is victorious over him, getting his revenge on the ladies' behalves. Thus, the sparrowhawk acts as a call to action in the plot.

<sup>66</sup> As an interesting sidenote, "Celebrating chivalry in sumptuous Arthurian festivals and tournaments in the cities and at court while directing scathing criticism at certain chivalric ideas must be accepted as the late medieval way to accomplish two ends: to reform Church and Empire and to realign and subsequently reaffirm the traditional social order" (Williams, 33).

The *Voeux du Paon* in turn ascribes the vowing portion of the story to a local tradition—they vow upon the roasted bird because it is custom in the land (*l'usage du pays*). The custom is not explained in the text, suggesting to the reader that it is common knowledge. However, there is no evidence that Ancient Greek culture inspired this aspect of the story. There is greater evidence, instead, that points to a Germanic tradition of vowing and that the vows on the peacock were partially inspired by Edward I's Feast of the Swans.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the *Voeux du Paon* was supposedly commissioned for Theibaut de Bar, bishop of Liège. Thiebaut's niece, also Edward's granddaughter, Joan of Bar, married John de Warenne, Earl of Surrey. John de Warenne was one of the knights dubbed during the Feast of the Swans. It is likely, then, that Thiebaut knew about the Feast of the Swans and commissioned the *Voeux du Paon* in imitation of the ceremony.<sup>68</sup>

The *Voeux du Paon* solidifies the knightly bird vow cycle. The *Paon* is at the center as it imitates two sources: the Feast of Swans and the *Voyage de Charlemagne* and the *gab* tradition.<sup>69</sup> Grigsby considers the *Voeux du Paon* a narrative that takes the *gab* tradition (of boasting and vowing as the center and driving force of the plot), and turns the ensuing hostility between characters on its head. Instead of rivalry, chivalry is at the center of the *Paon* story. He writes that:

It is a narrative in which chivalry triumphs without Christianity, Celtic mythology, or magic. Instead, courtesy reigns, evil is defeated, and the

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<sup>67</sup> The *gab*, as well as the bird vow cycle, are often connected to a Norse boasting tradition called *heitstrenging*. John L. Grigsby gives the best explanation of this in his *Gab as Latent Genre*. Grigsby explains the connection where most scholars skip over an explanation and state the connection between genres as almost a common place sort of thing.

<sup>68</sup> More information on this found in Loomis on page 125.

<sup>69</sup> John L. Grigsby places the *Voeux du Paon* at the end of his argument for the *gab* as a genre of literature in its own right. Grigsby argues that the *Voeux du Paon*, as well as the *Voeux de l'Épervier* and the *Voeux du héron*, are crystallizations of the *gab* genre. See *The Gab as Latent Genre in Medieval Literature*, Chapter 6: Crystallizations (Grigsby, *Gab*, 185-227).

protagonists play games [...] amidst women, whom the later marry. Although the knights are courteous to ladies, the kind of courtesy emphasized by Jacques [Longuyon] is that which warriors show to each other. [...] The idealistic combatants in our tale practice such extreme courtesy that they occasionally violate, unwittingly, another tenet of chivalry: loyalty (Grigsby, *Gab*, 202-3). Indeed, this sense of courtesy overcomes the characters' inherent rivalry as enemies in battle.

This courtesy erases the themes of vengeance, impulsivity, and arrogance as manifested in *gab* literature. Where the Feast of the Swans may have invented the idea of vowing over a bird, the *Voeux du Paon* legitimizes the ceremonial trend by tying it to medieval literary traditions. The *Paon* acts as the turning point for a cultural phenomenon wherein courtly culture became highly ritualistic. The ceremony of vowing on a bird is only one case study of its influence on the late Middle Ages. The courtly culture that rose around the knightly bird vows evolved into the courtly culture we associate with the aristocracy and royalty, ultimately finding its peak under the absolute monarchs of the sixteenth century.<sup>70</sup>

The *Paon* story emphasizes the courtesy of courtly culture, but also combines this with another medieval tradition. The *Voeux du Paon* is a late addition to the Alexander cycle, which means that it was also imitating the tradition of Alexander literature (*les matières de Rome*). The tradition of Alexander the Great was also tied to courtly culture. Grigsby describes that, “Alongside the societal genesis of the make-believe courtesy in the *Voeux du paon* also functions the spirit of magnanimity associated with the legend of Alexander. Both converge in this text to distinguish it from other crystallizations of the *gab* genre” (Grigsby, *Gab*, 203). Giacchetti also

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<sup>70</sup> Grigsby explored the connection between the bird vows and the absolute monarchs in another fashion when discussing the *Voeux du héron*. He connected the military culture of the late Middle Ages to the burden of taxation before the French Revolution, rather than the symbolism and ritual of court life. He wrote, “Military tactics were failing against the English long bow and the first primitive cannons. Armor was becoming heavy, and ostentation hazardous. The burden of taxation imposed on the populace to provide for glittering liveries, ill-planned invasions, and useless warfare had already inspired two revolts, so that one may well wonder why the Revolution of 1789 was so long in coming.” (Grigsby, *Gab*, 226-7).

writes that there was an emerging literary mood in the fourteenth century focused on a “sensibilité mondaine,” wherein Alexander was used as a “miroir des vertus héroïques et courtoises” (Giachetti, 361).<sup>71</sup> Thus, the court of Alexander was used not only to place the *Paon* story in historical context, but it also reflected a culture that Longuyon could use to emphasize a particular (and idealistic) courtly culture.<sup>72</sup>

The *Paon* story inspired a cycle around itself: the *Restor du Paon* and the *Parfait du Paon* complete the story laid out in the *Voeux*. These two sequels to Longuyon’s story solidify the convention of courtesy and ritual in courtly culture. The *Restor du Paon* was written by Jean Brisebarre le Court in the first quarter of the fourteenth century. It follows the *Voeux du Paon* in seventeen of the thirty-four extant manuscripts of the *Voeux*. The story was popular enough in the late Middle Ages to be included in Waquelin’s prose *Alexander* (Carey, 9-10). The plot follows the completion of the vows taken in the *Voeux*—everyone has completed their vows except for Edea. Thus, central to the story of the *Restor* is Edea accomplishing her vow to restore the peacock, which she does in gold. She requests gifts from the knights and ladies to pay for the peacock’s replica and sends for goldsmiths. A repetition of scenes from the *Voeux* follows, after which the knights separate and the author revisits Alexander’s tale. Jean de la Motte wrote the *Parfait du Paon* in 1340. Simon de Lille, the king’s goldsmith, commissioned it to accompany a golden peacock as described in the *Restor* for Philippe de Valois. Two manuscripts survive, though one is missing a hundred lines at the end. The story follows Alexander besieging the city of King Melidus, brother of Clarus, who is seeking vengeance for

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<sup>71</sup> “Mirror of heroic and courteous virtue.”

<sup>72</sup> There is at least one recorded instance of a 14<sup>th</sup> Century tournament imitating Alexander the Great rather than Arthur (the more traditional choice). A tournament that took place at Valenciennes in 1344 used a peacock for a prize. Additionally, “the names of the winning band of knights, those of Alexander’s knights’, suggest a romance about Alexander, such as *Les Voeux du Paon*” (Cline, 209).

Clarus' death by Cassamus' hands. It imitates the *Voeux*—some men are taken prisoner in the battle and both sides congregate in the *chambre amoureuX*. There, everyone—lords, ladies and even Alexander—participates in a poetry competition with prizes. A new vowing session follows with new people. Then the battle recommences and the story ends (Grigsby, *Heron*, 5).

The *Restor* and the *Parfait* both take off where the *Voeux* ends. Each story relies upon the oaths already taken to create a new plot. Furthermore, each takes the courtly culture from the *Voeux* and solidifies the theatricality of it. Martin Gosman writes that,

The theatrical side of noble life [...] becomes even more manifest in the texts centered around the peacock vows: the *Voeux*, the *Restor*, and the *Parfait*. Whether they are in the palace of Ephezon or on the battlefield before that town, the nobles try their utmost to perform their role as perfectly as possible. [...] The whole siege as described by Jacques de Longuyon is a hyperbole of coded *aemulatio*. The real master of the scene is Alexander who, from a promontory on the other side of the river, oversees the combats before the city (Maddox and Sturm-Maddox, 182).<sup>73</sup>

These texts turn knights from warriors into actors, attempting to fulfill a role. Their stage is set both in the court and on the battlefield, wherein each knight and each lady must compete to see who best plays their part. Gosman's use of the term *aemulatio* implies not only that nobility became a game of imitation—of legends such as Alexander and Arthur, but also each other. Court culture becomes a game wherein players compete with each other, in the court as well as on the battlefield. Rivalry, already an inherent attribute of warfare, finds its place in the court as well. The *Voeux du Paon* introduces rivalry to the courtly world, bringing the battlefield rivalry among knights to the realm of the court—among the ladies. The nobility become pawns in a game, competing with each other in a game of courtesy—however, the king (or emperor in

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<sup>73</sup>The siege referred to here is in the *Chambre de Vénus*, wherein the knights hold courtly conversations and play games with noble ladies while in a reserved space for such activities. However, at battle, the knights are inspired by militia as opposed to love. Each half of the story (between the interaction in the courtly space and that on the battle field) acts as a reflection of the other.

Alexander's case) participates by overseeing the knights. He is above the imitation and reigns over the noble culture as well as the nobility.<sup>74</sup> Gosman continues on this point by clarifying: "The perspective introduced by Jacques de Longuyon into his *Voeux* has become the essence of the canon: the nobleman is now an actor who plays his master's game and who never forgets that the latter always observes him" (Maddox and Sturm-Maddox, 183-4). Indeed, the *Voeux du Paon* created a new courtly culture that would take a knight's skills—obedience and competition—and translate them to his life off of the battlefield.<sup>75</sup>

This trend continues outside of the *Paon* cycle, as well. The first imitation of the *Voeux du Paon* is connected to Thiebaut as well, who also commissioned the *Voeux du Paon*. The *Voeux de l'Épervier* takes up the culture and ceremony created by Longuyon and places it in Henry VII of Luxembourg's court. Thiebaut is at the center of these vows, and this time the tradition is ascribed to a literary piece—the *Voeux du Paon* is specifically mentioned. Thiebaut references the vows taken on the peacock after the sparrowhawk is killed; he describes it as a legend he has heard before, rather than as a story he has read—and in fact commissioned. It is interesting to note that Thiebaut would have the *Voeux du Paon* specifically mentioned in the text as the source of inspiration and not the Feast of the Swans. Thiebaut has connections to both instances, after all.

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<sup>74</sup> This particular point is interesting when considering the *Voeux du Héron*, since Robert d'Artois essentially influences the King; he incites war by using a courtly ceremony.

<sup>75</sup> Additionally, the court was associated with love, as it is where the ladies primarily resided. Thus, the competition and obedience in the court was translated to be not only under the ruler of that court, but also in regards to ladies and love. This is perhaps why Longuyon also chose to describe a battle between a knight (Clarus) and a lady (Fesonas) at the center of the *Voeux*. The courtly culture behind the *Voeux du Paon* also brings up the curious trend of knights unwilling to vow because of poverty. Perhaps knightly culture revolved around social and economic status as much as it did around obedience and competition, as wealth would reflect possibly greater ability to participate in battles and games. The questions raised by a reluctance to vow based on wealth are not answered in this thesis, though they remain relevant to the topic.

One argument for ascribing the *Voeux du Paon* as origin for the ceremony is that of politics. Thiebaut could have mentioned that he heard about the Feast of the Swans from his niece, whose husband was present, rather than a fictional story he had commissioned. However, Thiebaut had allegiance to both Henry VII of Luxembourg and Philip IV of France. Imitating the court of the English king may have been a risky political step. Putting down in words his ties to Edward's court may have been viewed as disloyalty, and made each monarch question Thiebaut's intentions. His position as bishop may have been precarious had Thiebaut declared Edward I's court as his inspiration for not only one, but two literary works he commissioned.

This argument is merely speculation, and it is fairly weak when considering the reasons why *Les Voeux de l'Épervier* may have been written. Revisiting an argument laid out previously, the text may have been written as a *consolatio* to Henry VII. As a tribute to the dead monarch, rather than a political poem, Thiebaut may not have worried about a passing reference to the English court or to Alexander the Great. The *Paon* may have been chosen to solidify the connections made throughout the text that hold Henry in direct comparison to Alexander. It is also possible that the *Paon* story is specifically referenced because the author wanted to refer to another book within Thiebaut's library, rather than for an aspect within the plot of the text.

Perhaps a stronger argument explaining Thiebaut's invented inspiration from Alexander's court lies in legitimacy. Ignoring the political risk of claiming his ties to Edward I's ceremony and court, Thiebaut may have wanted to claim legitimacy from Alexander the Great instead of a contemporary ruler. Alexander the Great was an established legend by this point. The stories revolving around him were well known and well loved already. Thus, Thiebaut could tie his

stories to the already-popular Alexander cycle.<sup>76</sup> Even though he was a historical figure, Alexander had taken on mythical proportions and thus a certain amount of infallibility. Unlike Edward I, his success as a ruler was accepted and could not change much. Edward, after all, was contemporary to Thiebaut; as such, his life and character was more subject to scrutiny in the public eye. Alexander's popularity and acclaim was established, where Edward I was a less favorable figure for Thiebaut to tie himself—and his stories—to.

The *Voeux du héron* is interesting in light of this genealogy of bird vows (from the *Paon* and *Épervier*). Robert d'Artois presents the heron at Edward III's court. Edward III would clearly understand the allusion to the Feast of the Swans, which was held immediately after his father's dubbing ceremony. There is no reference to swans, Edward I (or even Edward II), or his battles against Scotland (the backdrop for the Swan vows).<sup>77</sup> Rather, the *Voeux du héron* imitate the *Voeux du Paon* fairly explicitly—even reusing the same lines at a few points in the poem. No mention, or even passing reference, is made to the Feast of the Swans. The tradition of knights taking vows upon birds at courtly banquets is thus ascribed, once more, to the *Voeux du*

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<sup>76</sup> Martin Gosman argues that the late Middle Ages is marked by a constant political restructuring that lacked lasting, substantive change. He argues that the two main reasons why the changes never lasted are that 1. History is a process and the ad-hoc event is only part of it, and 2. Propagandists know this and prefer to mask the actual context with “creative possibilities of the suggestive formula.” The result of this is, then, that Medieval and Renaissance rulers refuse to openly admit that the context to their historically-based propaganda is irrelevant to contemporary culture. “Thus monarchical society maintains the tradition feudal ritualism as long as possible, since it needs the support of key societal figures who, traditionally conservative, cling to old values” (Maddox and Sturm-Maddox, 179-80).

<sup>77</sup> R. L. Graeme Ritchie argues that Edward III could have very easily been copying the Feast of the Swans in an indirect way. He compares the two monarchs (and grandfather-grandson) in their love for Arthurian style chivalry: “That Edward was the sort of king who would vow to the Heron is plain from his addiction to other forms of flamboyant chivalry. He who in 1336 could ride, like young Lochinvar, all the way to Lonchindorb to save a beautiful Countess [of Atholl], build a Round Table at Windsor in 1334, and found the Order of the Garter, could no doubt vow to the Heron in 1339 as well as Edward I, ‘the English Justinian,’ could vow in 1306 to the Swans” (Barbour, xlvi).

*Paon* and to Alexander the Great. Edward's feast, and its origins in Arthurian legends, is ignored once more in light of the Alexander myth. Ascribing the choice of Alexander over Edward I in this case seems less likely to be political—Edward III could have gained legitimacy as heir by imitating his grandfather's court.<sup>78</sup> However, the legitimacy and popularity of Alexander the Great proved to be a better source of imitation for the *héron*'s author. The author may not have been connected to the English court in any case. He also possibly did not want to connect the ceremony to Edward I, and rather keep the originations away from Edward's court. Moreover, it is Robert d'Artois, rather than Edward III, who drives the vows, further removing the tradition from the English court. It is the French nobility that brings the tradition to England (ignoring the Feast of the Swans), and the French are the cultural inheritors of Alexander the Great's courtly tradition.

The author of the *Voeux du héron* is unknown, giving us less insight into the creation of the text itself than we have been able to extract from the other instances. Though the author is anonymous, the cultural context around the text is available through research. John L. Grigsby writes that “the *Voeux du héron* was composed in an environment for which we have a fair amount of historical information [which] allows us to observe in detail how custom and human nature relate to the birth of literary works, an opportunity not always accorded to students of medieval literature”(Grigsby, *Gab*, 225). This is particularly important in the case of the *Voeux du héron* because of its delicate position between history and fiction. The text itself is a literary record, but its historical accuracy is contestable. Though the plotline may not follow fact, the

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<sup>78</sup> During Edward I's reign, he was considered a strong monarch, where Edward II was considered a weak king. Edward II's rule over England is often viewed in unfavorable light; Edward III tying himself to Edward I rather than to his father would possibly have garnered him political strength. Edward III is known for transforming England's military power into the strongest in Europe, as well as for restoring legitimacy to the English throne after his father's disastrous failure.

vows recorded in the text may have happened in some form or another.<sup>79</sup> The *Voeux du héron* may record some truth behind the events leading up to the Hundred Years' War. Two important conclusions can still be drawn from the text in spite of its tenuous connections with history: one, that Robert d'Artois' reputation was "as instigator of war between the kings of France and England"(Grigsby, *Gab*, 214); second, that the author was successful, whether he explicitly was trying to, in capturing social custom in literature.<sup>80</sup> The historicity of the *Héron* is irrelevant when we consider that it was successfully able to capture both these points—the public sentiment concerning Robert d'Artois, as well as the rising cultural phenomenon of knightly bird vows.

On the other end of the history-vs-fiction spectrum, the Feast of the Pheasant represents the end of the Middle Ages. Though he was writing about the *Voeux du héron*, Grigsby effectively was describing the era leading up to Philip the Good's court: "It was created as the age of chivalry was waning and French knighthood was in the process of disintegrating" (Grigsby, *Gab*, 226).<sup>81</sup> Huizinga promotes this idea, as well. He writes that,

The idea of the vow vacillates between the highest dedication of life in the service of the most solemn ideal and the most conceited mockery of the elaborate social game that found only amusement in courage, love, and concerns of the state. The play element predominates; the vows become, for the most part, embellishments of court festivities. But they always remained tied to the most serious military

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<sup>79</sup> Ritchie defends the text's historical accuracy. See B. J. Whiting, "The Vows of the Heron," 268 n.4. Froissart gives some hints that vows of some kind may have taken place. See Froissart, trans. Johnes, 21. Grigsby argues that "it would be naïve to trust that this poem dramatizes the exact details." See Grigsby, *Gab*, 214.

<sup>80</sup> Grigsby argues for this second point by relating the *Voeux du héron* to the *Voyage de Charlemagne*. He writes that both pieces fulfill the same purpose of capturing social custom in literature. "Although the session in Constantinople is far from historical accuracy, it betrays a viewpoint which, by its very fiction, relates a truth. 'La littérature est un mensonge qui dit la vérité,' said Cocteau" (Grigsby, *Gab*, 226-7).

<sup>81</sup> Grigsby further elucidates the context of the Hundred Years' War, relevant to both the *Héron* and the Pheasant ceremonies, as they act as bookends to the war, with the *Héron* and the beginning and the Pheasant at the end.

undertakings: the invasion of France by Edward II, Philip the Good's envisioned crusade (Huizinga, 97).<sup>82</sup>

Knightly culture by the time of Philip the Good had become largely concerned with ritual and symbolism. Philip wanted to use a ceremony to start his crusade that would also be fitting for his court. A vowing ceremony, as described by Huizinga, would be an appropriate fit for an environment that thrived on ceremony, ritual and tradition.

The Feast of the Pheasant was not an isolated event within Burgundian culture. Philip the Good was immersed in Medieval literary traditions, and his entire court reflected the lengths to which his imagination was captured by it: "Ainsi, depuis relativement peu d'années avant le banquet du Faisan, la cour de Bourgogne se laissa submerger par l'imaginaire des aventures chevaleresques et lointaines. Il devenait donc normal pour le duc de présenter son voeu de croisade dans ce cadre."<sup>83</sup> Philip was drawing upon legends and stories to create this fantasy-based culture within his court, which in turn allowed him to create the Feast of the Pheasant. The courtly and knightly culture of Philip the Good's court imitated that of the literary tradition—the Duke tried to bring to life the world of King Arthur, Alexander the Great, and Jason (among many other legends) through his own courtly traditions.

The unique culture of the court of Burgundy resulted in part from the unification of their territories. The Duchy of Burgundy was linguistically, culturally and politically French, so Philip had to distinguish Burgundy from that tradition in part to create his own culture. In

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<sup>82</sup> Additionally, Norman Cantor wrote that, "The chivalric enthusiasm of the latter Middle Ages made the devastating and ruinously expensive Hundred Years' War socially palatable, glazing it over with romantic motifs, both in the conduct of the war and in the official history of it written by Froissart, an English courtier. Froissart glamorized terrorism and massacres as a series of Camelot encounters and turned blue-blooded thugs like Edward the Black Prince into golden heroes of the Lancelot mold" (Cantor, 538).

<sup>83</sup> "Thus, since the relatively few years before the Feast of the Pheasant, the Burgundian court let itself be submerged in the imagination of knightly and distant adventures. It became thus normal for the duke to present his crusader's vow in this context" (Paviot, 69).

addition to inheriting French courtly culture, Philip had to allow for more diverse cultures within his territories—through marriage and inheritance, his court included Flemish, German and Dutch inhabitants. Burgundy needed a culture that would not only include these different traditions and cultures, but additionally set up an identity unique to Burgundy. “Thus, the Valois dukes had every reason to want to establish an identity of their own to create a perception of unity, even if unification was beyond their grasp” (Wolfe, 349). Creating his own courtly culture allowed Philip the Good to at least imitate a unified domain, like that of France or England.

Part of the reason that unification could be imitated through an artificial courtly culture was that Philip the Good was creating a particular ideology for people both within and without his domain. “The Burgundian style, in this context, encompassed more than the visual characteristics of a particular ‘school’ or ‘nationality.’ It communicated socially validated and resonant meaning as an *instrumentum regni*, selected not for its mere visual or auditory appeal, but for its efficacy as an ideological statement” (Belozerskaya, 273).<sup>84</sup> The culture at Burgundy transcended its origins as French, Flemish or literary legend—it became an identity in and of itself. This ideology spread not only within the realm of Burgundy itself, but across Europe: “The Burgundian dukes and their brilliant court provided a model and an impetus for emulation across Europe. The artifacts they employed to manifest their ideologies were sought after by

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<sup>84</sup> Norman Cantor also writes that the middle class often partook in chivalric culture in order to feel included: “The affluent and highly literate class of country and town gentry, merchants, and lesser clergy were not, however, willing to allow the aristocracy to reserve neoromantic traditions exclusively for themselves. As much as they could, middle-class people sought to participate in chivalric culture” (Cantor, 538). This also has political ramifications on top of cultural ones—Cantor later describes that, in the late Middle Ages, there was plenty of discussion of progressive politics and more visibility of the high bourgeoisie. However, “the main trend in late medieval political life was the resurgence of aristocratic power and the high visibility of the great nobles in politics and government. In other words, neither the rebellions of peasants and artisans nor middle-class constitutionalism had a significant political outcome” (Cantor, 563).

their rivals and imitators, and they shed light on the values current in the fifteenth century” (Belozeskaya, 4). Thus, the ideology of Philip the Good’s court worked to identify Burgundian culture not only within his court but also throughout European courts. Burgundy imitated many sources to create its unique culture, but was in turn imitated throughout Europe.

The Feast of the Pheasant exemplifies the culture of imitation that defines the court of Burgundy. The Feast was possible in part because Philip was immersed in a culture of literary and fantastic imitation. The Feast of the Pheasant was itself an imitation of Philip’s literary-ideal driven culture, created out of an imitation of the *Voeux du Paon*, a late entry to the Alexander cycle. And in turn, as with much of the Burgundian courtly culture, the Feast of the Pheasant spread as Philip continued to accrue vows after the feast was over. The imitation that the Feast of the Pheasant exemplifies can be found particularly in its use of the images of Gideon and Jason, Arthur and the Round Table, Alexander the Great, and the Order of the Garter.<sup>85</sup> Thus, the Feast of the Pheasant drew its inspiration from a host of literary legends, and not only from the *Voeux du Paon*.

The Feast of the Pheasant drew upon so many sources for its inspiration and imitation that it would be impossible to trace them all in this thesis. However, it is clear from the research already presented in this paper that Philip the Good took his inspiration partially from the *Voeux du Paon*. It cannot be ruled out that Philip knew about, and wanted to also imitate, Edward I’s Feast of the Swans, though there is also no clear evidence that he did. Additionally, the Feast of the Pheasant was explicitly imitating several legends at various points: Jason and Gideon were

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<sup>85</sup> It also exemplifies a culture of imitation and symbolism that was manifested in other manners, particularly literature and art (more specifically with the paintings of Jan Van Eyck).

represented as characters in plays during the banquet.<sup>86</sup> King Arthur and his round table were also present through the Order of the Golden Fleece, Philip's imitation of the round table. The Order of the Golden Fleece was itself an imitation of other knightly orders, specifically that of the Order of the Garter, itself an English order. Philip's imitation of an English order might insinuate, to an uncertain degree, that Philip may have been imitating Edward I's Feast of Swans, as well.

Outside of taking vows on a pheasant, Philip's banquet has one other main feature that recalls Edward I's Feast of the Swans. The entire celebration was comprised of a series of tournaments and banquets that terminated in the Feast of the Pheasant. The event began with a joust, wherein Adolphe de Clèves played the Swan Knight. An entourage of other knights followed the Swan Knight from the Order of the Golden Fleece, such as the Comte d'Estampes. Following the entourage of knights, a large swan constructed with great art followed wearing a crown and the arms of the house of Clèves. Two crossbowmen were on either side, as well, to threaten anyone who would approach. The Swan Knight led this party, dressed in full armor—covered in white damask, of course. The Swan Knight then acted as the main knight in a joust, in which many knights participated, including the Count of Charolais and Antoine the bastard. After the joust, the Feast of the Pheasant began (Cartellieri, 180).

The Swan Knight recalls a long literary tradition that evokes the crusades. Because the entire Feast of the Pheasant is rife with the propaganda Philip the Good employed in order to recruit troops for his crusade, interpretations of the Swan Knight often stop at its connection to literary tradition and crusading. Additionally, little to none of the French scholarship mentions the Feast of the Swans. It is therefore no surprise that none of the scholarship on the Feast of the

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<sup>86</sup> This is in part an allusion to the Toison d'Or, whose symbol is a golden fleece that is tied first to Jason, and then to Gideon (to Christianize the knightly order).

Pheasant includes the possibility that the Burgundian Swan Knight was not only was an allusion to the crusades, but it was possibly a tongue-in-cheek reference to Edward I's Feast of the Swans. After all, Edward's ceremony is the only other instance in the knightly bird vow cycle that is an historical event rather than literary text. Additionally, Edward I's vow includes a stipulation to go on a crusade, a situation parallel to Philip's interests.

Through the Feast of the Pheasant, Longuyon's version of courtly life was translated to reality from fiction. It is interesting to trace the evolution of knightly bird vows as it moves back and forth between literature and history. Edward I started this trend by imitating the King Arthur stories he loved and creating the Feast of the Swans. Jacques de Longuyon wrote the *Voeux du Paon*, which was itself imitated and continued through the *Restor* and the *Parfait*. These used Alexander the Great as the context for stories, but did not maintain historical accuracy. The next step was in the *Voeux de l'Épervier* and the *Voeux du héron*, wherein history and literature combined. Both of these texts are fictional, although they are presented as chronicles of historical events. The last example is the Feast of the Pheasant, which used literature to create a fantastical ceremony inspired at least in part by all of these previous stories and events. All of these instances imitate each other. Though the Feast of the Swans is chronologically the first ceremony, it is not credited as the origination of knightly bird vows. Instead, the *Voeux du Paon* is typically credited as the original source. Most scholars seem to ignore the Feast of the Swans in their analyses of this grouping of late Medieval French texts. The Feast of the Swans is equally part of the cycle because it takes the Arthurian legends that Edward I loved and brings a piece of their ceremonial idealism into reality.

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