In many cases, the literary hyperbole of the romance genres provides the opportunity for researchers to discern the realistic elements of these sources. With proper focus on the value of such cultural ideals and the historical paradigm shift that inspired them, the usefulness of these stories become evident.\(^1\) Chrétien de Troyes' *Lancelot, or the Knight of the Cart* is a classic example of romantic literature of the twelfth century. This paper will examine the impact of the twelfth century renaissance in France and Germany and the wider European sphere and how this intellectual blossoming of law, literature and urbanization manifested in a more educated, secular and refined urban Europe. In particular, the role and popularity of the romance genre at medieval courts will be explored, and what aspects of these stories which appealed so greatly to courtly audiences reflect the realities of the changes that this renaissance brought. This paper will further examine this literature and 'courtly culture' for the historical insight they can provide today and how this intellectual stimulation reshaped the illiterate, religious and agrarian face of the earlier Middle Ages.

The twelfth-century renaissance has been used as an example of how the Middle Ages was a more dynamic period than previously described.\(^2\) The timeframe of this renaissance is considered roughly 1050 to 1250 CE; though widely disputed amongst recent historians, this serves as a useful framework for the beginning and end this medieval renaissance period. It is


first important to note that the rejuvenation of European education was not uniform across the continent, but was based on certain educational conditions of forerunning regions of the period. France and Western Europe expanded during the late eleventh century, coming into new contact with foreign cultures. As a result, European scholars now had access to Arabic, Greek and Latin texts. There was also a revival in legal discussion in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries which was inspired heavily by the rediscovery of the Code of Justinian. This was the compendium of Roman law, written by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian in the sixth-century. The translations of works by classical authors Plato, Aristotle, Euclid, Ptolemy and Galen by Muslim philosophers also were particularly influential. These new sources of intellectual stimulation dramatically altered the cultural character of Western Europe. For example, French translations of Greek and Arabic texts were completed at Bury Abbey, France in 1151. These included research performed on chemistry and a Latin copy of Al-Khwarizmi’s treatise on Hindu math. Works such as these were precious gems of knowledge that, beginning in the twelfth century, had only just reached the audiences of Western Europe.

Education is therefore considered critical to the concept of a ‘renaissance.’ At this time there was a transition of intellectual importance

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5 Ibid, p. 228.
6 Ibid, p. 220.
from monasteries and cathedral schools to universities. As secular institutions, universities drove forward the expansion of literature without religious themes; monasteries were still concerned with religious matters, while cathedral schools offered what was considered a ‘basic education’ at the time. The emergence of secular institutions of knowledge is one of the longest-lasting effects of this period. Moreover, it was Aristotle who was the most influential in this period due to the huge variety of material he discussed, spanning from logic and metaphysics to ethics and biology. Intellectuals were highly influenced by Aristotelian naturalism and other rediscovered concepts of the classical world. Theology was unable to initially solve the problems that Aristotle’s works presented on subjects like creation, form and matter, as well as the nature of time. He was sensational in the period because many of his views were incompatible with Christianity, resulting in a strong movement against Aristotelian literature by the Catholic Church. However much the religious elements of medieval society may have wanted to suppress Aristotelian logic, its enormous popularity among European intellectuals prevented this. Arguably the centre of this new trend of intellectual thought began in Paris during the twelfth century, and eventually Aristotle became a major part of the University of Paris’ curriculum in 1255. The twelfth century also saw the appearance of ‘humanism’ and triggered debates on the nature of the individual. In particular, this refinement of the individual can be observed in

8 Swanson, The Twelfth Century Renaissance, pp. 12-17.
10 Swanson, The Twelfth Century Renaissance, p. 135.
the characters of the romance genre. In this way, Aristotelian logic was influential on the ideals of the secular world itself.12

Peter Abelard was also very significant figure in the development of secular education and writing. A twelfth century philosopher, Abelard put forth novel ideas on logic, semantics and metaphysics that were inspired by the work of Aristotle.13 His contributions to medieval philosophy of logic and language were of great influence to medieval scholars, and in many cases formed the basis of scholasticism and Latin-influenced secular philosophy. He is typified as a secular philosopher because his views were often considered heretical. One particular revision of ecclesiastical thought was Abelard’s belief that the laws of God are rooted in those of natural law, which implied that these were accessible to any adult, regardless of a priest’s role between God and man.14

The twelfth century renaissance and its expansion of Western culture and learning therefore brought about a secularism that naturally conflicted with the Catholic Church. This period contained many events involving conflicts between kings and popes, but likely the most formative being the lay investiture dispute between Pope Gregory VII and Henry IV on the right to appoint and invest bishops. Tensions between spheres of influence grew bitter when Henry, after being humbled by the pope in the mountains of Canossa, established an anti-pope and invaded Italy. As Gregory fled and the Concordat of Worms declared equal jurisdiction of

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investing power to bishops in 1122, the clashes between the secular and ecclesiastical world would only worsen.\(^\text{15}\) Events like these reflected the growing confidence in secular authority, best realized in the form of national monarchies. These gained significant power in Europe, increasing throughout the medieval period, and for the purposes of this paper, in France under the Capetians.

Despite such emphasis on the secular world's influence during the renaissance, it is now believed that it did not overtake the religious world. The church itself did not change significantly, but progressive secular thought influenced new ways of looking at the universe.\(^\text{16}\) What is also emphasized by historians today is the utilization of reason, or scholasticism, and how that new method of thinking paved the way for the scientific reasoning of the later renaissance from the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries. There was also new emphasis on individualism and how it deeply affected European culture, and in many way how it was reflective of a newly emerged urban population.\(^\text{17}\)

France, Germany and much of Western Europe saw the significant growth of urbanized centres since the tenth century. Further, it was the twelfth century that realized a more distinctive independence of towns and cities in general. Much of this can be attributed to a growth in secular authority, the new wealth of individuals outside of the nobility (such as


\(^\text{17}\) Ibid, p. 236.
merchants and craftsmen and their accompanying guilds), and the development of the ability of towns to promote and defend their own localized interests. Many historians now consider the Investiture Contest to have emboldened localized secular authorities to become more independent and assert their own interests. After Henry IV’s invasion, many Italian towns and cities began to adopt Roman titles for administrative authorities and units, such as consul as an important urban official, or communion to describe the social culture and cohesion of urban centres. The influence of secular confidence in the form of Henry IV’s challenge to the papacy was echoed in more local attempts to assert their own authority over towns and cities, and the impact of Roman law and urban tradition can also be seen represented in this movement.

The justification of regional governance was the product of many events and developments from the twelfth century onwards. Some examples include the Treaty of Constance, which in 1183 realized the right of cities allied with Frederick I’s Lombard League to their own fortifications and membership. Unfortunately, this treaty did not outline any individual authority of member cities. In practice, the increased independence of towns and cities came as a result of logistical difficulties in feudal centralized government. In the cases of northern Italy and throughout Western Europe, kings and emperors could not actively control each individual urban jurisdiction and instead relied upon local

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authorities to represent their authority. The loyalty of these administrative became defined by national monarchies during this time, but the practical circumstances of the system eventually led to greater localized autonomy.

This lack of ability to suppress the outspoken nature of urban residents was best typified by urban revolts. Earlier, the rebellion of Cambrai in 1077 warned of similar events, when the people of the city swore to maintain a ‘commune’ to better protect their own interests. A similar revolt took place at Cologne in 1112, with the same outcome. Monarchical responses to these uprising were varied, but occasionally violent, as was the case when Frederick I destroyed an urban attempt at a commune at Triers in 1218 when the local archbishop requested outside intervention. Overall, the increasing tendency of urban citizens to band together and represent their own interests led to a natural flow into higher local authority. Later mediation for urban revolts had, by the thirteenth century, taken on the form of council meetings and local assemblies, reflecting a more developed legal, political and social conscience present amongst the urban medieval population.

Before an accurate analysis can take place, the connection between the twelfth century renaissance and romance literature must be established. By extension, this issue highlights the murky origins of troubadour poetry.

21 Ibid, pp. 176-178.
itself.\textsuperscript{22} Provence was once thought the birthplace of European vernacular poetry until the discovery of the Mozarabic vernacular in Spain. Regardless, Provence still can be considered a major centre of narrative literature of this time. One historian analyzed existing theories on the origins of vernacular literature. Of these, two he considered most likely: the 'Hispano-Arabic' theory, which argues that the origins of troubadour vernacular poetry of Provence were inspired by the cultures of Muslim Spain to the west; the second was, as this paper supports, that the twelfth century renaissance created the social conditions that allowed troubadour literature to reach a golden age. The complexity of the genre at the time can be attributed to a more educated and receptive audience, one less concerned with cultural survival.\textsuperscript{23}

The influence of Muslim Spain should not be completely dismissed. The Muslim world at this time was like a great railroad of culture, and the Arabic translations of classical authors could have easily entered Western Europe through Muslim Spain. Although this would require a small number of bilingual intellectuals, the interest in these works would surely have fuelled a small industry of translations.\textsuperscript{24} Though we do know this occurred, it is perhaps more encompassing to see this potential phenomenon within the context of the renaissance itself; the interest in gaining new types of secular knowledge is a distinguishing aspect of this period, and would have increased intellectual receptivity to Arabic translations. Also, the


\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, pp. 15-17.
appearance of such large amounts of translated works could only have been possible with a newly-emerging class of bilingual scholars, interested in classical works of the secular world.

As mentioned, the increased knowledge of classical writings also greatly impacted the literary works of the era. Western European writers considered themselves to be the inheritors of a classical tradition of writing. This has been described as a flow of Western culture from Greece and Rome to medieval France. This concept of cultural inheritance carried over into the literature of the twelfth century, and as a result, the setting of many romances took place in scenes of antiquity such as the legendary cities of Troy and Thebes. Chrétien de Troyes was influenced by these classical texts, as well as Celtic stories of Europe. Greco-Roman influences in the form of writers like Plato and Ovid are very clear in the themes of romance literature and helped define the genre for trouvères like Chrétien. Also present are themes potentially inspired by tales like that of Irish saints and their epic journeys, namely Saint Patrick. Europe’s linguistic culture would naturally have had localized influences, and from a combination with the classical works of the ancient world, new forms of secular literature emerged as part of the rippling intellectual impact of the twelfth century renaissance. Regardless, Chrétien de Troyes set the standard for the romance genre with his five books of Arthuria: Erec and Enide, Cliges, Yvain, Lancelot, and Percival. The setting of King Arthur’s court became the stage for Western European narratives up to and throughout the sixteenth

27 Ibid, p. 146.
century. In addition, Chrétien’s work was one of the first examples of telling a narrative romance which became the precursor to the modern novel in its style, narration and format. This all collaborated to form the distinct intellectual character of twelfth and thirteenth century Europe.\textsuperscript{28}

Latin was the language of clergy and vernacular was that of the layman. The slow deterioration of the exclusivity of literature education for clergy meant the cultural boundaries of the church and laity could manifest in secular literature like romances.\textsuperscript{29} The consequences of the vernacular language shift were first that it ensured a much wider audience for literary narratives, and it secondly distinguished literature from the studies of philosophy and theology as a separate focus. Therefore there was a definite change in the subject matter of vernacular poetry, where stories were told in verse, rather than the strict prose and rhyme of classical works. Where previous European poetry had been concerned with wars of cultural survival against Muslims and Norse raiders, the shift to romance literature was of a more leisurely society. This shift, from epic to romance, was one that marked a more elegant and complex form of literary narrative, which is useful due to its reflection of the aristocratic values during the twelfth century romance. Vernacular literature and non-Latin European culture are considered the most lasting elements of the twelfth-century renaissance today.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{28} Cook and Herzman, \textit{The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century}, p. 236.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid, p. 276.
\textsuperscript{30} Melve, “‘The Revolt of the Medievalists’. Directions in Recent Research on the Twelfth-Century Renaissance,” p. 248.
Whereas epics like *The Song of Roland* or *Raoul de Cambrai* had focused on themes of good versus evil, romances focused more on less obvious contrasts. It was often based around a lifelong journey, which was usually for the sake of a lady in distress. These were intensely emotional stories, and were deliberately obsessed with the new concept of courtly love. The literature inspired by twelfth century romance therefore relied heavily upon idealism, and can be described as a social commentary on the deterioration of law and order, and also a culture that now judged itself with a more worldly perception. In Germany, the works of Chrétien inspired writers like Wolfram von Eschenbach and Hartman von Aue to write Arthurian narrative literature in the romance style. It becomes clear that the type of chivalric values held by the French aristocracy of the time were also promoted by German minnesingers. Examination of the concept of *gewalt* within German romances reveals a similar shift of themes to that of French literature. Where *gewalt* once referred to the sheer physical capacity of a knight to achieve his goals, by the time of Eschenbach this applied more to social virtues like status and pursuit of praise. Clearly the societies of both regions were becoming more interested in social and courtly values than merely those of the battlefield. Based on such evidence we can conclude that the twelfth century renaissance was able to inspire a similar shift in values for both German and French secular writers and their audiences.

The reason for a shared popularity in such themes was that France represented the cultural zenith of Western Europe at this time, and was an

established centre of education by this time. The newly emerging urban, cosmopolitan educated and noble class of the region espoused a level of cultural pride and development that harkened back to the classical era. These romance stories idealized King Arthur’s court as a reformation to a civilized society. The theme of perfection of self reflected what medieval nobility wished all of society was like. The reason for such introspection can again be traced back to the rise of humanism and classical legal and philosophical thought. Poets could not have fashioned their own ideals about their society without the new popularity of the idealized past as a framework. Chrétien’s Lancelot was undoubtedly a model knight: valiant, powerful, but also dedicated and mannerly. For example, Chrétien described the gentleman warrior meeting the Queen in a way that diverged from previous descriptions of ideal warriors: “As soon as Lancelot saw the Queen leaning on the window-sill behind the great iron bars, he honoured her with a gentle salute. She promptly returned his greeting, for he was desirous of her, and she of him. Their talk and conversation are not of vulgar, tiresome affairs.”

Lancelot was therefore not a twelfth century literary hero because he could defeat an army at will, like in earlier stories like The Song of Roland. He was a hero because he played by the rules, and showed respect for custom and etiquette at all times, while his martial prowess was only demonstrated within the structure of formal duels and jousts and his desires were tempered by social expectations and respect. The

mostly urban and noble audiences of such stories were clearly more willing to idealize Lancelot than Roland; where the former is a warrior with restraint, rather than the proud and stubborn warrior of the past. Centred at urban courts, the aristocratic culture of the twelfth century renaissance period was sharply divergent from previous medieval cultures of the nobility.

The reason for such a shift in the social character of medieval Western Europe is critical to this topic. Much of the answer lies in the relationship between these new cultural values, education, and the growth of secular authority. The most striking result of these combined elements, alongside the feudalistic political framework, was urbanization. In this period, the regions of feudal control were centred on towns and villages. While not only providing an obvious seat of power for jurisdictions, towns became centres of secular and religious authority, as well as havens for urban professionals like moneylenders, government officials and lawyers. Furthermore, the commercial apogees of medieval Europe were in the urban centres as well, with artisan and merchants locating there for access to goods and customers – many of whom became as powerful, if not more so, than some local nobility. Important events, such as trials and tournaments were held in towns, due to the number of spectators and professionals, but also because the nobility inhabited these regions. Chretien's *Erec and Enide* and *Lancelot* all included duels taking place within
town settings, and for the former, a crowning ceremony in a larger city.\textsuperscript{34} The author was clearly reflective of not only noble culture, but also the growing urbanization of Western Europe.

The centralization of secular authority and intellectual development in towns and cities are markedly represented within romance literature. French people did indeed live relatively luxuriously in urban centres for the thirteenth century and the stories were written for educated, ‘burgher’ audiences.\textsuperscript{35} Troubadours did not solely write about chivalry, and occasionally espoused some genuinely cynical attitudes, particularly towards the clergy. The thirteenth century also produced versed short stories known as \textit{fabliaux}, which continued the anti-ecclesiastical sentiments, and even began to mock earlier chivalrous quests and pointless adventures of earlier literature. One famous example of \textit{fabliaux} was \textit{Aucassin and Nicolette}, which espoused many chivalric beliefs, but also mocked them along with religious institutions and the clergy. This clearly reflected a rapidly developing social and literary culture, influenced by an increasingly cosmopolitan outlook of the urban medieval population.\textsuperscript{36}

Courtly romances are effective representations of this emerging outlook on society. However, the degree to which nobles tried to emulate their own ideals cannot be known. The expectations of society are rarely the same as the actual culture that defines them, and our only source on the ideals of courtly society comes in the form of romantic literature. All courtly

\textsuperscript{35} Burns, \textit{Western Civilizations: Their History and Their Culture}, p.358.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid, p. 359.
romances of this period were inspired by the French descriptions of high social life in their literature; however the application of courtly values can be used for much of Europe in general due to the enormous influence of French culture at this time. Overall, the vast amount of examples of courtly literature outweighs the other windows into this culture; plenty of today’s research revolves around deciphering the clues embedded within such stories. The image of King Arthur at Whitsuntide revolved around exaggerations that were rooted in some reality, though the daily life of the average person was left out from these narratives entirely. Courtly romances can actually be considered handbooks for the culture of the aristocracy of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Evidence of the etiquette of the period can be seen in *Lancelot*, particular when the hero is being cared for by nobles: “She bids the lads remove the saddles and curry the horses well; no one refused to do this, but each carried out her instructions willingly. When she ordered the knights to be disarmed, her daughters step forward to perform this service. They remove their armour, and hand them three short mantles to put on.” Such courtesies further enforce that the more sophisticated cultural expectations of the aristocracy at this time.

Studies of cultural representation and its relation to the literary narratives show that they exist as the best primary evidence of noble culture at this time. Historical research in some cases has adopted the approach to the subject of romantic literature as a historical source while using more

38 Ibid, p. 5.
regional-specific sources, thereby sweeping away the distractions of literary discourse. This method of utilizing these sources focused entirely on the sociological aspects of history. In other words, kernels of truth exist within courtly literature, and that the court itself represented a social network of aristocratic individuals, bound together by a shared concept of honour. On the social level, the concept of honour was central to the internal dynamics of the court. Honour was ‘distributed’ at important secular ceremonies, between nobles, and from battle. Honour as a shared value was important to the sociology of the medieval court because it gave the courtly setting a social value. Furthermore, a ‘courtly person’ was one thoroughly submerged in the culture of the local court, and so the values represented by romances were an isolated cultural reflection of a specific class of people. Some authors consider Arthuria to be the setting for how the aristocracy understood their own society. The characters of Lancelot expressed such values in their courtesy to the knight-errant: “...in their joy they at once relieve the knight of his armour, and honour him in every way they can. Then they wash their hands again and take their places at the meal, which they eat with better cheer than is their wont.” This is an aspect of writing for purposes beyond purely religious themes, such as the virtues of knighthood and the conduct of aristocrats in a courtly setting.

The method by which honour was gained within such narratives had changed within the secular world as well. While previous tales had

42 Jackson, Courtly Culture and Aristocratic Representation in Medieval Germany: Some Recent Work, p. 86.
The medieval renaissance, urbanization, and the echoes of Arthuria emphasized violence and loyalty, romances praised more polite and courteous aspects of chivalry – which is why this genre more than any best reflects the twelfth-century renaissance. The heroic characters of these stories adhere to social and political customs, often at the expense of their ability to defeat their foes. This speaks volumes about a medieval culture armed with a new respect for law and order. In this sense, romance literature represented a new conscience for the elite of the period, and heroic figures like Lancelot were idealized representations of these more sophisticated values that the renaissance and urbanization had produced. Arthur’s court was intended to represent the calm order that the European world needed, in the minds of contemporary intellectuals. Monsters themselves were metaphors for wild emotions and a deterioration of order, and the knights of Arthur’s court were those who conquered these destabilizing elements. Important to this idea is the impact of fear on a cultural level: a more stable society meant more reckless and personal adventures for the heroes of literature, as opposed to epics, wherein the fear for cultural survival was particularly evident.  

In many cases, the use of Arthur’s court as a setting has been popular because it represents an image of the past that is deliberately murky and unknown. Within this vague world of Arthur, there was constructed the image of an ideal that was revered by medieval society. The allegory of King Arthur’s court has been such a timeless example of law and order that it is still invoked to describe ‘orderly’ medieval society in fiction. Likely, the concept was so out-of-context for the period of the twelfth and thirteen centuries

44 Ibid, p. 3.
centuries that it created an eternal association as an image of the classical world encased in a medieval society. Adam of Bremen, writing in the late eleventh century, described the roles of hospitality and charity. He discussed the role of Swedish nobles in relation to power and their roles as the givers of hospitality. He found that the social obligation of hosting was a pretext for garnering the prestige and status of hosting other members of the Swedish aristocracy. Though Sweden is not quite the focus of this phenomenon, it is clear from contemporary observation that some of the elements of romance literature were indeed realities of medieval aristocracy.

Arthurian romances reflected some real aspects of aristocratic medieval society. Rank was solidified by hospitality or the hosting of noble guests. These nobles would have safeguarded their role as a host in order to increase their social influence. This point emphasizes the social institution of courts. At the centre of this relation to literature, one must examine the role of King Arthur within the stories. Arthur's 'history' started out with Geoffery of Monmouth as a legendary British king. Despite this, by the time Chrétien used the material, Arthur's main role was as the host and arbiter of his court. What became more relevant to romances were characters that resided at this court. In twelfth and thirteen century Germany writings and Chrétien's romances, Arthur was still clearly the individual in charge of the court however diminished his role had become. This aspect of aristocratic society was reflective of actual social intricacies of the courtly culture, many

of which are revealed in the interaction of the characters of *Lancelot*. The theme of the ‘great host’ was very common in Arthurian literature of the period. Lancelot himself was only able to succeed in his quest because of the kindness of strangers. In reality this likely reflected the benefits of being a host granted to that individual. First, hosting others allowed a noble to assert their personality and opinions over the proceedings and other nobles. Secondly, the size of a noble’s courtly entourage reflected popularity and a reputation of being a good host, which provided further opportunities for that noble to extend their influence, power and social status. With a great forum for a noble’s influence, their influence could be elevated by a popular court. Having many guests at one’s court also increased their opportunities to display wealth, which manifested in respect and influence as well.

In the literature, hosts were as idealized as any other theme of romances. The knight-errant usually needed a kind host at some point in their journey; Lancelot himself benefited frequently from the homes and kindliness of strangers. This did not reflect actual social customs so much as it was an idealized aspect of social chivalry. There seems to have been limits to hospitality, which is another aspect of social custom researchers can glean from courtly romances: guests were expected to uphold their part in what was a complex but typical social exchange, as guests were expected to provide good conversation in thanks to their host. Such values reflected more educated nobility, with a highly refined outlook on society that emphasized more than simple martial prowess and loyalty. In this regard, a

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49 Ibid, pp. 15-17.
50 Ibid, p. 49.
knight was expected to be as much a gentleman and a lover as a warrior by the appearance of twelfth century romances. Beyond the role of a mindless warrior, the heroes of this period were far more complex, and followed a strict code of society – a modified form of chivalry. With cultural integrity assured, the twelfth century renaissance was able to mould Roland into Lancelot in the French, and by extension European, literary culture.

It is also worthwhile to examine other prominent features of the romance genre, and the influence of more specific cultural circumstances beyond the renaissance. It is possible that adultery was common enough within aristocratic society that it became a familiar theme for audiences that the author could invoke within the genre. Major themes of romances were adultery and social disparity as potential barriers to courtly love. Medieval audiences had what was clearly a tolerance of love that grew beyond social barriers which may also have contributed to the frequent appearance of the theme of adultery. Lancelot himself famously slept with the queen in Chrétien’s romance. However, such musings are not necessarily reflective of reality within aristocratic society of this period. A popular theory is that young women of nobility often married much older men at this time, and such age differences could very well have generated marital tension. Since romances reflect the culture of nobility it may be that the common theme of adultery reflected a real social issue. As for the more romantic notions of courtly love that were so dominant in this literature, it has been suggested that in some cases, the high rate of mortality for women during childbirth.

decreased their population, which made them more uncommon and thus more prized.

Overall, it is critical to recognize the limitations of courtly literature as a historical source. It can be useful as a window into the ideas and expectations of the medieval nobility of the time. It also reflects the social consciousness and norms of this class of people. Because the average person was either illiterate or unexposed to courtly culture, these pieces of literature are a snapshot of the mindset of the nobility, and to a certain extent the newly emerging urban culture. Since these ideals were near-impossible to achieve, in a way the idealism itself was idealized. Despite the huge role that the renaissance had in shaping the cultural face of Western Europe, it would be fallacious to assume all elements of the romance genre represented only the influence of the renaissance, and it is unlikely these new values evolved without additional social conditions of the period, alongside educational shifts. Nevertheless, as long as the historian can separate the reality from the idealism that such sources can be extremely valuable insights into the new urban social culture of the aristocracy, as impacted by the twelfth century renaissance.

The twelfth century renaissance brought a tremendous influx of new sources of knowledge in the form of Greek, Arabic and Latin sources. This inspired a flourishing of secular learning and writing centered on universities and a subsequent rise of the significance of towns and cities as

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administrative units.\textsuperscript{54} The work of Chrétien de Troyes and similar poets of the romance genre was performed at medieval centres of administration known as courts, which were the cultural apogees of early urban medieval culture. This new literature was so popular that it inspired others, like Gautier d’Arras, and German poets like Hartmann von Aue to translate the works of Chrétien into other languages, a testament to the widespread appeal of literature in a region previously suffering from scant secular literary thought.\textsuperscript{55} Furthermore, the transition and popularity of European vernacular literature over that of Latin was central to this spread of secular literature, and made classical education more realistic to educated urban elites such as lawyers and political administrators. This eventually made literature accessible to a wider audience and greatly increased the amount of work produced that could be enjoyed without learning Latin. Therefore, the twelfth century romance and its impact on secular learning increased the importance of towns as centres of cultural and legal authority. The relation of these elements to medieval courtly culture and administration makes the shift from epic to romantic literary works representative of one of the most formative events in medieval European history.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, pp 5-16.
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