The Song of Roland Study Guide

The Song of Roland by Anonymous

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Introduction

The Song of Roland, generally believed to have been composed around 1130, is the oldest surviving French epic. It is the preeminent example of the *chanson de geste,* or "song of great deeds," a poetic form usually used to tell stories of heroism rather than the accounts of love relationships that became more popular later in the twelfth century. The work knew an astounding success throughout the Middle Ages. Versions of the tale were popular in England, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and Wales until about 1500, but the story languished during the Renaissance (1500-1700). Starting in the late nineteenth century, scholars in France and Germany began to study the tale, noting its relevance to the formation of modern-day France. The epic draws a line between France and Islamic Spain By describing "la douce France" (sweet France) as consisting of a particular people, faith, and territory, the anonymous author lays the foundation for the emerging French nation-state.

The story establishes the eighth-century Charlemagne as the father of France. Particular attention is giving to naming specific barons who were, in fact, not contemporaries of Charlemagne but twelfth-century feudal lords, contemporaries of the anonymous author or authors of the *Song.* The story glorifies these barons by contrasting their honor, valor, and courage against the treachery of the Muslims, then called Saracens. The Christian forces of the French defeat the Muslims with divine intervention and great determination.

The characters of the story are still revered in French culture today. The treasonous French baron, Ganelon, who betrays the noble Roland to the enemy, embodies deception. Roland, Charlemagne's nephew, serves as a model of obedience and bravery in the face of overwhelming odds. *The Song of Roland* serves as the foundation of French literature, giving modern readers insight into the inception of the cultural life of France.

Author Biography

Little is know about the anonymous author or authors of the *Song of Roland.* The oldest surviving manuscript, the Oxford Digby 23, is signed "Turoldus" and written in Anglo-Norman, a language predominant in England following the Norman invasion from France in 1066. Few people outside the clergy in medieval France and England were literate, so Turoldus may have been a monk. One school of thought argues that the tale shows signs of being composed orally, perhaps copied down by Turoldus and other scribes when the story was performed at a feast or celebration. The extent to which the text's first scribes might have added then- own creative touches to the story is not known, but scribes are generally considered to be recorders of traditional tales, and notauthors of original ones.

Another theory maintains that the legend, existing from the time of Charlemagne, was put into poetic form by a single individual in the late eleventh century. The debate over the authorship of the *Song of Roland* probably can never be resolved.

Plot Summary

Part I: The Betrayal of the Peers

The *Chanson de Roland* begins at the close of Charlemagne's seven-year campaign against the Saracens, or Muslims, in Spain. The Frankish (French) forces have conquered all of Spain except for the city of Saragossa, ruled by the Saracen King Marsile. Charlemagne's men are weary from their long battles and yearn to return to their lands in France. Likewise, the Saracens are eager for the French to leave them in peace. Knowing that his army is no match for the French forces, Marsile holds a council to ask his men for advice. The knight Blancandrin suggests that they play upon the French desire to return home by paying Charlemagne rich tribute and promising to follow him back to France and convert to Christianity—never intending, of course, to do so. This way the Saracens will rid Spain of the French army. The Saracens agree that this is an excellent plot, and they send an envoy and a caravan loaded with riches to the French king with the proposal. Charlemagne calls a council of the Peers, his twelve most trusted advisors, to decide what to do.

The Peers encourage Charlemagne to accept Marsile's offer and end the war. Only Roland speaks out against the plan, reminding the French of past incidents of Saracen treachery. His is the lone dissenting voice, and he is disregarded. Several men volunteer to serve as Charlemagne's envoy back to Marsile, but are rejected because of the danger of the mission. Roland proposes his stepfather, Ganelon, and all the Peers agree that he would be a good choice. Ganelon, angered at Roland for putting him in such a perilous position, denounces him and names Roland's supporters among the Peers as his enemies now.

As Ganelon rides off with the Saracen envoy, Blancandrin, the two plot to kill Roland. Blancandrin will be glad to rid himself of a formidable enemy, and Ganelon will have his revenge. Roland and the other Peers will be found in the rear guard of the departing French forces, and Ganelon tells the Muslims exactly when to attack. For his efforts, Ganelon is well-rewarded with gifts by Marsile, Queen Bramimonde, and the Saracen court.

When Ganelon returns, he convinces the French of the good intentions of their enemy, encouraging Charlemagne to accept Marsile's offer and return to Aix. The next day, preparations are made for the trip, and Roland and the Peers are appointed to the rear guard at Ganelon's suggestion. Charlemagne, deeply upset by the danger to which he is exposing his nephew and favorite knight, nonetheless agrees to the arrangement. Charlemagne and his men pull away, leaving the rear guard.

Part II: The Last Stand of the Peers

On the other side, the Saracens are preparing for the attack. Marsile gives his nephew the honor of leading the raid against the French rear guard. Like the French forces, the Saracen contingent includes Marsile's twelve most trusted and valiant warriors. The Saracens, who vastly outnumber the French rear guard, outfit themselves richly for battle in gleaming golden armor, and the sound of their battle trumpets is heard by the French rear guard. Olivier, Roland's closest friend, sees the Saracens approaching, armed for battle, and declares Ganelon a traitor, but Roland will hear no evil of his stepfather. Olivier encourages Roland to blow the horn that will call the rest of Charlemagne's forces back to help defeat the Saracens. Roland contends that to call for help would dishonor him as a knight. He vows to kill all of the Saracens, singlehandedly if necessary. Olivier continues to beg Roland to blow his horn, as the enemy approaches. Finally, when it is too late for Charlemagne to come to their rescue, Archbishop Turpin blesses the French barons so that they will die as holy martyrs, and they engage the Saracens.

With their battle cry of "Montjoie," the French barons confront the Saracens, described by the author as a series of one-to-one combats. The carnage is great on both sides, and the Saracens call for reinforcements. Roland announces his intention to sound his horn to call Charlemagne. Olivier now objects, saying that because they are clearly doomed, it is wrong to call the rest of the French forces back to fight in what is now a lost cause. Turpin intervenes, pointing out that despite the fact that the rear guard cannot be saved, Charlemagne should be called to come and take revenge for them.

Roland blows the horn with all his might, so hard that he bursts a vessel in his brain, which will eventually lead to his demise. Charlemagne hears the horn and knows that his men are in mortal danger. He and his men wheel about to rush to their aid, and Ganelon is arrested and tortured as a traitor. The rear guard continues to fight their hardest, down to the last man. Olivier is struck down, and in his pain does not recognize Roland and almost kills him. The two are reconciled as Olivier dies. Finally, only Roland and Turpin remain standing, fighting the Saracen army. The remaining Saracens flee the approaching French forces as Turpin dies from his wounds. Close to death, Roland arranges the bodies of the French dead, turning them to face the retreating Saracen army so that it will not appear that any French fighters tried to run from the battle. Determined not to let his sword, Durendal, be taken by a pagan, Roland tries to break it on a stone. The mighty sword, however, will not break. Roland retreats beneath a pine tree, hiding both the sword and the horn underneath his dying body. Three angels sent by God come to escort Roland's soul to paradise.

Charlemagne and his men arrive, too late to aid the Peers. The French fear that they will be unable to avenge their men since they cannot pursue the Saracen forces with night falling. Charlemagne prays, and God causes the sun to stop in the sky, giving the French the light they need to ride on. They overtake and decimate the fleeing Saracens. The French make camp, planning to return to France the next day. In the night,

Charlemagne has a vision, announcing a great battle. In yet another dream, a chained bear is attacked by a greyhound.

Marsile had sent for Baligant, the Emir of Babylon (Cairo) to help fight Charlemagne. Charlemagne, meanwhile, is overcome with grief at Roland's death. Only with the encouragement of his men is he able to pull himself together for the burial of the Peers and the great battle to come. Baligant's men attack the French, and great valor and destruction ensue for both armies. Finally, the Emir and Charlemagne meet in one-to-one combat. Baligant calls for Charlemagne to capitulate and become his vassal. Charlemagne refuses and is almost killed. With the aid of God's angel, Gabriel, Charlemagne regains his strength and strikes a mortal blow. The remainder of the Saracen army flees.

Part III: The Trial

Victorious, but at a great price, the French army returns home. The bodies of Roland, Olivier, and Turpin are laid to rest. Aude, the sister of Olivier and fiancee of Roland, learns about their deaths from Charlemagne. She asks God not to let her live on without Roland, and she falls dead at Charlemagne's feet.

Ganelon stands accused of treason to Charlemagne. His argument is that he indeed plotted revenge on Roland, but that he always remained faithful and loyal to Charlemagne. He thus pleads vengeance, which is legal, and not treason, which merits death. Ganelon is seconded by thirty of his relatives, with the mighty warrior Pinabel as his champion. Pinabel will fight Charlemagne's representative, and the warrior who wins proves the case for his side. None of Charlemagne's barons, however, will stand up to the mighty Pinabel. A small, slight warrior named Thierry approaches, volunteering to fight the giant Pinabel. Thierry feels that Charlemagne's accusation of treason is just, since Roland was in Charlemagne's service at the time the vengeance was carried out. God helps Thierry to slay Pinabel, and Ganelon and his thirty relatives are put to death for the treason.

The tale closes with a conversion. The wise Queen Bramimonde, brought to France as a captive of war, converts to Christianity. The narrative stresses that the conversion is not forced, but is her choice, which for the twelfth- century transcriber of the account is a further sign of Bramimonde's wisdom and righteousness. The ancient Charlemagne goes to his room to rest. Hardly does he fall asleep when God send the angel Gabriel to bid Charlemagne go and rescue a Christian king who has been attacked by Saracens. With great regret, the weary king will go to their aid. The battle will never cease for the defender of Christianity.

Part 1

Part 1 Summary

This epic French poem tells the story of Roland, a warrior in the service of medieval King Charles, known to history as Charlemagne. This story of betrayal and revenge contains violently poetic and poetically violent imagery, all told within the context of a profoundly pro-Christian agenda.

Stanza 1 - This stanza introduces the French King Charles, known to history as Charlemagne. At the time the poem begins, he has been at war with Spain for seven years. The only city that remains outside his control is Saragossa, ruled by Marsile, who is a Saracen (Muslim.) The final line of the stanza predicts his eventual defeat.

Part 1 Analysis

This brief stanza explains the situation and defines the conflicts to come, both physical and spiritual. In terms of the former, the stanza predicts physical battle, with aspects and descriptions and consequences of that battle making up the main body of the poem's action. In terms of the latter, it's made clear that that battle is to be fought between Christian and non-Christian forces and that the story is being told from a Christian point of view. The attitude of both the poem and its Christian characters is that non-Christians, particularly Muslims, were pagans and that Christian kings had a duty to conquer and convert such people, a perspective common to European literature at the time.

Part 2

Part 2 Summary

Stanza 2 - Marsile addresses his courtiers and soldiers, telling them that Charles has come to conquer their land, that he has no army left to fight, and that he needs their advice on how to protect their home. Only Blancandrin speaks.

Stanza 3 - Blancandrin is described as wise and trustworthy, and advises Marsile to send Charles an extravagant tribute along with several hostages, the promise to meet him in peace, and a commitment to convert to Christianity. He believes that Charles has had enough of war, and that this apparent surrender will be enough to convince him to go home without attacking. He concludes by saying this form of surrender is better than living as a conquered people.

Stanza 4 - Blancandrin says again that paying Charles such tribute will be enough to convince him to go home, saying that once he gets there he'll celebrate in church. He then says, however, that on the day scheduled for the meeting the pagans will not show up and predicts that as a result Charles will behead the hostages, but adds that the sacrifice of losing a few men is worth preserving their homeland. The councilors agree.

Stanza 5 - Marsile concludes the meeting, calls forth several men including Blancandrin, and tells them to carry tokens of peace to Charles. He promises them great reward if they convince Charles of their peaceful intention. The councilors say they require no reward.

Stanza 6 - Marsile dismisses the councilors and orders Blancandrin and the others to depart immediately. He tells them to tell Charles that he (Marsile) will visit before the end of the month, and that he and the thousand men he will bring will convert to Christianity. Blancandrin predicts that Charles will behave exactly as he planned.

Stanza 7 - White horses bearing saddles and reins of gold and silver are prepared, and Blancandrin and the others depart. Narration comments that Charles "will not see the treachery they've planned."

Part 2 Analysis

The dramatic purpose of this section is to outline the Saracens' plan for preserving the safety of their homeland. It comes across as somewhat short sighted, since neither Blancandrin nor Marsile seems to understand that once Charles realizes he's been betrayed, it's possible that he won't stop with the execution of the hostages but will also resume his attack on the city. This lack of foresight is perhaps connected to the overall purpose of the poem, to paint Saracens/pagans in the worst possible light - in other words, their shortsightedness here is intended to make them appear unwise. Are they unwise, because they're non-Christian, or are they non-Christian, because they're

unwise? Either way, this aspect to the story reinforces its core narrative and thematic perspective.

It's important at this point to take note of the poem's style. Structurally it seems relatively loose, compared to more tightly structured poems such as Shakespearean sonnets. Stanzas here vary in length, lines vary in meter or rhythm, and there is relatively little consistency in the rhyme scheme. There are certain repetitive patterns, however. These include clearly defined pauses in the middle of lines, indicated on the page by extra spaces between words. This creates an effective sense of definition to events and descriptions, with those in the first part of the line coming across as more important than those in the second do. For example, in Stanza 7 lines read

"The olive branch you'll carry in your hands, A sign of peace and your humility"

The structure of the lines indicates that both the olive branch and the sign of peace (which are essentially the same thing) are more important than where the branch is carried and the apparent humility with which it's presented. It can be seen here how the physical structure of the words on the page is relevant to the actual story - the success of Blancandrin's plot depends on the Saracens' being perceived as peaceful, therefore ways in which that perception is created (the olive branch and the sign of peace) are given more emphasis.

Another repetitive element can be found at the end of each stanza. No matter how long the stanza is, it concludes with two rhyming lines, or a rhyming couplet. This brings each stanza to a definitive end, serves as an equally definite springboard into the action of the next stanza, and in general sums up the dramatic and/or thematic point of the stanza that preceded it. A definitive example is the couplet at the end of Stanza 7.

"They go to Charles who rules the Frankish land; He will not see the treachery they've planned."

This not only brings the stanza to a close, but it also brings the section to a close. It also uses the word "treachery" for the first time, stating definitively the purpose of Blancandrin's plan in case it hadn't been clear to this point. It also serves as a very clear, suspense-building springboard into the action of the next section, into which the reader is propelled with curiosity as to what will happen next. In short, the rhyming couplet is extremely effective storytelling.

Part 3

Part 3 Summary

Stanza 8 - This stanza begins with descriptions of rejoicing in Cordres, the city where Charles is headquartered and where no Saracens remain who are neither dead nor unconverted. Charles sits in state with several companions including Roland and Oliver, all seated comfortably on silk blankets, all amusing themselves with games or swordplay. Charles sits on a golden throne, and is described as having a long white beard, being handsome and proud. The poetry here is extravagant in its description of the beauty, peace and rightfulness of the scene as the Saracens dismount from their horses and greet Charles politely.

Stanza 9 - Speaking with flattering diplomatic language, Blancandrin tells Charles that he's come at Marsile's command, describing in detail the gifts of gold and silver he's brought, suggesting that Charles and his men must be more than ready to leave and that, when he goes, Marsile will follow. Charles raises his hands in prayer and considers.

Stanza 10 - After considering at length, which narration says that he's known to do, Charles asks Blancandrin how he can trust that Marsile is telling him the truth. Blancandrin tells him about the hostages, gives him the date of Marsile's visit to France, and tells him of Marsile's commitment to be baptized into the Christian faith. Charles comments that it's not too late for Marsile's conversion.

Stanza 11 - Charles sends the Saracens' horses to the stables, and commands that the Saracens' themselves be accommodated comfortably. Narration reveals that they spent a peaceful night, and that the following morning Charles awoke, attended church services, and sat to consult with his courtiers. Narration adds that he was always guided by the will of his people.

Stanza 12 - Narration lists the courtiers Charles consults, again including Roland and Oliver. Mention is made at this point of Ganelon, and narration comments that he betrayed his people, and that conversation was guided by evil.

Part 3 Analysis

The essential action of this section is straightforward - Blancandrin arrives, presents his case as best he can, and then withdraws as Charles considers what to do. The parallels and differences between Charles and Marsile here are significant. While they both consult with advisers, but Charles is clearly depicted as being both prayerful and thoughtful, where Marsile is portrayed as being more impulsive. Here again can be seen the narrative's pro-Christian perspective, given that Charles throughout the poem is a God-like figure and his war on the pagans as a war to create heaven on earth. This perspective also can be found in the poetic descriptions of both Charles and his court.

The end of Stanza 12, written in a rhyming couplet like all the endings of all the stanzas, clearly foreshadows Ganelon's betrayal and again propels the narrative into the dramatic confrontations of the following section.

Part 4

Part 4 Summary

Stanza 13 - Charles tells his courtiers what the Saracens have said, lists the extravagant gifts they've brought, and tells them of Marsile's promise to convert to Christianity. He concludes by saying he doesn't know what truth is behind the Saracens' actions, and says they all have to think carefully before acting.

Stanza 14 - Roland insists that Marsile is not to be trusted. He lists his victories over the Saracens, and recounts how in each time Marsile has made the same promises and each time revealed himself to be treacherous. He urges Charles to continue the fight he started, and avenge the deaths of the men killed by Marsile's treachery.

Stanza 15 - Narration describes Charles as considering Roland's words carefully, and also reveals that Roland is his nephew. Ganelon approaches Charles, and urges him to not listen to anyone but himself. He comments that Roland doesn't have his (Charles') best interests at heart, suggests that Roland is reckless and proud, and urges Charles to follow the "wise" course and accept Marsile's offer.

Stanza 16 - Another courtier, Naimon, urges Charles to follow Ganelon's advice. He says Marsile has been effectively conquered, and suggests that if Charles acts without mercy, he's guilty of a serious sin. He reminds Charles that the offer of hostages proves Marsile can be trusted, and says again that Ganelon's view is the right one.

Stanza 17 - Charles asks which of the courtiers will go to Saragossa and meet with Marsile. Naimon volunteers to go, and Charles tells him he's too wise and therefore too valuable. He swears by his beard that Naimon will never be put in danger and tells him to sit back down.

Stanza 18 - Charles asks again for a volunteer to go to Saragossa. Roland volunteers, but Oliver tells him he's too aggressive, adding that if Roland goes there's sure to be a fight. Oliver then volunteers to go himself. Charles tells them to be quiet, adding that neither of them will go and swearing by his beard that none of the courtiers will be allowed to leave. The courtiers fall silent.

Stanza 19 - A courtier from one of Charles' conquered provinces then volunteers, saying Charles' own people have suffered too much for too long and deserve to go home. However, Charles, now angrier than ever, tells him to sit and be quiet.

Stanza 20 - Charles asks for suggestions as to who should go to Saragossa. Roland suggests Ganelon, referring to him as "stepfather." The other courtiers agree. Ganelon becomes angry, calls Roland foolish and rash, reminds him that he's his stepfather and therefore worthy of respect, and promises that, when he comes home again, there will be an open feud between them. Roland comments that everyone knows he answers

such threats only with scorn, saying that wisdom is required for this mission and volunteering to take Ganelon's place.

Stanza 21 - Ganelon refuses to allow Roland to take his place, saying that he'll obey Charles' commands to go to Saragossa but will find some way to take revenge on Roland for his betrayal. Roland laughs.

Stanza 22 - At the sound of Roland's laughter, Ganelon becomes so angry he almost faints, telling Roland to now consider him an enemy. He then turns to Charles, and says he'll do as he (Charles) commands.

Stanza 23 - Ganelon continues, saying that he realizes whoever goes on the mission to Saragossa will not return alive. He reminds Charles that he (Ganelon) is married to Charles' sister, that his (Charles') son Baldwin will make a great warrior, and commends him to Charles' care. Charles tells him it's time for him to start on his way.

Stanza 24 - Charles gives Ganelon the official symbols of his authority as his representative. Ganelon protests that he's been put in this position because of Roland, and vows that from then on neither Roland nor Oliver will be considered a friend, challenging them both as well as the other peers. Charles tells him he's too quick to give in to anger and commands him to leave. Ganelon demands the same protection that two previous envoys, referred to earlier as having been killed, received.

Stanza 25 - Charles offers Ganelon a glove, but Ganelon lets it fall to the ground. The courtiers wonder what this rejection means, fearing that it will bring trouble. Ganelon says they'll know soon.

Stanza 26 - Ganelon formally asks permission to leave. Charles blesses him, and gives him a letter to give to Marsile.

Stanza 27 - Ganelon returns to his tent and arms himself for his mission. Several of his fellow knights and kinsmen weep at his departure, saying that even though he's served Charles well he's being sent to certain death. When they ask to accompany with him, Ganelon says he'll face the future alone, and tells them to carry his greetings to his wife, son and friends. He then departs.

Part 4 Analysis

There are two key purposes to this section. The first is to move the action forward as Charles contemplates and defines his next move in the high stakes game he's playing with Marsile. It's interesting to note how it becomes automatically understood that Marsile's proposal is in fact a potential betrayal. Roland suggests that it is and refers to the two murdered envoys in support of his argument, but neither Charles nor any of the other courtiers explicitly comes out and says this is a truth. Here again can be found the attitude of the storyteller and of Christians of the time, in that pagans and infidels like Marsile and the Saracens are automatically not to be trusted, simply because they are who they are and they believe what they believe.

The more important function of this section is to define character and relationship. Charles, Roland and Ganelon are all portrayed in vivid fashion here, in terms of both their individual characteristics and their relationships. The most interesting of these characters is Charles, who comes across as quite complex. He's tolerant and intolerant of his courtiers, patient and impatient, easily swayed by his nephew (Roland) and protective of him. Two aspects of his behavior here are particularly noteworthy, his rejection of several volunteers and his rapid acceptance of Roland's suggestion that Ganelon be the one to go to Saragossa. The reason he does it is never explicitly stated, but it can be deduced from Charles' evident devotion to Roland as his nephew and respect for his skills as a warrior that whatever Roland says, Charles agrees to. This idea is further illustrated by the way Charles, later in the poem, agrees to Roland's demands that he be left alone to guard the pass against the Saracens.

Roland, the central character later in the narrative, is portrayed here as loyal to Charles and determined to conquer the Saracens, but also arrogant, impulsive and vindictive. He continues to display these characteristics throughout the poem, and indeed meets his end because of them. Later in the narrative, it becomes clear that there is a lesson to be learned from his behavior, in that arrogance can bring destruction. Ganelon, for his part, is portrayed as being similar to Roland in many ways. Specifically, they share a certain kind of self-righteous arrogance, a quick temper, and above all vindictiveness. All three of these characteristics play a role in Ganelon's choice to betray Roland and therefore in his destruction. Ganelon's fate therefore becomes a similar warning against arrogance. It's interesting to note that Ganelon refuses to allow his kinsmen to accompany him out of fear that they'll lose their lives. Given that, at the end of the poem, when Ganelon is on trial and Charles executes hostages taken from among Ganelon's family, chances are that at least some of the people loyal to him at this point are executed for their loyalty at the end.

Part 5

Part 5 Summary

Stanza 28 - Ganelon encounters Blancandrin and the other envoys from Marsile. Blancandrin comments on how eager Charles always seems to conquer more land, and Ganelon diplomatically comments that Charles always keeps his purposes to himself.

Stanza 29 - Blancandrin speaks flatteringly of Charles' people, but then suggests that his courtiers give him wrong advice and that Charles is wearing himself out trying to control so much territory. Ganelon suggests that only Roland is guilty of giving bad advice, telling how Roland returned from conquest, gave Charles an apple, and described it as the crowns of all the kings he conquered. He describes Roland as being arrogant and proud, and suggests that if he were killed there'd be an end to war and conflict.

Stanza 30 - Blancandrin agrees that Roland is evil, and Ganelon comments that Charles' people are devotedly loyal to him, because he constantly rewards them with expensive gifts. He says that Charles refuses to disagree with him, because he believes that Roland's military might will win him (Charles) control over the Far East.

Stanza 31 - Narration reveals that as they ride on to Saragossa, Ganelon and Blancandrin agree to work together to seek Roland's death. When they arrive, Marsile greets them, dressed regally and attended by thousands of men, who all listen intently to what Blancandrin has to say.

Stanza 32 - Blancandrin greets Marsile in the name of Mohammed, tells him that the message has been delivered, and adds that Charles prayed to his God but gave no answer, sending one of his courtiers instead. Marsile tells Ganelon to speak.

Stanza 33 - Ganelon speaks in what narration refers to as carefully chosen words. He begins by invoking the spirit of the almighty Christian God, tells Marsile that Charles has commanded that if Marsile accepts Christianity, he'll be allowed to keep half of Spain under his control as Charles' deputy. He warns that if Marsile refuses, he will be taken prisoner, tried and condemned to a humiliating death. Marsile furiously raises a spear to throw it at Ganelon, but is restrained by his courtiers.

Stanza 34 - Ganelon reaches for his sword, referring poetically to it as his friend and ally and vowing that he will not die alone. The pagans comment that the two men must not be allowed to fight.

Stanza 35 - The courtiers calm Marsile down and urge him to let Ganelon finish what he has to say. Ganelon, in turn, vows to finish, and throws down his fur cloak as a challenge. The pagans comment on how bold and noble he is.

Stanza 36 - Ganelon tells Marsile if he accepts Charles' offer that he'll still have power, and will share control over the whole of Spain with Roland, whom he describes as "a partner full of pride." He tells Marsile again that if he doesn't agree he will be attacked, taken prisoner, treated without dignity, and executed. He presents the letter Charles gave him.

Stanza 37 - Marsile opens the letter, narrating that Charles has written in memory of the two murdered envoys and has insisted that the only way to ensure peace is if Marsile sends his uncle, the high priest, as a hostage. Marsile's son says Charles has gone too far and that Ganelon deserves to die. Ganelon prepares to defend himself.

Stanza 38 - Marsile withdraws to consider his options, accompanied by Blancandrin, his son Jurfaret, and the High Priest. Blancandrin tells Marsile that Ganelon has promised that he's on their side. Marsile demands to see him, and Blancandrin fetches him. Together "they plot the treason that cunning will conceal."

Part 5 Analysis

This section functions on two levels, the first clearly related to and defined by the second. On the first level, this section heightens the tension between Marsile and Charles through Ganelon's presentation of conditions that Charles never actually made. This is in turn a key component of the second level of function, to initiate and further define Ganelon's plan to take revenge on the arrogant Roland. His conversation with Blancandrin as they ride suggests that such a plan is in the works, while the presentation to Marsile actually begins to put the plan into effect. The final couplet of the final stanza indicates that Ganelon's plan has worked so far, and will continue to work as the action unfolds.

Ganelon's story of the apple presented by Roland to Charles carries with it echoes of the Biblical story of the Garden of Eden, specifically the point at which the Serpent convinces Eve to eat the apple of knowledge. The implication here is that Ganelon is trying to convince Blancandrin that Roland will one day betray Charles in the same way as the Serpent betrayed Eve. The irony here, of course, is that Ganelon is himself acting the way the Serpent did, betraying Roland and by extension Charles to the Saracens.

Part 6

Part 6 Summary

Stanza 39 - Marsile apologizes for almost striking Ganelon, and swears by the fur cloak Ganelon dropped that by the following evening he'll make appropriate amends. Ganelon expresses his gratitude, and promises that Marsile will not regret it.

Stanza 40 - Marsile vows friendship to Ganelon, and then asks what he truly thinks of Charles, suggesting that he's old and tired. Ganelon tells him respectfully that he's mistaken, that Charles is still considered a great man and would rather die than break faith with his people.

Stanzas 41, 42 - In both these stanzas the same essential content is defined through slightly different phrasing. Marsile comments that he's amazed on how well and how long Charles has survived, adding that he must be longing for peace. Also in both stanzas, Ganelon tells him peace will not be possible as long as Charles is influenced by Roland, commenting that Roland's friend Oliver is also very brave and that as long as the courtiers Charles trusts and relies upon remain alive, Charles will fear no one.

Stanza 43 - Marsile suggests that his four hundred thousand knights are ready and able to attack, but Ganelon says his men would be slaughtered. He suggests that Marsile send an even greater gift and more hostages, saying that Charles will then return to France, leaving Roland and Oliver behind to keep the peace. He then says that if Marsile does what he says, Roland and Oliver can be defeated, and both Charles' authority and his will to fight will collapse.

Stanzas 44, 45 - Marsile asks Ganelon to tell him how Roland can be defeated, and Ganelon describes a battle plan in detail, promising that at the end of the fight Roland will be dead, and he (Marsile) will be free. He goes on to say that with Roland's defeat Charles would also be defeated. Marsile embraces him and promises a rich reward.

Stanzas 46, 47 - Marsile demands that Ganelon swear an oath that Roland will die. Ganelon swears by his sword, "and so forever turned from his rightful lord." Marsile swears by holy relics to kill Roland. Ganelon says amen.

Stanzas 48, 49 - A pair of Saracen warriors presents Ganelon with ceremonial armor, expressing friendship and confidence. Ganelon embraces them both.

Stanza 50 - The Saracen Queen, Bramimonde comments on how much Ganelon is admired, and gives him jewelry to give to his wife. He packs them away and thanks her.

Stanzas 51, 52 - Marsile's treasurer announces that the gift for Charles has been prepared. Marsile then embraces Ganelon, calling him valiant and wise and commanding that he never betray him. He details the reward Ganelon is to receive, and then tells him what to tell Charles - that the keys to Saragossa await him, that Roland is

to be named commander of the soldiers guarding the city, and that when Roland is on his way he'll be attacked. Ganelon comments that he's eager for it all to take place, and rides off.

Part 6 Analysis

Aside from recounting the details of the plan hatched between Marsile and Ganelon, there are several other notable aspects to this section. The first is structural, with the relative brevity of several of the stanzas combining with the repetitive content of others to suggest a certain ritualized formality. Also, the passion that drives both Ganelon and Marsile, for revenge and freedom respectively, is kept under admirable control as they speak and act under the guise of diplomacy and mutual respect.

Another significant aspect of this section is the foreshadowing of Marsile's attack, which of course goes exactly as both he and Ganelon plan - at first. Also, there are two important ironies here, the first in Marsile's command that Ganelon not betray him, a powerfully ironic comment, because he has just clearly indicated he's completely capable of such acts of betrayal. It must be noted here that there is no indication anywhere in the text that Ganelon intends to betray Charles. His determination is clearly to ruin Roland, and Charles is unfortunately caught in the fallout. The second interesting irony is that Ganelon responds to Marsile's swearing on Saracen religious relics with a Christian amen. This makes clear that Ganelon's betrayal is motivated by personal concerns, not spiritual ones. He doesn't hate Roland enough to no longer be a Christian - he won't go that far.

Part 7

Part 7 Summary

Stanza 53 - Narration reveals that Charles has withdrawn his troops and his court to a town called Galne, which had been captured by Roland earlier in the war. He waits there for Ganelon's return and the tribute offered by Spain. One morning, Ganelon rides back.

Stanza 54 - Narration tells how Charles rose early, went to church services, and waited to greet Ganelon in the company of Roland, Oliver, Naimon and others. Ganelon greets Charles, presents him with the keys to Saragossa, and details the treasure and the hostages he brought with him. He then tells how the High Priest and others who refused to obey Marsile's command to surrender attempted to flee by sea, were caught in a storm and drowned. This is clearly a lie, concocted to explain why the High Priest isn't one of the hostages. Ganelon then assures Charles that Marsile will follow him to France and there convert to the Christian faith. Charles thanks God for the successful completion of Ganelon's mission, orders that a celebratory feast be prepared, and that the war camp break up and all the soldiers return to France.

Stanza 55 - Narration describes the first stages of Charles' and his armies return to France.

Stanzas 56, 57 - These stanzas recount a pair of dreams that Charles has. In the first, Ganelon grabs a spear from his hands and shatters it. In the second, Charles is attacked by one beast, attacks another in turn, and defends himself from a third. In both cases, narration tells how Charles' sleep continues undisturbed.

Stanza 58 - The following morning, Charles and his troops arrive at the pass where Ganelon had arranged for Marsile to attack Roland. Charles asks who should be left behind to guard the passage, and Ganelon suggests Roland, saying there's no one as brave as he. Charles accuses him of being vengeful and insane, asking who will go in front. Ganelon proposes another warrior.

Stanza 59 - Roland steps forward and accepts the responsibility for guarding the passage, promising that Charles and his army will remain safe and intact. Ganelon comments that he knows Roland's word can be trusted.

Stanza 60, 61 - Roland angrily asks Ganelon whether he thinks he'll lose his honorable purpose the way Ganelon dropped the glove at Charles' feet earlier. He then swears by Charles' bow that he will not fail, and Charles seems about to weep.

Stanza 62 - Naimon tells Charles that Roland is now so passionate about what he's being asked to do that no one will argue with him. He urges Charles to give Roland his bow and choose good men to leave behind with him. Charles hands over the bow.

Stanza 63 - Charles leaves half his army with Roland, but Roland confidently tells him twenty thousand will be enough, adding that, as long as he (Roland) is alive, the King has no reason to fear.

Stanza 64 - Oliver, and several other lords select the twenty thousand soldiers to remain behind.

Stanza 65 - Roland gives his directions to one of his deputies, Gautier, who promises that whatever happens he'll fight to the end.

Stanza 66 - This stanza consists of poetic descriptions of the valleys Charles and his remaining army ride through on their way home, and of the memories of home that come to the soldiers' minds as they ride. Meanwhile, Charles weeps at the thought of having left his nephew behind.

Stanza 67 - Naimon asks Charles why he weeps. Charles tells him he believes Ganelon will be "the doom of France," recalling his dream of the broken spear the night before and referring to Ganelon having suggested Roland remain behind. The implication here is that Charles believes the spear and its fate to have represented Roland and his.

Stanza 68 - Narration tells how Charles continues to weep, and how he and his soldiers become afraid for Roland. Imagery associated with the wealth Marsile bestowed on Ganelon is repeated, and then narration tells how Marsile summoned his allies, how they prepared and prayed, and rode towards the valley and their confrontation with Roland.

Part 7 Analysis

The action of this section is fairly straightforward, as both Charles and Roland fall into the trap set for them by Ganelon. There are several other noteworthy elements here that add depth and meaning to the bare bones of this rather straightforward movement of plot.

These elements include Roland's reference to the incident of the dropped glove in Stanza 25, which then as now represents Ganelon's rejection of Charles' authority. Roland's comments here represent his confidence (arrogance?) that he won't let Charles down in the same way. Do his comments indicate some kind of awareness of Ganelon's true agenda? Other evidence, discussed further in this section of analysis, indicates not. The point here is probably fairly simple - Roland is telling Charles that he, unlike Ganelon, respects and honors his authority.

Another noteworthy element here is Roland's reaction to Ganelon's suggestion that he be left behind, which is completely appropriate given Roland's arrogance and self-confidence and which Ganelon must have anticipated in his plan, for reasons also defined below. Yet another element is Charles' two dreams, the second of which foreshadows the battle between the French and the Saracens that makes up the final third of the poem, while the meaning of the first becomes clear later in this section.

There is also the poetic description of the landscape through which the retreating soldiers pass, the gloom of which echoes the gloom of the soldiers.

A final important element is Charles' anger at Ganelon's suggestion that Roland remain behind. It's at this moment that the meaning of his dream about Ganelon breaking the staff becomes suddenly apparent, with the suddenness of the realization triggering Charles' uncharacteristically angry response. It's also at this moment that Ganelon's anticipation of Roland's behavior becomes critical. It seems possible that Charles, who now has an idea what Ganelon has planned, is about to reject the suggestion that Roland remain behind. But then Roland, as mentioned, behaves exactly as Ganelon expects him to behave, arrogantly accepting the challenge to remain behind as a chance to prove his honor to Charles, prove his worth to Ganelon, and show off his ability as a warrior. Roland, in effect, seals his own fate.

The question arises as to why Charles doesn't over-rule him and command someone else to remain behind. It may be that he knows both Roland and Ganelon are right, that nobody is better able to defend the passage than Roland. It may also be that Charles knows that arguing with Roland is futile, that he'll go ahead and do exactly what he wants no matter what he's ordered to do - or not to do. Whatever the reason, the narrative now moves forward on its inevitable course, towards the confrontation between Roland and the Saracen forces in the section that follows.

Another question, as previously mentioned, is whether Roland has any suspicion of what Ganelon has planned. There is no evidence in the text to suggest that he does. In the first place, Roland gets angry when Charles proposes half his army remain behind. It's granted his attitude is at least partly the result of his arrogance, but he's also sure he won't need help, because he has no reason to anticipate an attack. The idea that Roland doesn't suspect Ganelon is also supported by Roland's comment in Stanza 80, in which he responds to Oliver's suspicions that Ganelon knew the French were going to be attacked by saying he doesn't want to hear anyone speak ill of his stepfather.

Part 8

Part 8 Summary

Stanzas 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78 - This series of stanzas introduces Marsile's warriors. The first is his nephew, who rides before him and asks for the honor of killing Roland. He comments that if Mohammed protects him the entire land of Spain will once more be under Marsile's control. Marsile gives him a gauntlet (an armored glove) as a symbol of his authority. Twelve lords then are brought forward. In similar formats in each stanza, both the evil and courage of each warrior are described. Each knight vows to be steadfast, to be the one to kill Roland, and to slaughter the French.

Part 8 Analysis

The first element to note about this section is its repetitive structure and content. This particular technique serves two purposes. The first is technical, in that it serves to build momentum towards the moment when the Saracens march off to war. The second is more story-related, in that the repetitiveness also serves to rouse the warriors' emotions, making them eager to depart. The second element to note here is the dramatization of the poem's pro-Christian, anti-pagan agenda. Without exception, Marsile and his lords are portrayed in negative, bloodthirsty terms. There is thematic value here, in that the poem seems to be suggesting that noble values are only truly noble if they're employed in a battle for a righteous cause. It's interesting to note here that the Christians are the only ones portrayed as righteous. There's no indication that the Saracens, in defending their homeland, are in any way righteous or justified. It's also interesting to note how echoes of this one-sided perspective on morality can be found throughout the ages and particularly in contemporary religious / racial conflicts between Jews and Palestinians, Christians and Muslims, or Communists and non-Communists.

Part 9

Part 9 Summary

Stanza 79 - This stanza contains a detailed description of the armor worn by the Saracens, their flags, their warhorses and their noisy preparations, which are heard in the French camp. Oliver comments to Roland that it seems as though the enemy is on its way. Roland vows to stand his ground well and defend Charles' honor and right to rule. He urges his men to prepare to fight well. "Pagans are wrong the Christian cause is right," he says, and vows to set a good example.

Stanza 80 - From the top of a hill Oliver sees the approaching Saracens, and shouts details of what he sees down to Roland. He comments that Ganelon must have known this would happen, but Roland tells him to be quiet, saying that he'll have no one speak badly of his stepfather.

Stanzas 81, 82 - Oliver takes a closer look at the Saracen army, sees the details of how their armed, becomes troubled, and comes down the hill to tell Roland and the French what they're up against. He then speaks in detail about the numbers of the Saracen soldiers and how well their armed, warning the French that they're going to face a battle like they've never fought before. He urges them to stand their ground. The French respond by invoking "God's curse on those who quit the field."

Stanzas 83, 84, 85 - In each of these three stanzas Oliver urges Roland to call for reinforcements from Charles, and each time Roland refuses, saying Roland says that if he did, his reputation and that of his family would be ruined. He vows that the Saracens are doomed.

Stanza 86 - Oliver tells Roland he would never be blamed if he summoned help, referring to the vast numbers of Saracen soldiers. Roland tells him it's better to die than live with shame, which can be interpreted as a reference to the shame he believes he'd have to live with if he admitted weakness and called for help.

Stanza 87 - Narration describes both Oliver and Roland as heroes. Oliver comments that Roland can now see the Saracen army, calls Roland proud for not calling for help, and tells him if they did have help they could not lose. Roland calls him foolish and cowardly, and vows that he and the army will stand their ground.

Stanza 88 - Narration comments that Roland becomes more and more fierce, as he sees the enemy approaching, telling Oliver that Charles chose no cowards for this mission, that to serve his lord sometimes warriors must endure pain and face death, and says that if he dies, whoever picks up his sword can say that its master served his lord well.

Stanza 89 - Archbishop Turpin rides forward, tells the French warriors they have a responsibility to defend the Faith, urges them to confess their sins and pray for

forgiveness, and grants them absolution. He describes their deaths as a holy martyrdom, the soldiers dismount and kneel, and Turpin blesses them.

Stanza 90 - Having been blessed, the French soldiers remount their horses and prepare for battle. Meanwhile, Roland admits to Oliver that Ganelon must have sold them out, but Marsile will now face Charles' revenge.

Part 9 Analysis

The first key aspect of this section can be found in its reinforcement of ideas about Roland's character. His repeated refusals to call for help can be interpreted as either arrogance or courage, or a combination of both. Given what has been seen of his character up to this point and his eventual death, it would be reasonable to assume it's more the former than the latter, with his apparently needless death coming across as a kind of justice for his arrogant behavior. On the other hand, his death could also be interpreted as tragic in the classical sense, i.e. a noble character is brought down by a single tragic flaw. In the same way as Macbeth is destroyed by ambition and Hamlet destroyed by indecision, Roland is destroyed by arrogance. This is perhaps more likely, given that the poem is called "The Song of Roland." In any case, Roland's refusals also foreshadow of his confrontation with Oliver in Stanzas 129 through 131, in which Oliver throws Roland's words back in his face and says if he'd only called Charles when it was first suggested, the French would have one the battle.

A second key aspect of this section is the reiteration of the poem's pro-Christian perspective. It appears again in Roland's blatant statement of Christian superiority in Stanza 79, and also in Turpin's comments during his blessing that the soldiers are fighting a holy war and that they will be rewarded in heaven. It's interesting to note that in the Muslim belief system there is exactly the same perspective, that warriors fighting in the name of Muhammad and of Allah are also to be rewarded in heaven. It's also interesting to note that in Stanza 91, Roland comments that the Saracens are looking for martyrdom in a manner that seems to indicate that that's a bad thing. He's apparently completely unaware of the irony in the fact that his Archbishop has just said exactly the same thing to the French, but that for them it's a GOOD thing.

The third, and perhaps most important aspect of this section is Roland's realization that he, Charles, and the rest of the French have been betrayed by Ganelon. As previously mentioned in the Analysis of Part 8, this realization is triggered by Oliver's comments and must come as both profoundly surprising and deeply disappointing. It's possible to see it, therefore, as additional fuel for his determination to destroy the Saracens, even in the face of overwhelming odds.

In those odds, there are echoes of a battle described in Greek history/mythology, a battle in which a small army of warriors positioned in a mountain pass held off a much larger army of invaders for several days. The defending warriors have ever since been viewed by history as heroes of the highest order. It seems possible that the author of

this poem intends Roland and his fellow Christian warriors to be viewed in the same light.

Part 10

Part 10 Summary

Stanza 91 - Roland rides his charger to the front of his army, followed by Oliver as all the French cheer their leaders. He urges his deputies to remain calm, commenting that the Saracens are approaching looking for martyrdom and promising them greater victory than has ever been won before. At that moment, the battle begins.

Stanza 92 - Oliver says he has no desire to hear any more words, reminding Roland that he was too proud to call for help. He then urges the French to be brave, stand their ground, and remember Charles. Narration describes them as fiercely riding into battle, and the Saracens as standing firm.

Stanza 93 - Marsile's nephew is now given a name, Aelroth. He tauntingly tells the French they've been abandoned and betrayed, comments that inspire Roland to such rage that he charges forward and skewers Aelroth on his lance. Roland shouts that Charles is neither a fool nor disloyal, and urges his warriors on.

Stanza 94 - Aelroth's uncle and Marsile's brother, Falsaron, who is described as both ruthless and huge, rushes forward and challenges the French. Oliver rushes to meet him, and in identical language to that describing Aelroth's death, Falsaron is skewered and killed by Oliver. In the same way as Roland shouted at Aelroth's body, Oliver shouts at Falsaron's, and then urges the French forward.

Stanza 95 - Another of Marsile's lords, Corsalis, speaks contemptuously of the French and tells the Saracens they have an easy victory ahead of them. Archbishop Turpin hears him, becomes furiously angry, rides forward and skewers him. He, too, shouts at the body that Charles is safe and the French will be triumphant, calls to the French to advance, and charges into battle.

Stanzas 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102 - In each of these stanzas one of Marsile's lords listed in Part 8 is killed by one of Roland's lords. In each case, details of how the Saracen is killed are listed and either Roland or the lord who killed the Saracen comments on the death. At the end of Stanza 102, narration reveals that only two of Marsile's lords remain. They are Chernuble and Margariz.

Stanza 103 - Margariz, described in positive and noble terms, charges Oliver. Narration comments that "the hand of God has turned aside that thrust," and Oliver is barely wounded. Margariz rids on through the ranks of the French, urging the Saracens on.

Stanza 104 - Narration describes how Roland kills fifteen Saracens with his spear, how when it breaks he starts fighting with his sword, and with it kills Chernuble and then his horse. He jeers that Mohammed will not protect him now.

Stanza 105 - Roland charges through the ranks of the Saracens, killing them left and right and staining both his armor and his horse with their blood. Oliver and the other peers are also described as killing large numbers of Saracens, who die or collapse. The Archbishop comments that they're operating under God's blessing.

Stanzas 106, 107 - Oliver's spear is broken, but he continues killing Saracens with the stump. Roland asks why he isn't fighting with his sword, and Oliver tells him he hasn't had time to take it out, because he's been fighting so hard. Oliver then draws his sword, splits the head of one of the pagans and breaks the back of his horse. Roland describes Oliver as a true brother, and the French again advance.

Stanza 108 - Two French commanders attack and kill a Saracen commander, and narration wonders which of them was the faster. Meanwhile, Archbishop Turpin slaughters a Saracen enchanter, whom narration describes as having visited hell. Roland comments to Oliver that he loves to see such blows.

Stanza 109 - The battle grows more intense as more and more blows are heaped on more and more warriors, spears are broken, and flags destroyed. Several young French warriors are eulogized as being unable to return to mothers or wives. Charles is described as weeping for grief, but narration comments that his tears will be too late. Narration also comments on how badly he was served by Ganelon, and reveals that Ganelon was executed for treason.

Stanza 110 - The battle continues, with Oliver, Roland, Turpin and the French described as fighting furiously and slaughtering thousands of Saracens. Again, those who lose their lives on the French side are eulogized. Narration reveals that at the time the battle was being fought, a great destructive thunderstorm sweeps through France. Noon is described as being darkened by shadows, and people who experience it believe the world is coming to an end. Narration comments that nature is grieving, because Roland is about to die.

Part 10 Analysis

This section chronicles the first stage of the battle between the Christians and the Saracens. Details of various deaths are quite graphically described, the valor and nobility of the both the French warriors and their cause are proclaimed in extravagant terms, and the individual victories of the various French heroes are celebrated with the same pride as the sacrifices of those French who have lost their lives. It's nonetheless chilling to reach the end of this section and encounter the poetically evocative description of the storm sweeping through France, which can be taken as symbolizing the storm of death sweeping through its male population. It's even more chilling to encounter the sudden foreshadowing of Roland's death, a jarring revelation indeed following the incessant reminders of his prowess and glory.

Something even more noteworthy about this foreshadowing, however, is its echoes of the story of the Crucifixion of Christ. Specifically, the reference to noon being shadowed

and dark echoes the reference in the Bible to a similar darkness on the day Christ was nailed to the Cross. The fairly obvious intent of this reference is to define Roland as a Christ-like figure, and as such creates similar echoes in other aspects of his life. His life is sacrificed for the good of many, he is the de-facto offspring of the God-like Charles, and is betrayed by Ganelon in the same way Christ was betrayed by Judas. The reference is not intended to define him as perfect, but to define him as noble and good, making the tragedy of his death more painful and even more, as previously discussed, a tragedy in the classic sense. In other words, by portraying Roland as Christ-like, his fall from nobility because of his arrogance carries even more thematic weight.

Another interesting element in this section is the various parallels found in Stanzas 93 and 94 - parallel nephews (Roland being Charles' nephew and Aelroth being Marsile's), and parallel father figures (Ganelon being Roland's stepfather, and Falsaron being Aelroth's uncle.) This means that Aelroth's death can be seen as foreshadowing of Roland's, and Falsaron's can be seen as foreshadowing of Ganelon's. This last death is further foreshadowed in Stanza 109, in which Ganelon's trial and execution is foretold.

Part 11

Part 11 Summary

Stanza 111 - Narration comments that the French have won a great victory, that only one Saracen remains alive, and that the French wander through the battlefield grieving for those whose lives have been lost. "Then King Marsile launches a new attack."

Stanza 112 - Marsile leads twenty battalions to the site of the battle, trumpets sounding. Roland hears the trumpets and comments to Oliver that Ganelon has sent them to their deaths, but they will be avenged by Charles. He describes the battle to come as the most difficult they've ever faced, and urges Oliver to charge forward with his sword drawn.

Stanza 113 - Marsile sees how the Saracens have been slaughtered and urges his army forward. His fiercest warrior, Abisme, is described as deeply evil, having no faith in Christ and no humor, and being dear to Marsile. Turpin sees him and longs to kill him.

Stanza 114 - Turpin rides a powerful and beautiful horse he won in another war into conflict with Abisme, who is skewered in the tradition of other Saracens. The French comment that no one is safe from Turpin.

Stanza 115 - The French soldiers see they're surrounded, and cry out to Roland, Oliver and Turpin for aid. Turpin urges them to be courageous and hold their ground, saying that soon they'll be in heaven. The French soldiers take heart, and fight on.

Stanza 116 - A Saracen described as having witnessed Ganelon's act of betrayal charges the French and, in language similar to that used to describe the deaths of the Saracens, skewers one of the French lords. The French soldiers cry out for God to save them.

Stanza 117 - Roland kills that Saracen, Oliver kills several more, and Roland comments on how furiously angry Oliver is becoming. He urges his fellow soldiers on.

Stanza 118 - Another Saracen, described as having commanded a vast armada of ships and as also having witnessed Ganelon's betrayal, charges into the French army and skewers another of Roland's generals. The French cry out that he died a hero.

Stanza 119 - Roland grieves for the dead general, and attacks and kills both the Saracen and his horse. The Saracens say he's delivered a harsh blow, but Roland tells them they're in the wrong, because they're so full of pride.

Stanzas 120, 121 - An African Saracen skewers another French general, and again the French soldiers grieve. Turpin charges through the fray and skewers the African Saracen.

Stanzas 122, 123, 124 - A pagan called Grandoine charges into the fray on an exceptionally speedy horse and kills six French generals. The French soldiers cry out and say their end is near. Roland seeks out Grandoine, vowing to make him pay for what he's done. Grandoine, although he's brave and powerful, suddenly becomes fearful, when he comes face to face with Roland. He tries to flee, but Roland slices his head and that of his horse, in half. The French soldiers say Roland knows how to fight.

Stanzas 125, 126 - The French fight so fiercely that even though they outnumber them, the Saracens become frightened and call to Marsile to come to their aid. When he doesn't appear immediately, the remaining Saracens retreat.

Stanza 127 - Roland comments to Oliver on how great a warrior Archbishop Turpin is. He and Oliver ride to join him, and narration recounts how during the entire battle four thousand pagans were slain by the few remaining French, how those French were ultimately defeated, and how they made the Saracens pay with their lives.

Part 11 Analysis

This section essentially chronicles the middle phase of the battle, in which the tide turned against the French and in spite of various impressive (not to mention gory) victories over individual Saracens, they realized they were doomed to defeat. Roland, Oliver and Turpin are all clearly determined to go down fighting, and the end of this section sets the stage for the final battle, chronicled in the following section.

Even though this section is mostly concerned with scenes of conflict, there are a few outstanding elements. These include the interesting name of Marsile's general Abisme, whose name bears a clear resemblance to the word "abyss." Given that that word means a dark pit or hole, the reference is clearly to hell, and the fact that Abisme, like the other Saracens, are viewed as anti-Christian at best and demons at worst. Also noteworthy is the glimpse of Roland's righteousness arrogance, when he actually speaks with the Saracens. Finally, Grandoine's encounter with Roland can be seen as dramatizing all the worthy, ideal aspects of both Roland's character as an individual and his metaphoric value as a symbol of Christianity. In the same way as Grandoine quails and flees, and in the same way as the rest of the Saracens also flee, the poem suggests that all non-Christians, when faced with righteousness like Roland's, will be vanquished. The implication of moments later in the poem, particularly the death of Roland, is that such losses are temporary, that ultimately Christian righteousness will win out in the way dramatized throughout the poem.

Part 12

Part 12 Summary

Stanza 128 - Seeing his army decimated, Roland asks Oliver for advice, wishing that Charles were there to help him and wondering how to call him back. Oliver quotes what he said earlier in Stanza 86, "Better to die than learn to live with shame."

Stanzas 129, 130 - Roland, apparently completely unaware of the irony in Oliver's words, prepares to sound the horn that will summon help from Charles. Oliver reminds him that he said earlier that summoning help would mean dishonor, that he suggested three times that Roland summon help and three times Roland refused, and that if Roland wants to call for help now Oliver will not consent. Roland says the battle has become a war, and resolves to sound the horn. Oliver tells him he'll disgrace himself, reminds him again that he refused earlier, and swears that because of the way he behaved, if they live Roland will never be with his (Oliver's) sister Alda.

Stanza 131 - Roland asks why Oliver is angry with him. Oliver accuses of being reckless, saying if he'd listened to him before Charles would be there, the French would have won, and Marsile would have been either killed or taken prisoner. He tells Roland that he's shamed France, and that nothing remains but for them to say their farewells.

Stanza 132 - Turpin rides up and tells them to stop arguing, adding that it's too late to hope for rescue but that it would still be wise to sound the horn, saying that Charles will arrive and still be able to conquer the remaining Saracens. He also says that Charles and his army will be able to carry the bodies of the French home, where they can be buried and not abandoned to hungry dogs. Roland agrees.

Stanzas 133, 134, 135, 136 - Three times Roland sounds the horn, blowing it more intensely each time and mortally wounding himself in the process. Charles hears and prepares to respond. Ganelon repeatedly tells him he's imagining things and urges Charles to continue on his way home. Naimon suggests that Roland has been betrayed, accuses Ganelon of that betrayal, and urges Charles to rush back to help. Charles orders his army to turn around and prepare for battle. The soldiers arm themselves and race as fast as they can back to where they left Roland and the rest of the army, all the while aware that their aid will come too late.

Part 12 Analysis

The most interesting and obvious element of this section is the fact that Roland seems completely unaware that Oliver is absolutely right, that his (Roland's) earlier arrogance has doomed the French. It's almost laughable, in fact, when Roland asks Oliver why he's angry, straining both credibility and respect for Roland's character. That being said, it's a clear manifestation of Roland's tragic flaw, his arrogance and self-righteousness. As such, the confrontation with Oliver illuminates the play's thematically relevant point

about the dangers and foolishness of such an attitude. Meanwhile, the description of how Roland suffers physically from blowing the horn symbolizes how he's suffering spiritually as the result of realizing the truth of what Oliver says. Both his soul and his face are bleeding as the result of his foolishness.

Another obvious element in this section is Ganelon's transparently traitorous urgings for Charles to continue on his way. With the truth pointed out to him by Naimon, Charles finally understands exactly what Ganelon has done, but there is the sense that he has prioritized and decided what he needs to do more than anything is help Roland. Ganelon will face justice later.

In Stanza 130, Oliver's reference to his sister and some kind of relationship between her and Roland is the first time in the poem that both have come up. They foreshadow later developments, particularly Alda's sole appearance in which she faints upon hearing of Roland's death.

Part 13

Part 13 Summary

Stanza 137 - In poetic narration, the sun shines on the armor of the French soldiers as they ride with Charles to Roland's rescue. Charles commands that Ganelon be placed in custody, and that the cooks and kitchen boys guard him. Ganelon is beaten, collared and chained, and placed on a mule's back to await Charles' return.

Stanzas 138, 139 - Charles' army sounds their trumpets to alert Roland and his army that they're coming. Charles' soldiers pray that Roland is kept safe, aware that no matter how hard they fight they will be too late. Charles, meanwhile, is becoming angry and like the soldiers riding with him, spurs his horse hard. They are aware that Roland is doomed, but have faith he's fighting hard.

Stanza 140 - Roland weeps and prays over the bodies of his fallen comrades, fully aware of his failure to protect them and urging them to "Look now to God who never failed a trust." He then vows loyalty to Oliver, and urges him to fight on.

Stanza 141 - Roland and Oliver rejoin the battle, killing dozens of Saracens each. As several Saracens flee, Turpin compliments Roland on how well he fought. Roland urges him to fight on, with many of the few remaining Christians falling before the Saracens.

Stanza 142 - Narration comments on how soldiers who know they're about to die will fight even more fiercely, and describes the remaining French as doing exactly that. Meanwhile, Marsile rides into battle and slaughters several French soldiers. Roland charges Marsile, cutting off his hand and killing his son. The Saracens cry to Mohammed for help, and then faced with Roland's rage, they flee.

Stanza 143 - Narration reveals that Marsile is one of those Saracens who fled, and that a group of African Saracens is charging into what remains of the French army. Roland realizes the moment has come for him and his soldiers to earn their martyrdom, urges the French to fight to the end, and brags about how many dead Saracens Charles will see, when he arrives.

Stanzas 144, 145 - Roland sees the charging Africans and believes this is the moment of his death. He calls the remaining French to follow him, and together they attack. When they see the few remaining French charging them, the Saracens comment to themselves that Charles was wrong. One of them skewers Oliver, saying his death alone avenges the deaths of all those Saracens who've died.

Stanzas 146, 147 - Oliver, close to death but still fighting, kills the Saracen who speared him, and then calls to Roland for help. He continues to fight, slaughtering more Saracens even while he's dying.

Stanzas 148, 149, 150, 151 - Oliver and Roland finally meet. Oliver is close to death. Roland says he doesn't know what to do, say there was no greater peer or friend, comments that Charles will miss Oliver greatly, and then faints. Oliver hallucinates and mistakes Roland for a Saracen, striking him with his sword. Roland suffers no wound, revives, tells Oliver who he is, and confesses that he loved him as a loyal friend. Oliver says he can only hear him now, prays that God bless him, and asks for pardon for striking. Roland forgives him, and they embrace. Oliver crumples to the ground in agony, prays for forgiveness for his sins and for God's blessing on Charles, on France, and on Roland. He then dies, his body sinking to the ground. Roland weeps. Roland bids Oliver farewell, talking about how loyal and brave he was and how intense his grief is. He then faints again.

Part 13 Analysis

Stanza 137 contains two particularly significant elements. The first is the opening image of light striking the armor of Charles' army, a representation of their Christian righteousness in terms of both their basic character and their determination to avenge Roland's death at the hands of the pagan Saracens. The second is the fact that Ganelon is not only put in chains, but placed under the control of kitchen staff. For a nobleman like Ganelon, to be placed in the custody of such lowborn captors is an incredible insult. Charles is undoubtedly aware of this, made this decision not only, because he has no soldiers to spare but also as an indication of how seriously he regards Ganelon's crime.

Meanwhile, aside from Marsile's one and only appearance in battle, the rest of this section is focused on the death of Oliver, who has been a voice of reason and common sense throughout the poem and who, as such, has provided a vivid and profound contrast to Roland. It's interesting to note here how Oliver mistakes Roland for a Saracen and strikes out at him. This can be taken as indicating that on some level, Oliver holds Roland responsible for his death - his striking out of him is, on that level, a counter attack. It's also interesting to note that the attempted blow does no real damage. This represents the way that Oliver ultimately holds Roland blameless.

The references to Roland fainting can be interpreted as more metaphorical than literal, representing as they do the extremity of emotion in which he finds himself.

Part 14

Part 14 Summary

Stanza 152 - While Roland remains unconscious, the remaining French except for Turpin and Gautier (from Stanza 65) have been killed. Gautier calls out for Roland, who regains consciousness, hears him and rushes to his aid.

Stanza 153 - As he rushes to Gautier's side, Roland kills twenty more Saracens. Gautier and Turpin each kill several more. The Saracens comment on how fierce the French are and charge towards them.

Stanza 154 - Roland, Gautier and Turpin fight against an overwhelming assault from the Saracens. Gautier is killed almost instantly, and Turpin is mortally wounded.

Stanza 155 - Turpin, wounded by spears thrust into him, seeks out Roland and vows to continue to fight. He draws his sword and slays four hundred more Saracens. Narration comments that Turpin's triumphs were recorded by one of Charles' soldiers, and left in a French church as proof of Turpin's righteous deeds.

Stanza 156 - Roland continues to fight in spite of the pain caused him by blowing the horn to summon Charles. He blows the horn again. In the distance, Charles hears the call, realizes that it's Roland's death cry, and orders his men to hurry. The men sound their trumpets. On the battlefield, the Saracens realize Charles is on his way.

Stanza 157 - The Saracens realize that if Charles arrives they may as well surrender, and that if Roland survives all of Spain will become part of Charles' kingdom. Four hundred Saracens attack Roland and Turpin anew.

Stanza 158 - Roland sees them coming and fights harder than ever, jumping onto his horse and riding to meet them. Turpin fights alongside him, and the Saracens begin to turn away.

Stanza 159 - Roland and Turpin encourage each other to keep fighting, saying they'll be avenged with Charles returns.

Stanza 160 - The Saracens bemoan the bad luck they've faced that day, the fact that Charles is returning, and Roland's fierceness. They hurl their spears at him, and he passes through them untouched. His horse, however, falls dead from under him. Roland stands alone.

Stanza 161 - The remainder of the Saracens flee. Roland, unable to chase them, because he has no horse, seeks out Turpin. He bandages the Archbishop's wounds, makes him comfortable, and asks his blessing to seek out the bodies of the French generals and lay them at his feet. Turpin gives his consent, saying that the field of battle has been won by the two of them.

Stanza 162 - Roland searches the battlefield, finds the bodies of the twelve generals, and brings them back to Turpin. Turpin blesses them, prays that God will welcome them into heaven, and then realizes that it's his turn - that he will never again see Charles.

Stanzas 163, 164 - Roland finds Oliver's body and brings it to Turpin, who blesses it. He and Roland mourn Oliver, recalling his good family name, his courage, and his wisdom. Roland feels immense sorry and remorse, collapsing to the ground.

Stanza 165 - Turpin takes Roland's horn and tries to fetch water from a stream running through the valley, but he's too weak from his wounds and collapses.

Stanza 166 - Roland regains consciousness, painfully searches for Turpin, and discovers him making his final confession and saying his last prayers. Turpin then dies. In narration, a prayer is uttered that he find peace.

Stanza 167 - Roland discovers Turpin's body, and narration graphically describes his wounds. Roland commends his soul to God, and prays that he be welcomed in Paradise.

Part 14 Analysis

The focus of the action in this scene is on Roland's last stand and Turpin's death. On the one hand, the idea that two warriors, even such apparently invincible warriors as Roland and Turpin, could withstand the onslaught of hundreds and maybe thousands of soldiers seems unlikely. It must be remembered, however, that while the poem has a certain minimal basis in historical events (there was, for example, a real Roland in service of the real Charlemagne), the essential purpose of the poem is to serve as an inspirational Christian metaphor. The apparently limitless stamina and resolve of both Roland and Turpin, in that context, can be seen as ideals by which Christians are urged to live, as being possible because of their Christian faith, and as being essential when faced with pagan foes like the Saracens. This perspective can also be seen as explaining why the Saracens repeatedly flee. The poem is making the metaphorical statement that pagan and non-Christian beliefs will ultimately and inevitably be conquered by the Christian faith.

Roland's searching for the bodies of the generals and returning them to Turpin can be seen as the first of several acts of repentance on his part. Having realized that Oliver was right, and he was/is ultimately responsible for the deaths of so many, he attempts here to redeem himself by ensuring those who died receive the formal, and traditional, last blessing of the church. It's never explicitly discussed, but it's possible to see Turpin as being aware that this is what Roland is doing, and therefore determinedly remaining alive long enough so that he can help Roland accomplish his goal. Meanwhile, Roland's process of atonement continues in the following section.

Part 15

Part 15 Summary

Stanza 168 - Roland feels death very near, and prays that God be kind to his fellow warriors. He takes the horn and his sword and staggers into Spain, eventually fainting, when he reaches a grove of trees in which there are four marble blocks.

Stanza 169 - A lone Saracen, described as having pretended to be dead, sees Roland, realizes who he is, and makes an attempt to steal both his sword and his armor. At the moment he lays hands on him, however, Roland wakes up.

Stanza 170 - Roland beats the Saracen to death with the horn, asking how he came to be so brave as to attack him while he's unconscious. When the Saracen lies dead, Roland realizes he's broken the horn.

Stanzas 171, 172, 173 - Roland, losing his sight and his strength, attempts to destroy his sword by beating it against a rock, saying that no one who intends to use it in an unholy way shall have it. The sword, however, doesn't break. When Roland sees he can't break the sword, he comments on how powerful it is, reminisces about all the battles and lands he won for Charles with it, and prays that God keep the sword from shamefully falling into the hands of someone who would use it against Charles and France. As he tries again to destroy it, his thoughts turn to the relics of various saints contained in its handle and saying that only a Christian can righteously wield it. He prays again that no pagan ever hold it or use it.

Stanzas 174, 175, 176 - Roland feels death closing in. He lies down under a tree, placing both the sword and the remnants of the horn beneath him. He turns his face in the direction of Spain so that whoever finds his body will say that he fought, until he died. He then confesses his sins and prays for forgiveness. Angels fly from heaven to him, as he recalls his victories in battle, his home and family and Charles, as he continues to pray for forgiveness. He dies, and the angels carry his soul to heaven.

Part 15 Analysis

The full symbolic value of Roland's sword appears here, in the last moments of Roland's life. Throughout the poem, it has appeared as a symbol of his power, skill and strength as a warrior. His failure to destroy it, however, suggests that is in fact a symbol of his strength as a Christian. This idea is reinforced by the fact that his attempts are fueled by a determination to keep the sword from falling into enemy hands, which represents the Christian conviction that the faith cannot and will be dominated. The idea is reinforced further by the fact that Roland's attempts are unsuccessful - the sword can't be destroyed in the same way as the Christian faith can't and won't be destroyed. Meanwhile, the poem's belief that in spite of his arrogance Roland fought a righteous

war is developed through the appearance of the angels, who carry Roland's soul to its just reward.

The irony here is that in spite of the holiness of his cause, Roland would still not have met his death if he hadn't been so arrogant. In other words, he dies because of his tragic flaw. This is an example of how an incident can function on two very different levels at the same time. Thematically Roland's death makes a positive statement about the value of Christian courage. On another level, however, Roland's death serves as a warning against arrogance and over-confidence. On a third level, the detailed description in Stanza 174 of the way he positions himself for death foreshadows Stanza 204, in which Charles recalls in equal detail how Roland described the way his body would be found if he died in battle.

Part 16

Part 16 Summary

Stanza 177 - Charles rides into the battlefield, littered with dead bodies of both the French and the Saracens. Charles cries out for Roland, Turpin, Oliver, and several other friends and nobles. He cries out in anguish, asking himself where he was when the battle began. The French soldiers accompanying him, including Naimon, grieve with him.

Stanza 178 - As Charles and his soldiers continue to grieve, Naimon notices a cloud of dust in the distance. He realizes it's the fleeing Saracens and urges Charles to chase them and take revenge. Charles commands several soldiers to remain behind and protect the bodies of the French dead.

Stanza 179 - Charles commands that the trumpets be sounded and rides off in pursuit of the Saracens. When he sees night drawing in, he stops his horse and prays that daylight, be extended so he can continue his pursuit. An angel, who narration says often communicates with Charles, tells him that his prayer will be granted, adding that he'll have his chance for vengeance on "the vile Saracen." Charles climbs back onto his horse.

Stanza 180 - Daylight continues as Charles and his armies pursue the Saracens, overtaking them and cutting through them with their swords. They chase the Saracens into a river, where many are drowned. The French cry out their wish that Roland was there to see their victory.

Stanza 181, 182 - Charles gives thanks to God for victory, sees the sun has finally set, and makes camp with his army on the riverbank. Horses are allowed to graze, and soldiers are allowed to rest without posting a watch - there is no enemy to fear.

Stanzas 183, 184 - Charles sleeps in his armor and with his weapons nearby. Narration reveals that Charles has the head of the spear that pierced Christ at his Crucifixion mounted into his sword, and that its presence guarantees Charles every victory. It's a beautiful night, but Charles continues to grieve for Roland, Oliver, the nobles and soldiers. He weeps and prays for their souls, and finally falls asleep. So do the horses and the rest of the men.

Stanzas 185, 186 - God sends an angel to watch over Charles, who brings two dreams. The first is of Charles fighting another army amidst a terrible storm, an enemy that includes vicious animals, mythical beasts, and a giant lion, which attacks Charles himself. The second dream sees Charles at his court, holding a bear on a chain as several other bears speak like humans and plead for the first bear to be released. A hunting dog attacks the largest bear, and Charles is unable to see who wins. Charles' sleep is undisturbed.

Part 16 Analysis

This section contains a simultaneous end and a beginning - the end of the first part of Charles' war with the Saracens and the beginning of the second. This latter conflict is foreshadowed in the two dreams sent to Charles by God at the end of the section, the imagery of which can be interpreted with relative ease as representing a conflict with the Saracens and the capture of Marsile. It's interesting to note that Charles' assault on the fleeing Saracens is described in much less detail than Roland's battle. The intent may have been to create a greater sense of identification with Roland and the battle he was fighting. It may also be that at this point it's more important for the story to move along. Neither possibility is mutually exclusive, but the ultimate point here is that even though Roland is dead, the war initiated by his arrogance is not yet over.

The two dreams can be interpreted as simultaneously symbolizing and foreshadowing forthcoming events. The first dream is essentially of the imminent battle with the second wave of pagan forces, with their powerful leader, Barigant, represented by the lion with which Charles enters into combat. The second dream is of Ganelon's trial, with the chained bear symbolizing Ganelon, the speaking bears symbolizing his family members as they argue for mercy, and the hunting dog representing Thierry, who is the underdog against whom Ganelon's advocate fights to determine his fate.

Part 17

Part 17 Summary

Stanzas 187, 188 - Marsile has returned to Saragossa and rests, weak from the loss of blood resulting from his hand being cut off. Queen Bramimonde laments the king's defeat, cursing Charles and his warriors and angrily crying out to heaven with their demand to know why they were defeated. Marsile is taken to his chamber to recover. Bramimonde continues to weep and grieve, saying the gods have failed Marsile and their country. She proclaims angrily that Charles can't be defeated.

Stanza 189 - Narration reveals that in the first year of Charles' conquest of Spain, Marsile sent a message to his ally, Baligant, telling him that unless he came to his aid, he will surrender to Charles and convert to Christianity. Baligant has been delayed by his extensive preparations, but now sends several ships and thousands of warriors.

Stanzas 190, 191 - These stanzas describe in poetic language the ships sent by Baligant, and the speed with which the ships make their way to Saragossa.

Stanza 192 - The ships arrive, and Baligant disembarks, followed by his lords. Baligant reveals his intention to pursue Charles into France, kill him, and conquer his territory.

Stanza 193 - Narration comments on how determined Baligant is, and how nothing will change his mind. He summons his generals and sends two of them as envoys to Marsile with the message that he's come to help, that he expects Marsile to be a loyal friend and servant, and that Charles will be made to beg for mercy.

Stanzas 194, 195, 196, 197, 198 - The envoys depart, and upon arriving at Saragossa hear the continuing grief at what happened at the pass. When the envoys visit Marsile, they explain their mission. Bramimonde calls them foolish, speaking at angry length about how the gods have betrayed them all. One of the envoys tells Bramimonde to be quiet, details the extent of the forces Baligant has sent, and tells her his plans for pursuing and destroying Charles. Bramimonde angrily tells him there's no need for pursuit since Charles is already in Spain and will not run. Marsile tells Bramimonde to be quiet, and tells the envoys to speak only to him. He tells them he's close to death, asks to see Baligant, and gives the envoys the keys to the city. Marsile then tells the envoys that Charles is relatively near, reveals his location, and urges that Baligant attack him there. The envoys depart.

Stanzas 199, 200 - The envoys return to Baligant and tell him what Marsile told them, offering details of how Marsile's hand was cut off, how his son was killed along with many of his noble generals, and how he was forced to flee. They also tell him Marsile promised him control of all of Spain if he defeats Charles, revealing that Roland and Oliver were both killed and repeating the story of how Marsile lost his hand, was chased

from the battlefield, and how few noble warriors are left. Baligant orders his armies to get ready to depart, vowing to take revenge on Charles for the loss of Marsile's hand.

Stanzas 201, 202- Baligant's armies depart. Baligant leaves a trusted deputy in charge and rides away himself. He and his armies later arrive at Saragossa, where they are met by a hysterical Bramimonde. Baligant passes her and goes to Marsile, who hands over control of all his lands to Baligant, who says he's grieved to learn of how much Marsile has suffered. He accepts Marsile's challenge to go after Charles, and hurriedly returns to his armies to plan the attack.

Part 17 Analysis

Aside from laying the groundwork for the dramatic developments in the following section of the poem, this section is noteworthy for the increasingly hysterical appearances of Bramimonde, and the appearance and development of the character of Baligant.

In terms of Bramimonde, it's difficult to determine whether she's reacting as a wife to the maiming of her husband, or whether she intends her queenly grief is intended to represent the grief of her people. Both are possible. A more metaphorical, possibility is that hers is actually the disguised voice of the poet, suggesting that defeated pagans like the Saracens OUGHT to question their relationship with their gods, since the Christian God is so obviously the only God that can be trusted. Whatever the reason for her extremity of emotion, the fact that she's told to be quiet on several occasions by several men indicates the way women of both the time the battle supposedly took place and the time the poem was written were perceived, and expected to behave.

Baligant is described in narration as being similar in age and regal/political stature to Charles. There is also a key difference, similar to the previously discussed difference between Charles and Marsile. While clear efforts are made to define Charles as sensitive to the needs and desires of his people, equally clear efforts are made to define both Marsile and Baligant as autocratic and domineering, imposing their will upon their people as opposed to making their will their own. Once again, this contrast defines the black and white of the poem's socio-religious context. Pagans are bad, because they're autocratic, Christians are good, because they're populist.

Part 18

Part 18 Summary

Stanzas 203, 204 - Charles wakes up, the angel keeping watch blesses him, and Charles removes his armor. The soldiers remove theirs as well, and return to the battlefield. There he reveals his intention to find Roland's body. He recalls how Roland once described how he'd be found if he were killed in battle - beyond the battlefield, his head turned to face the enemy. This is a clear echo of Stanza 174, when Roland positioned himself for death in exactly the manner Charles recalls. Charles begins his search.

Stanzas 205, 206, 207 - Charles crosses a meadow where the flowers are stained with French blood, comes upon the stones where Roland attempted to destroy his sword and discovers Roland's body. He collapses in grief. As Charles recovers himself, Naimon and several other nobles join him. Charles says his farewells, praising Roland's great deeds. He collapses again, and again recovers and laments, saying that he has no remaining friends in the world. The other French soldiers echo his grief.

Stanzas 208, 209, 210, 211- Speaking to Roland as though he were present, Charles says that, when he returns home and resumes his court, he believes people will come from all over the world asking to hear tales of him. He also says he anticipates rebellion from his conquered lands as the result of his absence. He grieves aloud for France, and again the French soldiers grieve with him. He then prays for forgiveness for Roland's sins, comments on how intensely he grieves for everyone who lost their lives, and prays for death before he has to return home without the company of so many brave souls. One of the nobles urges Charles to control himself, and suggests that the bodies of the French soldiers be collected and buried in a mass grave. Charles commands that this be done.

Stanza 212 - The French soldiers collect the bodies of their fallen comrades. The various priests in the company them pray as the bodies are buried.

Stanza 213 - Charles prepares Roland, Oliver and Turpin for burial. Their hearts are cut out and buried in a separate, ornate coffin. The bodies are prepared, shrouded, loaded onto a cart, and covered with equally ornate blankets.

Stanza 214 - As Charles prepares to leave for France messengers arrive from Baligant, demanding that he prepare himself for war and challenging Charles to show how brave he is. Charles recalls everything he's lost, and then calls on his nobles and soldiers to prepare themselves for battle.

Part 18 Analysis

On one level, the essential purpose of this section is to detail Charles' extravagant grief and the equally extravagant preparations he makes for Roland's burial. On another level, however, its purpose is to lay the groundwork for the intensity of feeling with which Charles attacks Baligant and his armies. Grief is the fuel for anger here, with the intensity of the grief foreshadowing the intensity of the anger.

The other noteworthy element of this section is the revelation that Roland foretold the manner in which his body would be found. This not only reinforces the idea that Roland was a warrior through and through, it hints at a previously unnoticed awareness of mortality. Until this point, Roland has come across as arrogantly believing himself to be invincible. The implication here is that he had a deeper awareness of both himself and the dangers of being a knight than previously implied.

The final stanzas of this section propel the narrative into the next section, with the arrogant challenge of Baligant's emissaries trigging both Charles' anger and his determination to avenge Roland's death.

Part 19

Part 19 Summary

Stanzas 215, 216 - Charles arms himself and mounts his war horse. He leads his soldiers on, calling for aid from God and Saint Peter. Meanwhile, his soldiers arm themselves for battle. Charles tells his noble generals that the courage and bravery of the nights can be completely trusted, adding that if the Saracens don't flee, they'll pay a high price for Roland's death.

Stanza 217 - Charles names two deputies as replacements for Roland and Oliver, assigns four other nobles as commanders of other divisions, and expresses the belief that none of them will be quick to yield in battle.

Stanzas 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225 - Under the direction of Charles and Naimon, the soldiers organize themselves into their divisions. Each stanza repeats the same essential content, listing the French county from which each division comes, celebrating the divisions' bravery, and describing their armor and equipment.

Stanza 226 - When everything is ready, Charles prays to God for protection, referring to several Biblical instances in which those in peril were protected. After praying to be allowed to take vengeance for Roland's death, he calmly arms himself, mounts his warhorse, and sounds Roland's horn. The French soldiers remember Roland and grieve.

Stanza 227 - Charles leads his men into Spain and their confrontation with Baligant. Meanwhile, Saracen messengers take word to Baligant that Charles and his men are on their way. Baligant rejoices, and orders that his soldiers be summoned.

Part 19 Analysis

This section follows a similar format to previous sections in which both the Saracen and Christian armies prepared for battle. The detailed descriptions of leaders, divisions and armors is repeated, as are the prayers for God's blessing and support. Once again, both sides are eager and believe they're fighting in a righteous cause. The anticipation and suspense build as a result of this repetition, and the energy of the storytelling moves forward into the inevitable confrontation.

Part 20

Part 20 Summary

Stanza 228 - Drums beat and horns sound as Baligant's armies prepare for war. Narration extensively details the armor in which Baligant dresses himself, how attractive and noble he appears, and comments he'd be a great hero if he'd only have been baptized. This comment is juxtaposed with a description of how he draws blood, when he spurs his horse, which leaps a broad ditch. The Saracens give voice to the belief that with Baligant in charge their armies cannot lose, and call Charles a fool for continuing to fight.

Stanza 229 - Narration comments again on how great a warrior Baligant is and describes the courage of his son, who says he'd be surprised if Charles remained in the country to fight them. Baligant says Charles is no coward, but adds that since Roland is dead, Charles has no real power.

Stanzas 230, 231 - Baligant tells his son Malpramis how Oliver, Charles' nobles, and the thousands of other warriors who were killed are worth nothing compared to Roland. He then describes the size and might of the army Charles is now leading, and Malpramis asks to strike the first blow. Baligant gives his consent to Malpramis' request, detailing the noble deputies who will be following his lead. Malpramis thanks him, and Baligant gives him the rights to a conquered land. Narration recounts that, because the gift was bestowed at such an evil time, Malpramis will not live to rejoice in it.

Stanzas 232, 233, 234 - Baligant surveys his army, accompanied by Malpramis. Narration in all three stanzas comments on the size of its various divisions and where they each came from, along with the army's combined courage, readiness for battle, savagery, and lack of love for God. Baligant vows by Mohammed that, when he's through, Charles will no longer wear a crown, and leads his warriors in the charge to encounter him.

Part 20 Analysis

In the same manner as Part 19 detailed the nature and preparations of Charles' armies for battle, Part 20 does the same for Baligant's. The key difference here is that will the commanders, Charles and Baligant, are described in equally heroic terms, Baligant's attributes are undercut by the comment in Stanza 228 about his not being a Christian. It's interesting to note the juxtaposition of this comment with the image of Baligant's spurred and bleeding horse. As if the comment itself wasn't enough of a condemnation, the image paints Baligant as an even blacker soul, and therefore deserving of the defeat he inevitably faces at the hands of Charles, the Christian.

The reference in Stanza 231 to Malpramis' death foreshadows Stanza 247, in which he's killed by Naimon.

Part 21

Part 21 Summary

Stanza 235 - Baligant rides at the head of his army as his deputies urge his followers to pray. The soldiers "bow their heads and chins ... down to the very ground," an apt description of Muslim prayer. Meanwhile, the French soldiers shout that the Saracens are facing ruin, and pray for victory.

Stanza 236 - Baligant calls Malpramis and two generals to him for a council, and reveals his plan to leave three divisions behind in the initial attack. He vows to behead Charles.

Stanza 237 - The two armies farce each other across a level plain. Baligant rallies his troops. Charles sounds Roland's horn, and the pagans fear they're facing a terrible battle.

Stanza 238 - Narration describes the battlefield, the gleaming armor of the combatants, and the sound of Roland's horn ringing out. Baligant points out to his brother how Charles is at the rear of his well armed army. He raises his spear, pointing it at Charles.

Stanzas 239, 240 - Charles watches Baligant and his army, shouting to his soldiers that the pagans are cowardly, their gods are worthless, and their vast numbers irrelevant. He spurs his horse, which does not bleed, and the French rally round him. Narration reveals it's a beautiful day as the two armies charge each other.

Stanzas 241, 242 - In both stanzas, French nobles skewer pagan deputies, and French soldiers cheer them on.

Stanza 243 - Malpramis cuts through the ranks of the French, slaughtering soldiers left and right. Baligant calls out to his soldiers to follow his example. The soldiers rush to encounter the French army, and the fighting grows ever fiercer.

Stanzas 244, 245 - Both sides fight full out. Narration describes the shattered armor, the bloodstained ground, and the bodies piling up. Baligant urges his men on, promising them beautiful well born wives and kingdoms of their own if they win. The pagans fight more fiercely.

Stanza 246 - Charles promises his men financial reward, and urges them to remember their friends and comrades previously slaughtered. The soldiers proclaim their loyalty, and fight loyally and hard.

Stanza 247- As Malpramis charges across the battlefield, Naimon watches him, judges his timing, charges him, and kills him.

Stanza 248 - Baligant's brother charges Naimon, swinging his sword at his head. Naimon survives, and is defended by Charles.

Stanza 249 - Charles attacks Baligant's brother and kills him.

Stanza 250 - Charles is stricken with grief at seeing Naimon so wounded, urging him to climb back up on his horse and rejoin the battle, adding that the man who attacked him has been killed. Naimon vows loyalty to Charles and fights on.

Stanza 251 - Baligant skewers several French nobles. The pagans comment that they have no reason to be afraid.

Stanzas 252, 253, 254 - Narration comments on how fiercely the pagans are fighting and on how the French continue to fight regardless, describing in vivid detail the violence of the battle and the death agonies of soldiers on both sides. Baligant receives the news of the deaths of his son and brother, and learns his brother was killed by Charles himself. Baligant grieves intensely, and calls forth an advisor, whom he asks what the outcome of the battle will be. The advisor tells him bluntly that he is dead, that Charles and the French are too fierce, and that he should call forth his reserves.

Stanza 255 - Outside his tent, Baligant sounds his horn. The reserves obey the summons and charge the French, who are killed by the thousands.

Stanza 256 - Several French nobles see the decimation caused by the reserve forces, and furiously charge into vengeful battle.

Stanza 257 - One of the nobles kills the bearer of Baligant's flag. Baligant sees the flag fall and is described in narration as beginning to understand that he is wrong and Charles is right. Meanwhile, Charles calls for further efforts from his soldiers, who tell him he doesn't have to ask.

Stanzas 258, 259 - Night falls as both Baligant and Charles cry out to rally the troops. They recognize each other's voice and charge each other. As they swing their swords at one another, they both fall off their horses and continue to fight hand to hand, with narration commenting that their battle will not end, until one of them lies dead. Narration comments that neither Baligant nor Charles backs down, both fighting viciously, because neither is prepared to admit he's wrong.

Stanzas 260, 26, 262, 263 - Baligant demands that Charles surrender. Charles refuses, demanding that Baligant become a Christian. Baligant refuses, and the fight continues. Baligant strikes a near-fatal blow and Charles almost falls, but the angel who sent him the dreams comes again to him and tells him to keep fighting. Charles' courage returns, wields his sword, and splits Baligant's head in two. Charles cries out with joy. Naimon hears him and runs to his side. The pagans flee. The French know they've won. The pagans run, "for that is what God wills." The French pursue them, with Charles urging them to avenge their grief. The French slaughter the pagans.

Stanzas 264, 265 - The following day, the pagans take refuge in Saragossa. Bramimonde hides in her tower in the company of her clerics, sees the retreating soldiers and cries out that Baligant has been slain. Marsile hears her, grieves, and "to quick demons yields up his sinful soul." Charles and his army beat down the gates of Saragossa and take control of the city. Bramimonde surrenders. Narration comments that he who calls on the aid of God can do great things.

Stanza 266 - Night falls with Charles in full control of Saragossa. His soldiers rage through the town, raiding and destroying mosques and temples. Charles has the water of the city blessed, pagans are brought to be baptized, and any who resist are executed. Bramimonde is taken captive and will return with Charles to France.

Part 21 Analysis

Within the lengthy narrative of this climactic battle, there are several interesting details reiterating the poem's pro-Christian perspective. The first can be found in the passing reference to Charles spurring his horse, which as mentioned in the Summary doesn't bleed. The contrast here with Baligant, whose horse does bleed, indicates again the comparative moral and spirituality of the French as contrasted with the cruelty of the pagans. Another example can be found in Stanza 264, at the moment of Marsile's death. It's interesting to note how his soul is taken by demons, while Roland's was taken by angels. Yet another example of this can be found in Stanza 266, in which Charles' army effectively eradicates any trace of Muslim faith in terms of both buildings and the beliefs of individual pagans. These details are smaller manifestations of the larger narrative and thematic perspective of this section, which is that Christian triumph is inevitable and justified. It's clear from every perspective, including that of their determination to take vengeance for the death of Roland, that Christians, in the mind of the poet, have right on their side, and that Baligant's nobility and courage are wasted in a losing, evil cause.

Part 22

Part 22 Summary

Stanza 267 - The morning after the surrender of Saragossa, Charles departs, leaving a thousand of his knights in control of the city. He carries Bramimonde with her, with narration commenting that she resists him but that he desires only to do her good. On the trip home, Charles leaves Roland's horn in Bordeaux where religious pilgrims can visit it. He provides ornate coffins for the bodies of Roland, Oliver and Turpin, leaving them in another town. Finally, he arrives home, summons his court, and begins Ganelon's trial.

Stanza 268, 269 - Charles is greeted by Alda, who can be remembered from Stanza 130 as Oliver's sister and betrothed of Roland. She asks where Roland is, and Charles, overcome with grief, tells her Roland is dead. He offers her his son Louis, who will be king following Charles' death. Alda says she has no reason to live now Roland is no more, and falls dead at Charles' feet. Narration offers prayers for her soul. At first, Charles doesn't understand Alda has died, but soon realizes the truth. Prayers are said for her, and she is buried in an ornate tomb paid for by Charles.

Part 22 Analysis

This section focuses briefly on the character of Alda, mentioned only once before and appearing in person for the only time here. Her reaction to the news of Roland's death can be seen as extreme, but as was the case with the extremity of Bramimonde's grief at the defeat of her husband and their people, the feelings on display here can be seen as more symbolic than realistic. Alda's grief here is representative of the grief of a nation, of the justified and profound sense of loss any loyal citizen should feel at the loss of such a great warrior as Roland. Also, because Roland is held up as a Christ-like figure, there are two other possible meanings to Alda's grief. The first is that it represents the grief of any Christian contemplating the agony of Christ's sacrifice, a parallel to Roland's sacrifice, albeit one on a much larger scale. The second is that it represents the grief of the women associated with Christ's ministry - his mother and Mary Magdalene in particular. A final implication of Alda's grief has a more sexist overtone but nothing inappropriate for the time in which the poem was written. Women were expected to be entirely devoted to the men to whom they were betrothed. Alda's death, therefore, is an example of that total devotion, and while there is no indication that the poem is suggesting that women should literally die if their husbands do, there is the strong hint that they should at least be stricken with powerfully overwhelming grief.

Part 23

Part 23 Summary

Stanzas 270, 271, 272 - Narration recounts how Ganelon has been enchained and beaten while awaiting trial. Charles summons the governors of his territories to make up the court. Opening speeches are given on both sides of the issue, and then Ganelon is allowed to speak. Before he does, Charles reminds the governors and nobles of the accusations Ganelon faces, referring to the deaths of thousands of soldiers and the particular deaths of Oliver and Roland. Ganelon confesses that because of Roland he lost goods and money, and therefore wanted him to suffer and die. He claims that in that desire for vengeance there was no treachery.

Stanza 273 - Ganelon faces the governors and nobles, among whom are several members of his own family. He reminds them of his loyalty to Charles, and claims that Roland deliberately planned his (Ganelon's) death, a reference to Roland's suggestion in Stanza 20 that Ganelon be sent to Saragossa. He recounts how he survived the trip, making no mention of the agreement he made with Marsile but telling the court how he challenged Roland's motives. He says again he's avenged, but committed no treachery.

Stanza 274 - Ganelon asks with a famously articulate noble and member of his family, Pinabel, to defend him. Pinabel agrees, saying that if it's decided that Ganelon should be executed, under law Charles must have that decision challenged in combat, and Pinabel is confident he can win such a challenge. Ganelon thanks him gratefully.

Stanza 275 - The governors and nobles confer, and decide that Ganelon should be forgiven. They agree that once freed Ganelon's loyalty will be unquestioned, and that nothing will bring Roland back to life. Only one man disagrees, a noble named Thierry.

Stanzas 276, 277, 278 - The nobles return and make their decision known to Charles, who reacts with anger and calls them all traitors. He grieves over what he perceives as a lack of support from his nobles. Thierry, who is described as small and relatively weak, says he believes Ganelon should die for what he did, and volunteers to challenge anyone who defends him. The French people agree that his position makes sense. Meanwhile Pinabel, who is described as strong and powerful, reminds Charles that he's heard the judgment of the governors and ought to follow it, adding that he challenges anyone who says that decision is wrong. Charles agrees to the challenge, and arranges for hostages to be taken ensuring that Pinabel keeps his word and Ganelon remains imprisoned.

Stanzas 279, 280 - Charles prepares an arena, the rules for the challenge are laid down, and the weapons are decided. Meanwhile, Thierry and Pinabel prepare for combat, making themselves right with God and suiting themselves in armor. Watching knights assume the worst, and prepare for Thierry's death.

Stanzas 281, 282 - Narration describes bow Thierry and Pinabel meet. Combat on horseback begins, both are rapidly knocked off their mounts, and hand-to-hand combat begins. Thierry and Pinabel strike at each other with their swords. Charles prays for what's right to prevail.

Stanzas 283, 284 - Pinabel demands that Thierry surrender, asking him to act as a mediator to reconcile Charles and Ganelon. Thierry refuses, and then makes a counter offer, saying he'll mediate reconciliation between Pinabel and Charles if Pinabel agrees that Ganelon should be executed. Pinabel refuses, saying he's fighting on behalf of his family name. The fight continues, with narration commenting that both men are determined to fight, until one of them is dead. Language here echoes language used to describe the final battle between Charles and Baligant.

Stanza 285, 286 - Pinabel lands a near-fatal blow on Thierry's head. Narration comments that "Without God's help, he'd have died then and there!" Thierry strikes back, slicing Pinabel's head in two and as a result winning the battle. The French cry out that justice has been defined, and that Ganelon must die.

Stanza 287, 288, 289 - Charles thanks Thierry, wiping his wounds with his own cloak. Thierry is cared for as preparations are made for Ganelon's execution. Charles asks the court for their advice on what to do with the hostages. Members of the court advise him to execute them, and Charles agrees. All the hostages are hanged as \narration comments that "So one man's evil draws others in its wake." All the members of the court agree that Ganelon should be executed. Ganelon is then pulled apart by four horses.

Part 23 Analysis

It's important to note the core irony at work in this section. While readers of the poem know full well that Ganelon is guilty of the charges against him, the nobles do not. This is because at no point does Ganelon mention the agreement he made with Marsile, when they first met in Saragossa. Herein lies the explanation for why the court at first decides to acquit him. Not only do they not know the truth, and therefore have no proof of treachery, they see Ganelon's claim of the right to vengeance as just. They all know that the embassy to Saragossa was potentially fatal, and they all know that Roland acted with apparent dishonor in suggesting that his step-father be sent to certain death knowing that Charles would follow that suggestion. In other words, in their minds, Ganelon's argument is completely valid. If it wasn't, if the truth were known, there is no way they would have voted to acquit him, and no way Pinabel would have volunteered to defend him.

The battle between Thierry and Ganelon, foretold in Charles' dream in Stanza 186, is therefore yet another example of the poem's attitude towards the righteousness of Christianity. Thierry is clearly intended to be perceived as a representative of God's justice, an idea supported by the way he's described as a physical underdog, miraculously surviving a blow that would have killed another man, and striking in his turn

an even more fatal blow. In spite of lying, Ganelon gets what he deserves, and once again ideals of Christian justice of the time are served. Meanwhile, it's interesting to note that after Ganelon's speech of self defense, after Thierry's volunteering to represent Charles' cause in battle, throughout the battle itself and during narration of Ganelon's execution, Roland is not mentioned once. One possible explanation is that the issue at stake here has moved beyond being merely about Ganelon facing justice for his act of betrayal and into the realm of an examination of the nature of justice in general. This idea is born out by the previously discussed idea that Ganelon is facing God's justice. In other words, he's no longer on trial for the specific crime of betraying Roland, he's on trial for the larger and broader sin of being disloyal. In fact, it's not going too far to suggest that, because Charles and Roland are both, throughout the poem, upheld as symbols of Christian faith and power, Ganelon is in fact on trial for betraying Christianity. The lack of mention of Roland's name, therefore, reinforces this idea.

Ganelon's punishment, being pulled apart by horses, was a common punishment for traitors at the time. In extreme cases it was preceded by being hanged to the point of unconsciousness, drawn (sliced down the torso with a sword) and then quartered, the formal term for the pulling apart. As was the case for other noble traitors of the time, the execution was eased in honor of the traitors' rank. In short, and ironically enough, Ganelon's execution would have been perceived as merciful

Part 24

Part 24 Summary

Stanza 290 - His vengeance complete, Charles summons several bishops and prepares for Bramimonde's baptism. Narration reveals that following her conversion she changed her name to Juliana and became a true Christian.

Stanza 291 - Following the day of baptism, Charles is visited in his sleep one last time by his angel, who urges him to prepare for another conquest on another pagan lord. In the dream, Charles indicates he has no desire to go, claiming he's too weary. As he weeps, the poem ends.

Part 24 Analysis

In these two final concluding stanzas, there is another end and another beginning. Stanza 290 indicates that his battle with Marsile has finally been concluded, with Bramimonde's conversion symbolizing the ultimate, admirable goal of all such battles, the triumph of Christianity. Stanza 291, however, indicates that the larger war against paganism is not yet over, and that Charles has no heart left in him to fight again. There are echoes here of Christ's prayer on the night before his Crucifixion that he be spared the ordeal to come.

Characters

Archbishop Turpin

See Turpin

Aude

Aude is Roland's fiancee and the sister of his best friend Olivier. When she hears from Charlemagne that Roland is dead, she rejects his offer of his own son Louis as a husband. She asks God that she not live on after Roland's death, and in a display of ultimate loyalty, she falls dead at Charlemagne's feet.

Baligant

Baligant is the Emir of Babylon, or Cairo. Marsile calls on him to come and help him defeat Charlemagne. Baligant makes the long trip in record time, and his troops fight valiantly against Charlemagne's forces. Although a Saracen, Baligant is a fine and noble warrior, and that the epic implies that he surely would have won the battle if he had been a Christian. Only with the help of the angel Gabriel is Charlemagne able to kill Baligant in the decisive battle.

Blancandrin

Marsile's most trusted advisor, Blancandrin is described as wise, valiant, and a worthy soldier. It is he who hatches the plot to betray the French and trick them into leaving Spain, and he acts as King Marsile's emissary to the French to carry the sham proposal that the Saracens do not intend to honor. He and Ganelon devise the plan to annihilate Roland and the Peers who make up the French rear guard.

Bramidonie

See Bramimonde

Bramimonde

Queen Bramimonde is the wise wife of the Saracen King Marsile. In several passages she is shown functioning effectively as a ruler in the Saragossan court, and she displays knowledge of the deployment of both the French forces and her own country's defending army. She predicts doom for the Saracen forces. Captured by the French, Bramimonde converts to Christianity when taken to France. While this may be offensive

to a twentieth-century reader, to the author of the epic it was intended to show the Saracen queen's noble qualities, inherent goodness, and wisdom.

Bramimunde

See Bramimonde

Carlemagne

See Charlemagne

Cartemagnes

See Charlemagne

Charlemagne

Charlemagne is the venerable leader of the Prankish (French) forces. When the epic opens, he has been in Spain for seven years, at war with the Saracens, as Spanish Muslims (and many other foreigners) were termed by the Franks. Defender of the Christian faith, his purpose is to travel from place to place, fighting to regain lands lost to "the infidel," that is, to non-Christians. The character is based on the actual historical figure of Charlemagne (742-814), King of the Franks (768-814) and Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire.The epic's unknown author or recorder took some liberties with historical fact: Charlemagne is said to be 200 years old, for example, and in *The Song of Roland* he is presented as the contemporary of French nobles who actually lived hundred of years after him. The central event of *The Song of Roland*—the ambush and slaughter of the Prankish rear guard by Spanish forces at Roncesvalles—is also based on historical fact

At times Charlemagne seems almost weak. The barons who are among his followers make most of the important decisions for the group. He has strong objections to putting his favored nephew, Roland, at the head of the rear guard because of the danger of the position, yet he is unable to prevent it. Charlemagne is almost killed by the Emir of Babylon, Baligant, and only wins the battle with the help of God. In the final conflict, when Charlemagne accuses Ganelon of treason, none of Charlemagne's strongest soldiers will stand up for him in combat, acting as his champion. Only the weak Thierry will step forward to profess his belief in Charlemagne and champion his lord. Despite his age and a hint of frailty, both the French and the Saracens speak of Charlemagne in reverent terms. At the close of the text, as Charlemagne finally lies down for a well-deserved rest, God calls to him, telling him to go and regain another Christian land lost to the infidel. The weary, reluctant, and weeping Charlemagne does as he is told.

Charles the Great

See Charlemagne

Charles I

See Charlemagne

Durendal

Roland's famous sword, Durendal, has a golden hilt and a blade of steel. Sacred relics, including the teeth, hair, and blood of saints, and fabric from a garment worn by the Blessed Virgin, are enclosed in the hilt. The sword's strength is such that Roland cannot even dull the blade as he tries to break it on a rock to prevent it from falling into enemy hands. Roland hides the sword under his body as he dies.

Gabriel

Gabriel is god's emissary and the leader of the angels that help the French army. Gabriel leads Roland's soul to Paradise after his death and helps Charlemagne and Thierry triumph in combat.

Ganelon

Roland's stepfather Ganelon is one of Charlemagne's most trusted advisors. When the Franks debate the merits of the Saracen peace plan—to pay rich tribute and to become French vassals and Christian converts if the French forces will leave Spain—Roland reminds the group that the Saracens have broke such promises before, and advises an immediate attack on their forces. Ganelon scornfully rejects Roland's suggestion, even going so far as to term it the advice of a fool. He urges strongly that the French accept the terms and leave. His arguments convince Charlemagne and his advisors. When Roland proposed that Ganelon undertake the dangerous mission of carrying the French response to the Saracen peace proposal, Ganelon denounces Roland angrily in front of Charlemagne and his gathered advisors, and curses those Franks who support Charlemagne's decision to send him on the mission. Ganelon admires Charlemagne, and he deems himself loyal to his ruler even after he betrays Roland and the Peers to the Saracens. Ganelon's betrayal of Roland for goods and money echoes the betrayal of Jesus Christ by Judas Iscariot in the Bible. Because of this association, Ganelon's name now represents the arch-traitor.

Guenelon

See Ganelon

Guenelun

See Ganelon

Guenes

See Ganelon

Karlemagne

See Charlemagne

King Marsile

See Marsile

Marsile

King Marsile rules Saragossa, the only Spanish city that has not fallen to Charlemagne's forces in seven years of fighting. In many ways, Marsile's rale parallels that of the French leader. He is well respected by his people, and he, too, seeks the counsil of twelve trusted advisors in planning his strategy. His treachery: promising to become Charlemagne's vassal and then attacking the rear guard, leads ultimately to the annihilation of his troops. The French only attain their victory with the help of God, implying that while the forces of goodness are on the side of the French, the Saracens were their equals in strength and bravery in battle. Marsile's ruthlessness is underscored by the fact that he pledges to send his own son Jurfaleu as a hostage in order to guarantee the promise he intends to break, knowing that Jurfaleu will be executed when the treachery is discovered.

Marsilie

See Marsile

Marsilies

See Marsile

Oliver

See Olivier

Olivier

Roland's best friend, fellow soldier, and the brother of Roland's fiancee Aude, Olivier represents wisdom where Roland stands for bravery. Olivier encourages Roland to call back the main body of Charlemagne's forces as soon as Ganelon's treachery is discovered and the French rear guard is attacked by the Saracens. Had Roland followed this advice, Charlemagne's men could have returned to aid the outnumbered rear guard and their destruction would have been avoided. The struggle between these two close friends over blowing the horn to call for help comprises a central theme of the epic. The intervention in their dispute by the archbishop Turpin helps the friends to reconcile before they die.

Pinabel

Pinabel is a formidable French warrior and a relative of Ganelon's. He volunteers to defend his relative against Charlemagne's accusation of treason, facing Thierry in the bout of judicial combat that will determine Ganelon's guilt or innocence.

Roland

Eclipsing Charlemagne in this epic, the emperor's nephew Roland takes center stage. He is renowned for his phenomenal bravery, always volunteering for the most difficult and dangerous assignments. His bravery and pride in his abilities as a soldier ultimately bring about his death and the deaths of the men he leads. Roland proposes that his stepfather, Gj»nelon, take the dangerous role of carrying Charlemagne's answer to the Saracen envoy when the Saracens propose a diplomatic end to the war. This begins the central conflict of the story. Roland had wanted to undertake the mission, but Charlemagne refused to risk one of his best soldiers. Roland may have thought that his stepfather would be happy to accept such an honorable assignment, but Ganelon does not seem to share his stepson's love of danger. Ganelon avenges himself by choosing Roland to lead the dangerous rear guard as the French return to Aix, a mission that Ganelon believes will result in Roland's death: Ganelon has already betrayed this contingent of the French forces to the Saracen envoy, Blancandnn. When the Saracens attack the rear guard, Roland refuses to blow the horn that would call Charlemagne and the rest of the French troops to their aid, believing that it would be dishonorable. The outnumbered French contingent is wiped out by the Saracens. After an argument with his friend Olivier that is settled by Archbiship Turpin, Roland finally calls on Charlemagne to avenge the deaths of his fellow fighters, blowing the horn so forcefully that he bursts a blood vessel in his brain and falls, mortally wounded. He arranges the bodies of the dead to face toward the Saracen army, so that it will not appear than any of them fled from battle. He dies from the brain injury sustained as he blows the horn to call Charlemagne.

Thierris

See Thierry

Thierry

Although short and slight, Thierry, Duke of Argonne, is the only one of Charlemagne's followers who will fight with the might warrior Pinabel to determine the outcome of the charge of treason against Ganelon. During their battle Jie commends Pinabel's bravery and physical prowess, and asks him to consider halting their combat and requiring Ganelon to answer the charge of treason. Thierry appears to be no match for the huge warrier Pinabel, but with the aid of God Thierry wins the bout of judicial combat.

Tierri

See Thierry

Turpin

An archbishop fighting with the French forces, Turpin excels in warfare even as he tends to the souls of Charlemagne's men. Turpin's prayers before battle and his blessings over fallen men guarantees martyrdom for them. Side-by-side with Roland, Turpin makes a brave last stand against the Saracen sneak attack. His wise intervention between the quarreling Roland and Olivier helps them to reconcile before both die on the battlefield.

Themes

Culture Clash

As the Saracens and Franks encounter each other, differences in culture and religion come to the foreground. The French admire the Saracens for their prowess, the beauty of their armaments, and, at times, their valor. However, Charlemagne's sole purpose in life according to the epic is to defend the Christian religion. As such, all non- believers must be converted or destroyed. Since the Muslim Saracens control Spain, which was formerly Christian, Charlemagne's special mission is to drive the Muslims from Christian lands. The epic shows no real understanding of Islam by the medieval, presumably Christian, author of the text.

Duty and Responsibility

Charlemagne is the venerable lord of the French fighters. They must serve him, even if this means personal danger or hardship. Roland, eager to serve, tries to volunteer for every mission. When he is appointed to head the rear guard, he vows to protect Charlemagne from all harm. Thus, he refuses to blow the horn that will summon Charlemagne when the rear guard is attacked. Even the treacherous Ganelon accepts his duty to act as emissary to the Saracens when Charlemagne orders it, but because of the danger involved he harbors resentment against Roland, who encouraged his appointment. Ganelon tries to separate his duty to Charlemagne from his duty toward Charlemagne's men. He contends that he remained faithful to Charlemagne even while betraying Roland. Charlemagne and the knight Thierry, who fights on his behalf, believe that the duty owed to Charlemagne includes protection of his men. The fact that an angel of God helps Thierry to defeat the knight who fights for Ganelon suggests that God, too, agrees that Ganelon's duty was to Roland as a representative of Charlemagne.

Friendship

Olivier and Roland present a model friendship of men brought together in battling a common enemy. They have fought together for many years, and Roland is engaged to marry Olivier's sister. Olivier does not hesitate to criticize Roland for not blowing the horn to summon Charlemagne, and their differing views on calling for help lead to a serious argument. While Roland represents sometimes heedless bravery, Olivier represents a more considered wisdom. Together they form a perfect union, and their reconciliation in the final hour attests to the strength of their friendship and the necessity that the qualities of bravery embodied in Roland be tempered with the kind of wisdom held by Olivier.

Good and Evil

The characters of the *Chanson de Roland* are aligned starkly on the side of either Good or Evil. Individual Saracens are acknowledged to possess qualities of bravery, wisdom, skill in battle, and even physical attractiveness—but for the epic's author, the fact that they are "pagan" and not Christian relegates them to damnation. Conversely, some Christian characters are shown to have faults. Most notably, Roland's excessive pride leads to an angry exchange with his best friend, the massacre of the rear guard, and his own death. But, as a Christian crusader, Roland is on the side of good, and at his death angels escort his soul to heaven. Marsile, when killed, is ushered away by demons. God intervenes several times in the French cause and to ensure that Ganelon is punished for betraying Roland. In the end, Good will always triumph over Evil.

Honor

Roland struggles with the issue of honor as he decides whether to blow the horn or not. He deems it dishonorable to blow the horn call the main body of the French forces back to help him fight the Saracens, yet once the French rear guard is massacred, honor dictates that Charlemagne be called to avenge the death of the Peers.

Justice and Injustice (Right and Wrong)

Each action in the epic falls on the side of right or wrong. Because the Christians believe in God, their actions are viewed as essentially right, whereas the non-Christian Saracens cannot be other than wrong. Individuals may present qualities that differ from this mold. For example, Ganelon, though French, acts wrongly toward Charlemagne in betraying Roland. The Babylonian Baligant, though a pagan, is regarded as a valiant and courageous warrior by both sides. Nonetheless, the essential conflict between Muslim and Christian is one of right versus wrong, and the Christians, being on the side of right, are destined to win the battle. Medieval man believed that God would intervene on the side of right. Therefore, in the narrative, God intervenes to help the French defeat Marsile's army, to enable Charlemagne to slay Baligant, and to make it possible for the weak knight Thierry to strike down the giant Pinabel.

Memory

The role of the epic is to establish the memory of the origins of the French nation. Charlemagne emerges as father of the French, and the recounting of his battles in the *Chanson de Roland* writes the earliest history of France. Many of the characters in the text are not historical contemporaries of Charlemagne but, rather, lived at the time that the text was first written down. By using their names in the epic, the author ensures that the memory of their names is admirable, linked with that of the national hero Charlemagne and to the very beginnings of France as a nation. The importance of memory—of how the story of the battle will be recalled and retold— is found within the

text. The dying Roland turns the bodies of the French dead to face the retreating Saracen army. He does this to make sure that since no one survives to tell of the battle, Charlemagne will know that no French man turned and fled. The stories told after death, the memory of the battle, are of utmost importance to the fighters.

Race and Racism

The question of race and racism in the epic is a confused one. While the Saracens are described at times as black as coal and monstrous in appearance, at other times the author lauds the beauty of an individual Saracen warrior, complete with flowing blonde hair. The Saracens fight as well as, and sometimes even better than, the French. The main issue is the religious differences between the two forces. The Saracens are Muslim and the French are Christian. To the epic's author (and, presumably, to its first audience), this difference means that the Saracens are destined to lose, God being on the side of the French.

Treason

The question of Ganelon's treason is central to the work. By betraying Roland, Ganelon also betrays his lord, Charlemagne. The final battle between Thierry and Pinabel serves to establish Ganelon's guilt, making him stand in French culture as an archetypal traitor.

Style

Poetic Form and Rhyme

The Song of Roland is written in poetic form. The verse paragraphs are called *laisses,* and they are of varying length. The rhyming scheme is assonance, meaning that only the final stressed vowels are identical. Most lines have 10 syllables, with a break, or caesura, after the fourth syllable.

Language

The author of the Digby 23 manuscript penned this epic in Anglo-Norman. This was a form of French spoken in the region that is now England about 100 years after the Norman invasion of 1066. The story existed in oral form long before this, and the original language of the epic is unknown.

Point of View

The story is told by an omniscient, or "all-knowing," third-person narrator. The author is not involved in the story, but is very clearly on the side of the French, Authorial asides criticize the treachery of Ganelon or the frighrfulness of the Saracens, for example, while praising the bravery of Roland and the wisdom of Olivier.

Foreshadowing

From the beginning of the tale, the author lets the audience know the essential elements of the story. Ganelon is called a traitor long before he actually betrays Roland to the enemy. Roland and the Peers proclaim their own death and martyrdom before the battle even begins. Charlemagne cries when Roland is appointed to the rear guard, knowing somehow that he will not see this favorite knight alive again. The technique of foreshadowing points to the oral nature of the test: traditionally, in this kind of oral narrative, the audience hears the outcome, or importance of the story, then hears the story itself. Foreshadowing helps set the stage for the performance that most likely accompanied the reading or reciting of the story.

Symbolism

As in most medieval texts, symbolism is an important part of *The Song of Roland.* Charlemagne's dreams are full of symbols, mainly animals. Medieval bestiaries, or animal dictionaries, attributed certain characteristics to each animal. These characteristics transfer to the animals in Charlemagne's dreams, each of which represents an important character in the story. Another example of symbolism: Ganelon

drops the glove and baton ceremonially given to him as emissary from his ruler, Charlemagne. By dropping these tokens of trust, Ganelon's treachery is symbolically revealed even before it takes place.

Setting

The setting of *The Song of Roland* serves as more symbolic than picturesque. Rarely is the landscape described. In a rare exception, the author notes that Charlemagne sits under a pine tree during one of his council meetings. The pine tree acts a symbol. The triangular shape of the pine was thought to represent the Holy Trinity, central to the Christians' system of belief. Tellingly, Roland drags himself beneat a pine tree to die. The skies themselves reflect the action of the epic. Charlemagne prays for help in defeating the fleeing Saracens, and God stops the sun in the sky so that the French will have the daylight they need to pursue their enemy. While nature is rarely described except for its symbolic importance, the author details the armor and outfitting of the troops with gusto. Each knight bests the next in the quality of his weaponry and the luxury of his gem-encrusted armor. For the medieval author, the setting of a text privileged the man-made world over nature.

Historical Context

Charlemagne's Reign

The historical Charlemagne was born in 742, about 300 years before *The Song ofRolandv/as* first recorded in a manuscript. Descended from Germanic tribesmen, Charlemagne possessed a remarkable love of learning for a ruler of his time. He learned to read and tried, without success, to learn to write. In addition to his local Germanic dialect, he spoke old Teutonic, literary Latin, and understood Greek. Charlemagne, like his literary image, fought to defend the Christian faith in foreign lands, including the regions that are now Spain, France, Germany, and Italy. His success on the battlefield unified the peoples of these countries, who had been torn apart by tribal conflict for centuries.

Charlemagne's administrative expertise provided a structure to his vast empire. He made military service codified and mandatory. To increase the sense of public participation in government, he fostered assemblies in which landowners came together and made suggestions to be brought before the king. Under his rule, the beginnings of the modern jury system were formed. The empire was divided into counties for administrative purposes, and local assemblies served as governing bodies and courts for the region. He shared his love of learning by bringing in foreign scholars to his realm and establishing schools. At his direction, monks began to make more accurate and legible copies of the Bible, the writings of the Church Fathers, and Latin classics. This renewal of learning, often termed the Carolingian Renaissance, helped reintroduce much of the literature of the Ancients to Europe.

In 800, Charlemagne was crowned Emperor of the Romans by Pope Leo III. This first coronation had for effect the subordination of temporal power to the Church, as the Emperor had to look to the Pope for justification of his power. On the other hand, this act greatly increased the power of the king, since his power was deemed to have come from God, thus establishing a precedent for rule by Divine Right. In 806, Charlemagne divided his empire among his sons. Charlemagne died in 814 at the age of 72, leaving a legacy that his son and only remaining heir, Louis, was unable to maintain.

Women's Lives under Charlemagne's Rule

Marriage was a central question during the late eighth century. The Catholic Church had one set of rules while Carolingian society had others. During this period, the two models of marriage moved closer to each other. Charlemagne prohibited remarriage after divorce and declared that adultery could not be considered a cause for dissolution of a marriage. Wives were generally chosen by the husband's father. Among nobility, women had a degree of security because of the stricter marriage and divorce laws, but they also gained new responsibility. Charlemagne's queen had the power to rule in his absence. She also had Charlemagne's backing on any requests made of his judges and

ministers. All women were concerned with child-bearing and rearing. Noble women provided religious instruction to boys until they left home at the age of seven to go to another lord's court, and they taught daughters until they married somewhere between twelve and fifteen. Because of a high incidence of death in childbirth, women lived only an average of thirty-six years, whereas men generally reached almost fifty. The peasant women of Charlemagne's realm owed services to their overlords, just as their husbands did. In an unusually thoughtful document for the period, Charlemagne decreed that these women had rights to a certain standard of living, including heat and security.

The Battle of Roncesvalles

In 773 Charlemagne took on the role of protector of the Catholic Church. Charlemagne fought the enemies of the Church for most of his reign. At that time, the non- Christian threat included Muslims (called Saracens in *The Song of Roland,* Bavarians, and Saxons, among others. In 777, the Muslim governor of Barcelona, Ibn al-Arabi, asked Charles to aid him against the emir or caliph of Cordoba. Charlemagne crossed the Pyrenees into Spain, captured Pamplona and advanced on to Saragossa. En route, he treated the Christian Basques, living in Northern Spain, as enemies. His campaign into Spain, though somewhat successful, did not unseat the caliph of Cordoba, largely because the reinforcements expected from Ibn al-Arabi did not materialize. Realizing that he would never be able to take on the formidable caliph alone, Charlemagne began his return to France. Traveling back through the Pyrenees in 778, he was attacked by the Christian Basques whom he had mistreated on his entrance into Spain. The route through the Pyrenees was made of long, narrow passes through the high mountain range, and, in one of these passes, the Basques swooped down on Charlemagne's rear guard and annihilated it to the man. Within the ranks of the rear guard, historians tell us there was one "Hruodland," and it is believed that the heroic Roland is based on this historical person.

Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages

The Muslim invasions of Spain and even France in the eighth century thrust Western Europeans into close contact with another culture and religion. Christians and Muslims remained enemies on the battlefield for another 700 years, but their rapport changed significantly during this period. Early fighting was focused mainly on stemming the seemingly endless flood of Muslim invaders into Christian lands. National boundaries were fairly firmly fixed, however, by 732, when Charles Martel drove advancing Muslim troops from established Frankish territories back into Spain, where they made their stronghold for many centuries to come. These lands were always coveted, but to those living in present-day France the threat of loss of further life and property had diminished. The dream of reconquest was ever-present, however, spurred by the Catholic Church, which promised martyrdom for those who died trying to recapture Christian lands. The Crusades—military actions against non-Christians with the dual purpose of winning converts and seizing land— were common from the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries. While this cultural contact was hostile by definition, other practical

relationships had begun to form that would continue to flourish until the end of the Reconquest in 1492 Trading relationships, ambassadorial envoys, cross-cultural education, and even cohabitation exposed those north of the Pyrenees to a way of life quite different from their own. The Muslim culture had developed art and learning to a much higher degree than their counterparts in the West. Exquisite fabrics and spices were the envy of many a Christian who profited through commerce and trade with the Infidel. Christian noblemen sent their sons to learn in the courts of Muslim Spain, where the finest teachers could be found. Intermarriage became a theme in the literature of the high Middle Ages, suggesting that some such marriages between Christian and Muslim did indeed take place. While the differences in religion provided for an uneasy and sometimes tumultuous coexistence, even during the period of the Crusades Christians and Muslims forged alliances that have not since been repeated.

Critical Overview

The Song of Roland was largely ignored by critics and the reading public until the nineteenth century. In their cursory examinations of the French epic, the first commentators on the work considered it lacking in emotionalism, primitive, and inferior to Greek and Latin epic. The first real interest in the text stemmed from a debate between Gaston Paris, the most illustrious professor of medieval French literature in late nineteenth-century France, and his student, Joseph Bedier. Paris claimed that *The Song of Roland* was an essentially oral text, having been sung by minstrels since the battle of Roncesvalles. The written text, he contended, was simply a version of the oral story copied down by a cleric. This critical approach is called "traditionalism." Bedier contended that, while the story of Roland and Olivier was a popular legend, the cleric who found in the legend material for an epic poem added the detail and complexity that make it a significant literary work. This is called the "individualist" approach to *The Song of Roland.*

This critical debate, never resolved, has given way to different readings and debates, making *The Song of Roland* arguably the most analyzed work in the French literary tradition. Many essays closely analyze the actions and character of Roland. Should he have blown the horn or not? Is he guilty of the sin of excessive pride in refusing to call for help, or is such reckless bravery the hallmark of the worthy soldier? Critic Alain Renoir sees Roland's internal conflict as a religious one, and several commentators have noted that Roland's final prayer is followed by the approach of angels who take his soul to heaven, indicating that he has found redeption. D. D. R. Owen and others, however, maintain that the motivation for Roland's conduct is non-religious, based on "a triple sense of duty: to king and country, to family, and to self." Roland's refusing to blow the horn is not a sin of pride but rather an admirable trait of bravery that came from his utter devotion to the feudal political system. The question of Roland as hero or as redeemed recalcitrant yet remains, as does the dispute between traditionalist and individualist interpreters, unresolved and probably unresolvable.

Yet another trend in *Song of Roland* criticism reads the epic for the insight it provides into late eleventh-century French life. While at first glance the tale seems far from realistic, many of its episodes recount events common in eleventh-century life. Emanuel J. Mickel has found that Ganelon's trial by judicial combat between his representative and a representative of his accuser is an accurate account of such medieval trial. For Eugene Vance the story illustrates a political conflict that preoccupied eleventh-century France. According to Vance, the author writes to explore the questions "How to tame the barons?", "Where does power reside?" and "Where is loyalty due?"

The Song of Roland lends itself as well to postmodern criticism. In a foray into psychoanalytical criticism, R. Howard Bloch finds the hostility between Roland and Ganelon to be an expression of the oedipal archetype. Ganelon, married to Roland's mother after the death of Roland's father, represents the wicked stepfather, while Charlemagne, Roland's maternal uncle, is Roland's spiritual father. This psychoanalytic reading explores the many twisted and complicated familial relationships found in *The*

Song of Roland. Feminist critic Ann Tukey Harrison looks at the women in the text, finding that Aude is essentially passive and defined by her relationship to male characters (Roland's fiancee, Olivier's sister), whereas Queen Bramimonde functions independently: she is active in ruling Saragossa and guiding court business.

The many and varied approaches to readingT^e *Song of Roland* demonstrate the work's timeless appeal. The epic is sufficiently complicated and vague to allow multiple readings that have significance for audiences of all times. Each reader can find a lesson, a moral, or an example that is appropriate to his or her own experience. As long as *The Song of Roland* is read, new audiences will bring new ideas and approaches to the text. Some of these notions will no doubt share much with those of the eleventh-century audience, while others will be unique to the reader's time and place.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

In the following essay, Ramey discusses such aspects of the epic as its basis in historical fact, as well as the national, political, religious, and racial biases of the anonymous author.

The oldest known epic in France, *The Song of Roland,* which dates from around 1100, bears traces of the battles that had taken place about 200 years earlier. While ostensibly telling the story of Charlemagne at Roncesvalles in 778, the events of *The Song of Roland* have been shifted into a contemporary setting, superimposing a long history of concerns about the Muslim upon the palpable fear of Muslim invasion that gripped France in Charles Martel's and Charlemagne's time. The historical basis of the battle, most likely a decimation of Charlemagne's rear guard in 778 by Basques, then in control of the mountains separating present-day France and Spain, is transformed to make it more understandable, even more tragic, for the early twelfth-century audience. While it would no longer make sense for Charlemagne to be fighting what were now Christian brothers in Spain, the threat of the Muslim infidel had very real meaning and a long history of representation to the listeners. Charlemagne's struggle with the Saracen forces could thus take on the guise of good versus evil, right versus wrong, that makes ideal material for an epic tragedy.

Yet this tale that would seemingly be made up of straight-forward dichotomies of black versus white encounters ambiguities at each turn. When Roland decides not to blow the horn, his action could be interpreted as a mistake due to excessive pride, as Janet Boatner deems. At the same time, his refusal to summon Charlemagne can be viewed as Christian and Germanic bravery, as Constance Hieatt asserts. T. Atkinson Jenkins reads Charlemagne as heroic, while Eugene Vance counters that Charlemagne embodies disillusionment with the whole ideal of heroism. We cannot say that the author shows a progressive view of the role of women, for as Ann Tukey Harrison shows, Aude retires while Bramhnunde acts. Apparently almost every question that is asked of the characters of the *Chanson de Roland* can be answered both one way and with its opposite. Nowhere does this statement hold truer than in the picture the author draws of the Muslim.

In the early twelfth century concrete knowledge about the customs, habits and religion of the Muslims was little or non-existent. One of the problems when dealing with these invasions is precisely what to call the peoples who invaded Spain and the south of France. While the impetus certainly came from the extraordinary success of the followers of Muhammad, the people who actually carried out the invasions were not a homogenous bunch. Having come via Morocco and the Straits of Gibraltar up through Spain, the invaders included Arabs (both Muslim and non-Muslim), as well as a strong contingent of Berber tribesmen who had not yet converted to Islam. The victorious group did not even speak the same language, some conversing in Berber and others in Arabic. In many ways then, the medieval term of Saracen to refer to this disparate group of peoples embodies a generalizing, and therefore more accurate, terminology appropriate for the period.

The term Saracen probably conies from the Greek, sarakenos, the word used to describe the Arab invaders following the precepts of Muhammad. "Saracen," however, was used to describe all foreign enemies, even those residing in Hungary or the Holy Land, and even the Normans, with apparently no need for justification on the part of the author of a text. Saracen is used interchangeably with "pagan." In the late Middle Ages, the remains of Roman architecture, long-since unused and of forgotten origin, were sometimes termed Saracen" The term Saracen seems to hold the same place in the medieval imagination that "foreign," "exotic," or "outlandish" represents for a late twentieth-century reader.

The Song of Roland undoubtedly speaks of the Saracen as Muslim, yet understanding of Islam plays no role in the text. In a piece of Christian crusade propaganda such as this epic, one would not necessarily expect the author to take a great interest in truthfully exposing the tenets of Islam and the differences between this faith and Christianity. However, even very basic, accurate information about Islam is lacking. The poet credits the infidels with numerous gods, contrary to the monotheism that makes "There is no god but God" the first and most fundamental belief of Islam. Examples of this misunderstanding include the author's assertion that Marsile worships three gods: Muhammad, Apollo and Tervagant. Likewise, when the Saracens wish to swear an oath to do their best to kill Roland, they swear it on their holy book, mistaking Muhammad and Tervagant as the authors of, presumably, the Koran, whereas Islam holds the book to be the literal word of God. The Saracens, anticipating the return and vengeance of Charlemagne, pray to one of their gods, Tervagant, who predictably does not come to their aid. Angry with the non-response of their gods, the Saracens desecrate their own temple, cursing and tearing down the statues of Tervagant, Muhammad and Apollo. This scene reflects perhaps the ultimate sacrilege to the Christian community, which believed quite strongly in icons, but it makes no sense in Islam as images and pictorial representations were and are not permitted.

The Saracen warrior mirrors the Christian quite frequently throughout the text. Charlemagne retires to an orchard, underneath a pine tree, following his initial defeat of the Saracens. Here his 15,000 soldiers gather around, but most notably present are the Peers, Charlemagne's closest men and advisors with whom he proceeds to discuss plans for leaving Spain. Marsile, the Arab ruler, also goes into an orchard following the same battle and is described as sitting in the shade. His 20,000 men surround him, and he takes this moment to call his closest advisors to brainstorm on how to finally crush the French. The political and governing strategies of the two groups are the same. Both leaders are greatly respected by their men, yet their best ideas and future directions come from a select group of noble advisors (dukes and counts), many of whom are related to each other and to the king. As Marsile and his men seal their treachery, the parallelism is complete; twelve chosen from the Saracens, led by the nephew of Marsile, will go head to head with the twelve companions of Charlemagne, led by Roland, his nephew. The glove that the Saracen carries as representative of his ruler will be the same emblem that Ganelon, ambassador of Charlemagne, accepts from his king.

The Saracen doubles the Christian in other aspects of the epic as well. During the battle, as is the convention in most battle scenes of the chansons de geste, each Christian knight meets individually with a Saracen knight. Blows are exchanged and one knight emerges victorious, having killed the other. The two armies are equipped identically, though a certain exoticism dominates the description of the Saracen outfit. The armor remains essentially western, as does the basic riding techniques (on a special war-horse, in tight lines). Yet, the Saracen is distinguished from the French by the provenance of his weaponry. The author gives the impression that excellent, perhaps the best, armor comes from far away, from the pagan lands of Saragossa and Valencia, in addition to Venice. No doubt about it, the Saracen is regally equipped. The shield of an Emir holds fascination and beauty, encrusted in stones, amethyst, topaz, diamonds, and a brilliant carbuncle.

Admiration for the Saracen is not limited to his armor. The Saracen knight can be noble, handsome, loyal and bold. In short, all the same characteristics admired in the Christian knight can be found in certain Saracen knights as well. The author highlights the prowess and beauty of the Saracen Margarit. Baligant, the Emir of Babylon serves as a prime example of the knight that would be perfect, were he only a Christian. Physically, even, this Saracen shares the traits of the Christian. His skin, most noticeably, is white.

The author is able to step back from the good versus evil dichotomy that forms the basis of the epic in order to admit a certain similitude and even admiration. The armor of the Christian knights is not quite so fabulous as that of the Saracen. Baligant distinguishes himself as almost a true baron, to be compared with the treasonous French renegade, Ganelon. By bringing the two armies together in moments of similarity, an implicit examination of the values and culture of the Christian results. Better weaponry can be found in other cultures. Superior knights are not limited to the French, and indeed certain Christian knights fall short of their Saracen counterparts.

The Saracen is not without his abominable traits, however. Roland sees the approaching hordes through a literal perspective of black versus white, noting that they "are blacker than ink and have no white except for their teeth alone." Just as the Emir epitomized the almost-ideal knight, the appropriately named Saracen, Abyss, serves as the stereotypical concentration of French fears of Arabs. Not only is Abyss morally corrupt, he is also physically repulsive. His very humanness is called into question by his inability or unwillingness to laugh and play. The archbishop/knight Turpin, symbolizing Christianity and Good, takes it upon himself to destroy the personified evil, Abyss. The fight is nothing other than good versus evil, right versus wrong, truth versus lies.

The portrait of the Saracen in the *Chanson de Roland* vacillates between the positive and the negative. At the same time that the audience of the 1100s feared the Saracen, and thus pictured him in monstrous terms, they also coveted the refinements of Muslim culture, many of which were totally lacking in the West. The Saracen characters of the epic echo this movement between fear and envy. As Joseph J. Duggan relates, the *Chanson de Roland* and other militant poems "helped shape the mentalities that made the crusades possible." Not simply by opposing Christians and Muslims, but also by

constructing a Saracen who was frightening and inhuman enough to kill at the same time that he possessed objects and characteristics worthy of appropriation. The epic battle satisfied both these urges.

Source: Lynn T Ramey, for *Epics for Students,* Gale Research, 1997.

Critical Essay #2

Below, Duggan provides an historical overview of the beginnings of French literature in the chansons de geste, *or "songs of great deeds," the great epic poems of which* The Song of Roland *is the "acknowledged masterpiece of the genre." He notes the origins of this form in oral, or recited, poetry, and notes that these works were often based on actual events and individuals. Duggan discusses the way that epic poems were usedpropagandistically, to glorify national heroes, to find historical precedence for current events, and to popularize specific social, political, or religious points of view. Duggan comments that* The Song *contributed to the mindset that let to the Crusades and served as a ' foundation myth" about the beginnings of French nationalism.*

When Pope Urban II preached the First Crusade to the Orient in 1095 at Clermont, the vernacular literature of France consisted of epic poems *(chansons de geste),* saints' Lives, and lyric poetry. Most of these works were still being passed on orally rather than being written down. The immensely popular *chansons de geste* include several of the finest works in medieval French literature: the *Chanson de Roland* (ca. 1100; *Song of Roland), Raoul de Cambrai, Garin le Lorrain,* the *Chanson de Guillaume, Girart de Roussillon* , and *Huon de Bordeaux.* They were sung at fairs, weddings, and coronations, in public squares and in castles. Over 120 of them have survived, and the corpus totals more than a million lines. Many of the poems were translated into other medieval languages. In the 14th and 15th centuries, the most popular were reworked in prose, and several of these were among the first texts to be printed in the late 15th century. They continued to be read well into the 1800s in the Bibliotheque Bleue and other popular collections.

The French epic was largely the creation of jongleurs, itinerant performers who not only composed *chansons de geste* and performed the lyric poetry of the trouveres (inventors) of northern France and the troubadours of the south, but also juggled, did acrobatic tricks, exhibited trained animals, played instruments, and staged mimes and other entertainments. Jongleurs depended for their livelihood on the generosity of audiences; thus their songs can be taken to reflect the types of narrative diversion that the public desired. From the pronouncements of ecclesiastical officials, it is obvious that jongleurs belonged to the lowest level of medieval society. Female jongleurs, for example, were routinely assumed to engage in prostitution. Since literacy was confined almost entirely to the clergy and the higher nobility in the period in which the *chansons de geste* flourished, it appears that most jongleurs were illiterate. In any case, in medieval iconography jongleurs are never seen using books in their performances. Apparently they were able to perform *chansons de geste* of considerable length—examples of the genre range from 800 to 35,000 lines—through the use of an improvisational technique that has been solidly documented in other preliterate cultures: jongleurs developed a repertoire of stock scenes and phrases to aid them in reproducing, often in more or less the same form but sometimes with considerable modification, the songs that they heard others perform. In keeping with this oral and traditional transmission, the vast majority of the poems are anonymous.

Medieval illuminations show jongleurs playing a stringed instrument called the *vielle,* and treatises report that they sang the entire story to a chantlike melody. *Chansons de geste* are divided into *laisses,* stanzas of varying length, each characterized by a single assonance or rhyme; the lines are ten or twelve syllables long (though in one text, *Gormont etlsembart,* eight), and each is marked by a pause, or caesura. Variations in melody probably marked the first and last lines of the *laisse,* and the hiatus between *laisses* may have been filled with instrumental music.

Evidence for the existence of a thriving literature of epic song before the First Crusade is found in several precious texts: in his chronicle of the abbey of Saint-Riquier (completed in 1088), the monk Hariulf incorporates into his narrative an event from *Gormont et Isembart;* the Nota Emilianense, from the third quarter of the 1 lth century, summarizes a version of the *Chanson de Roland* ; and the Fragment of the Hague, an attempt around the year 1000 to render into a nostalgically classicized Latin the story of a fictional siege of Gerona, places there a number of heroes from what was later to be the cycle of epic poems recounting the deeds of Guillaume d'Orange, his forebears, and his nephews. The two other major epic cycles of *chansons de geste* (so divided by the 12th-century poet Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube) are that of the kings of France, sometimes referred to as the cycle of Charlemagne, and that of the rebellious vassals, treacherous or recalcitrant barons who are conceived as having all belonged to the same lineage. Several indications, including references to episodes from other songs in the early 12th-century *Chanson de Guillaume* and the presence of Guillaume-cycle heroes in the Fragment of the Hague, lead to the conclusion that the cycles had begun to develop well before the earliest *chanson de geste* to be preserved, the Oxford *Chanson de Roland* (Bodleian Library Ms. Digby 23), was copied in the second quarter of the 12th century. Not mentioned by Bertrand is the cycle that purports to give an account of the First Crusade: its content is, with the notable exception of the *Chanson d' Antioche,* almost entirely fictitious.

As a body of literature, then, the *chansons de geste* were conceived of genealogically. Typically each of the great heroes was the subject of a major song: examples are the *Chanson de Roland,* the *Chanson de Guillaume, Renaut de Montauban, Girart de Roussillon,* and *Raoul de Cambrai.* The process of cyclical development led to the composing of songs that told of the heroes' childhood exploits, or *enfances* (the *Enfances Guillaume,* the *Enfances Vivien);* their young manhood or *chevalerie* (the *Chevalerie Ogier de Danemark,* the *Chevalerie Vivien);* their conversions to the monastic life, or *moniage* (the *Moniage Guillaume,* the *Moniage Renouart);* and their deaths (the *Mort Charlemagne;* the *Mort Aimeri de Narbonne,* which recounts the demise of Guillaume's father). The deeds of great heroes are set in the context of their kinship alliances, reflecting the medieval legal principle that one was responsible for the acts of one's relatives: thus in the Oxford *Chanson de Roland,* Roland is the son of Charlemagne as well as his nephew; Guillaume is the brother of six other heroes, each of whom sets out to conquer a different land *(Les Narbonnais*), and the uncle of the tragic Vivien; the traitor Ganelon of the *Roland* is viewed as having been related to other untrustworthy knights, like him descended from the eponymous hero of *Boon de Mayence.* This emphasis on genealogy in the *chansons de geste* is hardly surprising:

geste signifies not only "deeds" and "tale about a hero's exploits" but also "lineage" and "cycle of songs about a lineage."

The seemingly sudden profusion of French texts after the First Crusade has frequently been viewed as the product of a great burst of authorial energy. Much of that textual production, however, resulted simply from the writing down of an oral literature that was in full blossom long before the crusade got under way. Although debates about the origins of French literature are often confined to the few hagiographic texts that were actually copied before the crusade, such as the late 9th-century *Cantilene* or *Sequence de sainte Eulalie (Sequence of Saint Eulalie)* and *La vie de saint Alexis* (ca. 1050), in a very real sense there were no discrete origins, since ,it appears that the oral literature of France came into being along with the French language as it developed out of popular Latin.

Viewed in that light, the relationship between the *chanson de geste* and history takes on added significance. Many of the earliest and most famous of the songs have at their center a historical kernel, frequently a great battle. Thus the *Chanson de Guillaume* recalls William of Toulouse's capture of Barcelona from the Moors in 803; the battle of Saucourt in 881, in which Louis HI defeated a Viking force that had attacked and burned the monastery of Saint-Riquier, inspired the tradition that produced *Gormont et Isembart;* the attack of Raoul, son of a certain Raoul de Gouy, on the county of Vermandois in 943 is at the core *of Raoul de Cambrai.* Sometimes surprisingly accurate details are preserved in the epics, such as the name of William of Toulouse's wife, Witburgh, which comes down in works of the Guillaume cycle in the corresponding French form Guibourc. Generally the historical events found in the *chanson de geste* date from the Carolingian period, although names and occurrences from as early as the Merovingian monarchy and as late as the taking of Antioch in 1098 figure in the French epic, and the Occitan *chanson de geste,* composed south of the Loire, contains material from as late as the civil war in Navarre of 1276-77. The preservation of events for as long as 300 years says much about the conservatism of the oral tradition.

Nonetheless, only a modicum of the tens of thousands of events recounted in the epics have a basis in history, and even in those cases the facts have been adapted to the dramatic and mythical requirements of the genre. The poets appropriated the details of history to their own needs—compositional, socio-economic, and occasionally even propa-gandistic—shaping a vision of the French past that centered on the achievements of legendary figures from the formative period in which the consciousness of national identity had begun to appear. In the process, they sometimes merged the deeds of historical figures who shared the same name, assigned one person's actions to another, created independent heroes from the same historical prototype, ascribed straight-forward military defeats to the machinations of traitors, and took other liberties with the facts that had entered their ken. Still, they claimed that their songs were true, as a result of which the *chansons de geste* were viewed as history by many a medieval cleric; and modern readers have not been exempt from the tendency to accept their testimony. In fact the *chanson de geste* embodied a popular form of historiography that competed with both the official annalists and chroniclers and the ecclesiastical historians.

Chansons de geste were sometimes used to spread the news of great historical events. The late 12th-century chronicler of the house of Guines, Lambert d'Ardre, tells a revealing anecdote concerning Arnold de Guines, who took part in the siege of Antioch during the First Crusade A jongleur singing a *Chanson d'Antioche* one day offered to include Arnold's deeds in his tale in exchange for a pair of scarlet shoes. When Arnold rejected the bargain, the jongleur excluded him from his version of the song. This example of the use of a *chanson de geste* to propagate the news of a recent event is also valuable for the insight it provides into the economic mentality of jongleurs, who did not hesitate to exact a price for the fame they were capable of spreading. That noble families did indeed pay attention to the songs that told of their putative ancestors' achievements is indicated by the fact that, from the last quarter of the 12th century on, the viscounts of Narbonne began to call their heirs "Aimen" in obvious emulation of the epic—and probably fictitious—Aunen de Narbonne of the Guillaume cycle.

Legends from the *chansons de geste* were also invoked for purposes of persuasion. The First Crusade offers a salient instance: the chronicler Robert of Reims, an eyewitness to Urban It's speech launching the idea of the crusade, reports that the pope called upon the assembled nobles to follow the example of their predecessors Charlemagne and his son Louis, who destroyed pagan kingdoms and extended the boundaries of the holy church. In the context of the struggle against Islam, this image of Charlemagne and Louis corresponds more closely to their deeds as transformed in the *chansons de geste* than to their historical undertakings, and suggests that the fictional story of Charlemagne's journey to the Holy Land, told in the *Pelerinage de Charlemagne,* provided an ideal precedent for French knights to take the cross.

Thus it is very likely that the *Chanson de Roland* and similar militant poems helped to shape the mentalities that made the crusades possible. Struggles between paganism and Christendom are predominant themes in the *chansons de geste,* and the ways in which the French Crusaders imagined Islam and the Arabs could not help but be shaped by their depiction in the epics. Not that the forces who opposed the Crusaders can simply be equated with the Saracens of the *chansons de geste.* The inclusion among the latter of such diverse tribes as the Ireis (Irish), the Argoilles (Scottish Argyles), the Esclavon (Slavs), the Ermines (Armenians), the Avers (Avars), the "people of Samuel" (Bulgars of Macedonia), the Hums (Huns), and the Hungres (Hungarians) renders it plausible that the Saracens represent all the external forces of paganism that were perceived as threats in early medieval France. Understanding of the tenets of Islam did not figure in the stock of knowledge available to the Crusaders, most of whom probably held a notion of that religion informed by the *chansons de geste:* the Saracens are said in the epics to worship many gods in the form of idols and to keep pigs—characteristics that are not only alien to Islam but abhorrent to its followers. That Mohammed is included among the gods of the Saracens is perhaps the crowning distortion. But rather than an anti-Islam conceived in calculated fashion, this depiction of the pagans who held Spain, North Africa (whose chief city in the epics is "Babylone," that is, Cairo), and the Holy Land represents a failure to differentiate between, on the one hand, the Germanic, Scandinavian, and Slavic pagans, many of whom did indeed worship idols, and, on the other, the monotheists emanating from Arabia, Persia, and Turkey. These reminiscences of the earlier threat of northern and eastern paganism is

an archaism in the epic conception of the world: just as many of the subjects of the *chansons de geste* hark back to the Carolingian era, when the poems presumably first began to take shape, so the view of the non-Christian world represented in them reflects a popular historiography of the 8th through 1 lth centuries rather than the view of Islam that men of learning began to develop in the 12th century.

The acknowledged masterpiece of the genre, the *Chanson de Roland,* has traditionally been viewed as the story of Charlemagne's nephew, but an obscure reference to the emperor's confessor, St. Giles, in lines 2096-98 reveals that the poet composed his work in full awareness of the legend that Charlemagne had committed incest with his sister, who as a consequence gave birth to Roland. These events are detailed in the First Branch of the *Karlamagnus Saga,* a Norse text of the mid-13th century that is based on lost French epics of the 1 lth and 12th centuries. The most renowned of the *chansons de geste* is thus the tale of the tragic death of Charlemagne's son, the genealogically pure offspring of the Frankish royal family, whose death, caused not by the Saracens but rather by his own extraordinary effort in sounding the horn to call for help after he and his men have fallen into a trap arranged by his stepfather Ganelon, is no doubt a punishment for his father's sin. Hence the *Chanson de Roland* belongs among a range of myths concerning heroes and gods born of incest—Heracles, Romulus, Mordred, Zeus, Apollo, Freyr, and in particular Sinfjotli in the *Volsunga Saga,* son of a brother (Sigmund) and a sister (Signy), who refuses to call for his father's help in a fight against overwhelming odds and who dies young and without offspring through his stepmother's treachery. The *Chanson de Roland* is a foundation myth, the story of the suffering and eventual triumph of Charlemagne, the figure who in the national consciousness is the founder of the French collectivity, on the occasion of his own son's death. In keeping with the character of the *chansons de geste,* however, the myth is anchored in a historical event, the defeat of Charlemagne's rearguard in the Pyrenees in the year 778. The evidence for Roland's historical existence is fragile and ambiguous.

The *Chanson de Roland* exemplifies the mutually beneficial relationship between the jongleurs and history: the poets preserved in their songs fragmentary memories of historical events, which they embellished for artistic purposes, while historical figures such as Urban II appropriated and exploited the epic legends to further their political and social agendas.

Source: Joseph J. Duggan, "TheEpic," in *A New History of French Literature,* edited by Dems Hollier, Harvard University Press, 1989, pp. 18-23.

Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpt, Harrison compares the two main women characters from The Song of Roland. *She notes that Roland's fiancee Aude is described as having typically desirable "feminine" traits: she is beautiful, faithful, and devoted, and is identified primarily in terms of her relationships with male characters. In contrast, the anonymous author depicted the Saracen queen Bramimunde as a strong, active, indepedent individual, who is in fact the only surviving Saracen discussed by name in the* Song.

Modern students of the humanities in high school, college, and graduate school who study the history of western civilization in a wide variety of disciplines from anthropology to comparative literature and French are currently exposed to the *Chanson de Roland* (in English, modern French, or Old French), usually they read short passages of a hundred verses or so, and they are told about the content and emphasis of the work as a whole.

Such readers are led to two conclusions concerning women characters in French epic literature: 1) women are unimportant or even nonexistent in the French epic; 2) the major female character in the *Chanson de Roland,* Aude, Roland's fiancee, offers a typical feminine depiction: her appearance is brief, unusually beautiful, and poignant. The first premise does find corroboration in many *chansons de geste,* where women are secondary or tertiary figures, not major protagonists of heroic proportions. The French epic seems to have been written for, by, and about men.

The second premise, asserting the representative nature of Aude and the remarkable beauty of her few verses, continues to be popular, both in French and English-language scholarship. In some ways, this can be seen as a direct response to the intellectual currents of our own time, when women as students and scholars are increasingly interested in the roles of women in literature and in the cultures that produced such writings. Two questions are central to a balanced appraisal and understanding of women characters in the *Chanson de Roland:* how important to this work is Aude? are there other artistically interesting women characters in the poem?

Aude is first mentioned during the rearguard battle. When first named in verses 1719-1721, she is a relative latecomer to the story. The poet focuses at once on her relationship or kinship to both of the heroes, Roland *and* Olivier: she is fiancee to one, sister of the other. The two companions have disagreed vigorously earlier, and their debate is renewed at the turning point of the battle, when their heroism is at its apogee. Here the reader first hears of Aude, from Olivier, in the heat of anger.... Critics have observed the importance of the whole battlefield debate without much attention to its effect on the characterization of Aude. She is introduced at a privileged moment of high emotion, in a passage that circumscribes four traits essential to her character: her noble family lineage; her passive status therein dominated by their right of bestowal of her person in marriage; her prestigious betrothal; and her discreetly sexual role as bride-to-be. At this point, Aude's possession, within the limits of family and marriage—two of the primary circles of medieval woman's social existence—is a subject of a mild oath,

uttered in anger, a corollary to the foremost male pursuit—warfare. It is not an exaggeration, within this context, to equate Aude with royal booty, one of the better prizes of conquest.

Aude's major episode, two thousand verses later, consists of a dialogue with Charlemagne, about Roland, followed by her death and interment. Described only as "une bele damisele" ["a fair damsel"], she meets the emperor on the steps of his palace, to ask: "Co dist al rei: 'O est Rollant le catanie, Ki me jurat cume sa per a prendre?'" ["She said to the King: 'Where is Roland, the captain, Who gave me his solemn word he would take me to wife?'"] Charles, weeping and tearing his beard, tells her she inquires after a dead man, and he then offers her his own son Louis in marriage. Aude finds the offer "estrange," which I interpret to mean "incompatible or inconsistent with my nature and view of my life." Praying that it not please God, his angels, and saints for her to survive Roland, she drops dead. (The same idiom, *aler a sa fin,* is used to describe Roland also, nght after his death.) Charlemagne, thinking she has fainted, attempts to revive her, then calls four countesses to carry the body to a convent, where, after a night's vigil, she is buried beside an altar. Finally, Charlemagne endows a convent in Aude's honor

Aude is faithful, pious, beautiful, a noblewoman whose sacrifice is honored. Her status is thrice indicated: first, by her direct approach to the emperor, which is well received by him; second, by his reactions to her words, his deep concern for her and his marriage offer of his own heir; finally, by his endowment of the convent. Although Aude is here an initiator of action, a woman who speaks and acts, she does so only in relation to male characters. As her introduction as a character was defined by her relationship to Roland and Olivier, her deeds here are directly related to Charlemagne, her soveeign, with full power over her person. The poet implicitly suggests the spatial and legal constraints within which she exists (the palace and the arranged marriage), while explicitly stating the male dominance that circumscribes her life. Charlemagne's actions begin and end the episode, and his words or deeds occupy seventeen of the twenty-nine verses. Aude's life has been one of honor, within the confines of family, betrothal, and church; although she is associated with the major heroic figures of the poem (Roland, Olivier, Charlemagne), she is sheltered, protected, bestowed. She is wholly dependent, and her honor, like her status, is reflected from male characters.

Some critics call her death a martyrdom, and both Reau and Brault associate her demise with the iconographic formula of the Death of the Virgin. As Brault writes: "Like Mary, Alda is a virgin, and her passing, which is so peaceful it completely deceives Charles into believing she has merely fainted, is an awe-inspiring dormition." Scholars have seen her as the last victim of the Battle of Roncevals, the most touching reminder of Roland, the incarnation of ideal love and the most moving of all tributes to Roland's glory, one of Roland's greatest claims to glory. Although her twenty-nine verses are surely not mere decoration, some of these claims on her behalf are hyperbolic and distorted Her episode is woven well into the epic's action; she does contribute to the character development of both Roland and Charlemagne, but she does not directly reinforce the poem's central theme of Christian supremacy over the pagans. Beautiful Aude is tightly confined, subordinate, and supportive, and if that is typical of unmarried

noblewomen of her time, then she can be called representative and, if not mimetic, at least *grosso modo* realistic.

A much more significant female figure is the Saracen queen Bramimunde, wife of Saragossa's King Marsile. By far the most developed woman character in this epic, she is an independent, active participant in four different passages, each of which is strategically located within the poem's action. Bramimunde first appears in the scene of treachery (when the betrayal of the French rearguard is planned by Ganelon and the Saracen leaders to whom he is an ambassador); she is next a central figure during the scenes showing the reactions to Marsile's defeat; she is prominent in three stages of the second half of the poem when Charlemagne as Roland's emperor and Christendom's champion defeats the Emir Baligant, sovereign of Marsile and ruler of Araby; and finally, her conversion to Christianity is reported by the poet as part of the poem's conclusion. In each instance she is directly and explicitly linked with the emperor Charlemagne. She is the sole individualized Saracen survivor, and by her baptism, arranged at Charles' behest, she embodies the primary theme of the *chanson:* the Christians are right, the pagans are wrong.

Laisse 50, within the section of the poem where Ganelon plans the Saracen ambush of the French rearguard led by Roland, contains a description of Bramimunde's gifts to the wife of the French ambassador and traitor. While Ganelon is in council with the enemy Saracens, Bramimunde comes to the gathering, declares her affection for the Frenchman, and states that she is sending two necklaces (with gold, amethysts, and sapphires) to Ganelon's wife. In this her first appearance, Bramimunde concludes with a formulaic, oblique reference to Charlemagne: "Vostre emperere si bones n'en out unches" ["Your Emperor never had such fine ones"]. The Queen is not the only pagan to give presents to Ganelon; Valdabrun has already offered his sword and Climorin his helmet, but the men's gifts are to the ambassador directly, and the men exchange kisses as well to seal the gift-giving. Bramrmunde's gifts are non-military, for Ganelon's wife (a woman never mentioned again), and the feudal kiss is replaced by a statement that "Il les ad prises, en sa hoese les butet" ["He took them, he sticks them in his boot"]. The author of the *Roland* is fully cognizant of Bramimunde's femininity, and he depicts actions and statements that are appropriate for women.

Brault finds Bramimunde's words to Ganelon "bold and suggestive." ... [He] explains that "the voluptuous and amoral Saracen lady is a stock character in epic Literature." He also notes that in this passage, as elsewhere in the epic tradition, "diabolism and eroticism are closely intertwined." I find little substantiation for this interpretation, in this section of the text or in other appearances of Bramimunde in the poem. She is a Queen, with a political and religious role; her gifts are to Ganelon's *wife;* and nowhere else in the text does her conduct convey an erotic connotation, much less diabolism.

Bramimunde's second scene takes place in Saragossa, immediately after the defeat of Marsile. In laisse 187, she cries out, along with 20,000 men. They are reported to curse Charlemagne, then proceed to depose their gods while uttering blasphemous shouts and curses quoted by the poet directly. Although Bramimunde is the only individual of the stanza, her appearance is very short (three verses), and the actions and words are

attributed to the mob as well. The next stanza, laisse 188, the last before the principal division of the poem (the second part or Baligant episode), is devoted entirely to Bramimunde's outpouring of grief, in deed and word.The Saracen reaction to Marsile's defeat is described in terms of the undifferentiated mob *and* Bramimunde, who is the only individual to speak for the infidel cause. She performs the ritual actions of grief and delivers a carefully balanced, eleven-verse speech of formal lamentation.

The third set of passages in which Bramimunde appears are the three stages of the Baligant section; she is still a part of the Saracen court. Marsile, her husband, was victorious over Roland's rearguard, but Charlemagne's army has destroyed the Saracen troops. Now Marsile's sovereign, the Emir Baligant, comes to do battle with the Emperor Charles, in the ultimate conflict between pagan and Christian. When the messengers from Baligant arrive at Saragossa, at the court of Marsile, his Queen receives them, and she counsels them twice. Neither speech is well received, and both times a male character virtually tells her to be quiet, in so many words. Their refusal to listen to her is, eventually, their undoing, for she has ended each statement of advice with a warning about the power of Charlemagne Bramimunde is the official of the court to welcome the Emir Baligant, throwing herself at his feet, as she bemoans her pitiful situation, since she has lost her lord (Marsile being wounded and incapable of protecting her).

And finally, Bramimunde, from a tower, witnesses the Emir's defeat, called the confounding of Araby, and she invokes Mohammed while reporting the shame and death she sees. Upon hearing her words, her wounded husband Marsile turns his face to the wall and dies of grief.

Bramimunde is in evidence and speaks at three crucial moments during the Baligant encounter: the arrival of the messengers, the arrival of the Emir himself, and the defeat of Baligant along with the subsequent death of Marsile. She fills an official role, both as Queen and as witness.

The fourth stage of her role in the *Chanson de Roland* is her conversion to Christianity. It is annouced by the poet during the sack of Saragossa; each time the reader is told that it is the will of the king that she be converted, but by love and not by force, in France and not in Spain. She is to be taken, as a prisoner, to Aix. This information is conveyed directly twice. The first time, she is the only individual taken, unconverted, from Saragossa home to France.... The second reference says that the Emperor wishes her only good.

After the trial of Ganelon and the execution of his kin (among whom there is no mention of his wife, to whom Bramimunde sent the necklaces), Charlemagne's first concern seems to be the conversion of his queenly captive.... [In the baptism scene, as] with the gift-giving scene, the poet is conscious that Bramimunde is a woman, and the ritual observed is appropriate for a nun, not a male convert.

The final stanza of the entire poem contains the reiteration of the conversion of Charlemagne's important prisoner; this is the third accomplishment of his mission—he has done justice, assuaged his anger, and given Christianity to Bramimunde.... Although

converted and baptised Juliana, she is in the last reference known under the old, familiar Saracen name, and she here represents the Saracen community of which she is the sole individualized survivor.

A feminist appraisal of Bramimunde must answer at least three crucial questions: is she a full-fledged member of the society depicted? does she act outside of the love-marriage situation? is she a role model? Certainly Bramimunde's participation in her society is full, if not extraordinary. The gift scene, her role in the formal reception of Baligant's embassy and the Emir's arrival at Saragossa, and finally her conversion, at the singular behest of Charles: the importance of these episodes and her particular behavior in them show her as not only a full-fledged member, but, by the end of the *geste,* as the representative of the Saracen world. On two instances when she is rebuffed by Saracen men, rudely, the poet shows that Bramimunde is right and the pagans are wrong when they do not heed her warnings.

Though the reader would infer that her title Queen of Spain comes to her through marriage with Marsile, the author of the *Roland* only twice qualifies her as "his wife," both in stanza 187, in the scene where she sees and understands the severity of her husband's wounds. The poet far prefers to call her by name or royal title. Bramimunde is portrayed as a loyal wife, fulfilling the regal duties of her status, but after the mortal wounding of her spouse Marsile, her activity, prominence, and representative position increase, verse by verse. And long after her king-consort has died, Queen Bramimunde is alive, a worthy convert, far beyond the love-marriage identification of other medieval women in other works of literature, such as Iseut.

The most important facet of Bramimunde's presentation by the *Roland* poet is her close association, specifically stated in each instance, with Charles. Every time she appears, without exception, she or the poet makes explicit reference to Charles the Emperor. And this link, forged from her debut as gift-giving queen, to the great king, with a divinely bestowed mission of subduing or converting the pagans, brings Bramimunde into contact with the major theme of the poem. Neither diabolic nor erotic, she is not a romantic foil for Charles, or a feminine counterpart, or a pseudo-consort, she is instead a living example of the most lasting and benevolent side of his assigned earthly task—the flower of the pagan world converted to Christianity, admitted in honor to the very center of Christendom, and the only preoccupation of Charles when the vengeance is over.

Aude and Bramimunde offer an interesting set of opposite characteristics; in some ways they are complementary to one another: Christian/Saracen, virgin betrothed/wife then widow, noblewoman queen, representative of women left behind/representative of the Saracen political and religious community, inexperienced youth of uncompromising idealism/experienced middle age capable of compromise and conversion. Critics observe a religious association for both (Aude with the Virgin Mary in death, Bramimunde with St. Juliana in baptism), and both are clearly female, depicted as women in actions appropriate to women. Teachers who decide to emphasize Aude at the expense of Bramimunde are choosing to stress Roland's sacrifice as the central event of the epic, since Aude as a character serves, perhaps exclusively, to reinforce

Roland's role. Bramimunde as a character is more full, much more active, and woven into the greater theme of the whole epic: Charlemagne's conquest of the pagans, as the champion of Christendom. Although the total number of verses devoted to both women is small (twenty-nine for Aude and one hundred forty-seven for Bramimunde, out of four thousand), these women are integral to the plot, character, and thematic development of the *chanson.* An examination of them both, in measured fashion, is but another way of observing the meticulous artistry of the *Roland* poet.

Source: Ann Tukey Harrison, "Aude and Bramimunde: Their Importance in the 'Chanson de Roland'," *The French Review,* Vol LIV, No 5, April, 1981, pp. 672-79.

Adaptations

Le mystere de Roncevaux is a stage adaptation written by Adolphe, Baron d'Avril, and published in 1893 in Paris. The play was republished in 1993 by Troyes.

Peter Racine Flicker wrote three fragments from the *Song of Roland* for unaccompanied chorus in London, published by Schottin 1955.

Edward MacDowell, 1860-1908, wrote *The Symphonic Poems* which include two fragments from the *Chanson de Roland,* one called "The Saracens," and the other called "The Lovely Alda."

A full-length feature movie directed by Frank Cassenti, *La Chanson de Roland,* appeared in France in 1978 from Z productions.

Greg Roach created the award-winning multimedia interactive book CD-ROM called *The Madness of Roland* from HyperBole.

A World-Wide Web site containing an electronic edition of the *Song of Roland* (1995) was produced, edited and prepared by Douglas B. Killings. It can be found at URL http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/OMACL/Roland.

Topics for Further Study

Many commentators on *The Song of Roland* debate the question of Roland's character. Does his refusal to summon help for the rear guard support an interpretation of Roland as a brave and noble man, or does it mark him as guilty of the sin of pride? Can a case be made for both interpretations?

The character of Ganelon claims that he always remained loyal to his lord and king, Charlemagne, even though he betrayed another of Charlemagne's knights to the Saracens. Can Ganelon's claim be justified? Compare his actions with incidents from modern history in which highly-placed officials broke laws or caused harm while claiming to keep faith with a leader. Examples might include: the Watergate conspirators, Colonel Oliver North, German army officers during World War II, or Soviet and U.S. double agents during the Cold War.

The Song of Roland is said to be the written form of an oral story. Read about oral performance and investigate ways that the text of *The Song of Roland* might demonstrate its oral origin.

Research the early history of France and look at the ways that *The Song of Roland* reflects more about eleventh-century France than the France of the eighth century in which it is set.

Roland's fiancee, Aude, prefers death to living without her beloved. This was considered an honorable and desirable choice for a woman of her time. How is this choice viewed by a twentieth-century reader of this work?

The trial of Ganelon gives us a picture of medieval justice. Compare this system of justice with that of the late twentieth-century United States.

Toward the end of *The Song of Roland,* the captive Saracen Queen Bramimonde voluntarily renouces her Muslim faith and is baptized as a Christian. To the anonymous author of this epic, this is proof of her wisdom and goodness. Offer another explanation of why a foreign prisoner of a war in which her husband was killed might choose to accept the belief system of her captors.

Compare and Contrast

700s: During this century Charlemagne expanded his empire to include all of present-day France and Germany, as well as parts of Spain, Italy, Slovenia, Hungary and Croatia. His seat of power was Aachen, in present-day Germany.

1000s: France was divided into small houses of power, ruled by local lords. Henry IPs marriage to Eleanor of Aquitaine made the king of England the most powerful ruler in what is present-day France. The French king controlled the area around Paris, but his influence was slight outside the immediate area. The barons in the *Chanson de Roland* exert considerable influence over Charlemagne's actions.

Late twentieth century: France, though divided into departments for administrative purposes, has a highly-centralized government located in Paris. Attempts to spread power and influence throughout the country are underway in the late twentieth century, but Paris remains the political and cultural center of France.

700s: The Islamic empire expanded as conquests begun by Muhammad in 622 continued throughout this century. The Arabs met little organized resistance until they pushed well into France and were stopped and driven back by Charles Martel in 732.

1000s: The Islamic empire, like the Christian one, was divided into two parts; the Shiites with a capital in Cairo, and the Sunni caliphate centered in Baghdad. Baligant comes from Cairo to aid his vassal, Marsile.

Late twentieth century: The Muslim world, never reunited, is still divided among Sunnis and Shiites, No central power exists as each country in the Islamic world has its own spiritual and temporal rulers.

700s: In Europe, marriage laws based on Christian doctrine are passed, providing women with a degree of security and added responsibility.

1000s: Women, left behind as their husbands went on crusade, control lands and run households. Marsile's wife Bramimonde rules in her husband's absense.

Late twentieth century: Women enjoy equal protection under the law and hold positions of power in local and national governments in many countries, though some feel there is still progress to be made in the campaign for women's rights.

700s: The French language was emerging as a combination of Latin and the tongues of the Germanic tribes. No literary works in this tongue have been found.

1000s: Old French has evolved into an entirely separate language. *The Song of Ro land* marks the beginning of a literary explosion in the vernacular.

Late twentieth century: France continues to cherish its literary heritage, encouraging young writers and making French literature a central element in its national curriculum.

The Academie Francaise is charged with maintaining the purity of the French language. In the late 1990s laws and regulations have been put in place to restrict the use of non-French-language words in advertising, public interchange (such as television programming), and even the ratio of French to non-French language songs that can be broadcast on the radio.

What Do I Read Next?

Other medieval French epics have survived. They were grouped by twelfth-century scribes into cycles. *The Song ofRolandis* part of the Cycle of the King *(Geste du roi),* which also includes *The Pilgrimage of Charlemagne (he pelerinage de Charlemagne* or *he voyage de Charlemagne),* Other epic poetry cycles included the Feudal Cycle *(Geste de Boon de Maiance)* and the William cycle *(Geste de Guillaume d'Orange* or *Geste de Garin de Monglane.*

Italian Renaissance poet Luidi Pulci wrote a burlesque version of the Roland story in 1470 entitles *Il Morgante maggiore (The Great Morgante),* retelling the story of the ambush in the valley of Roncevalles.

The romantic poem *Orlando Innamorto (Roland in Love),* by Matteo Maria Boiardo, blends the heroic ideal of the Roland epic with the courtly love motif of later French epic poetry.

Lodovico Ariosto's *Orlando Funoso (Roland Mad)* adds many episodes to the account of the heroic knight Roland, including his amorous adventures.

Defiance and courage characterize the quest of the knight portrayed in Robert Browning's poem "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" ("Childe" is an archaic term for "knight").

Norman Daniel's 1984 study *Heroes and Saracens* looks at the portrayal of Christians and Muslims in medieval literature.

A History of Women: Silences of the Middle Ages, edited by Christiane Klapish-Zuber in 1992, provides essays that give a good overview of what life was like for medieval women.

Jamaica Kincaid's short story "Song of Roland" appeared in the *New Yorker* magazine on April 12, 1993.

Further Study

Auerbach, Erich. "Roland against Ganelon," in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature,* pp 96-122 Princeton University Press, 1953

Examines and discusses the technical composition of The *Song of Roland,* focusing on the work's representation of reality.

Burgess, Glyn. Introduction to *The Song of Roland,* translated by Glyn Burgess, pp. 7-25. Penguin, 1990.

Provides information about the provenance of the manuscript, the historical background of the poem, a plot synopsis, and a technical analysis of the verse and language of the poet.

Cook, Robert Francis *The Sense of the Song of Roland* Ithaca- Cornell University Press, 1987,266 p.

General reading with detailed analysis of key episodes.

Duby, Georges, and Perrot, Michelle. *A History of Women, Vol. II: Silences of the Middle Ages.* Belknap Press, 1992,575 p.

Essay collection treating the different roles for women during the Middle Ages.

Duggan, Joseph J. "The Epic," in *A New History of French Literature,* Harvard University Press, 1989, pp. 18-23.

Study of the relationship between history and epic that examines the popularity of the epic form in the twelfth century

Durant, Will *The Age of Faith,* Simon and Schuster, 1950, 1196 p

Provides historical background for the period in which *The Song of Roland is* set and was written

Emden, Wolfgang van, *La Chanson de Roland,* London: Grant & Cutler, 1995,135 p. Critical guide.

Enders, Jody, "The Logic of the Debates in the *Chanson de Roland,"* ra *Ohphant,* Vol 14, No 2, pp 83-100.

Looks at the use of rhetoric—the art of effective or persuasive speech—as practiced by major characters in *The Song of Roland*

Jenkins, T. Atkinson, Introduction to *La Chanson de Roland,* edited by D C. Atkinson, pp. 175-78. Heath and Company, 1924.

Discusses the characters, style and themes of the poem, and concludes that the character of Roland is a hero in the traditional sense of the word

Mickel, Emanuel J *Ganelon, Treason and the Chanson de Roland,* University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1989,184 p.

Examines the medieval legal system in France with application to the trail of Ganelon in *The Song of Roland*

Renoir, Alain "Roland's Lament: Its Meaning and Function in the *Chanson de Roland*," in *Speculum,* Vol. 35, No. 4, 1960, pp. 572-83.

Bases an interpretation of *The Song of Roland* as an essentially Christian work on an explication of Roland's lament for the fallen French knights

Uitti, Karl D., "'Co dit la geste': Reflections on the Poetic Restoration of History in the *Song of Roland," mStudies in Honor of Hans Erich Keller,* edited by Rupert T Pickens. Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 1993, pp. 1-27.

Examines the historical sources of *The Song of Roland.*

Vance, Eugene, *Reading the Song of Roland,* Prentice-Hall, 1970,118 p.

Provides a detailed reading and interpretation of the epic that includes analysis of characters and the work's historical context.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Epics for Students (EfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's For Students Literature line, EfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on classic novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of EfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of EfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in EfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by EfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an at-a-glance comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

EfS includes The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature, a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Epics for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the EfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the EfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Epics for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Epics for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from EfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Epics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from EfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Epics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of EfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Epics for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of EfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Epics for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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