In the course of an article\(^1\) which seeks to show that Roland is in the right morally and tactically on the analogy of Tierri seen as a sort of typological parallel to the hero—an argument which has certain attractions, undoubtedly, in terms of neatness and unity—Professor William W. Kibler does me the honour of criticising part of my paper "'E cil de France le cleiment a guarant' . . .\(^2\)". As he takes me to task on a point of methodology, I feel it incumbent on me to reply, and perhaps to elaborate one or two related points.

The statement under discussion is essentially the following:

> L'on a prétendu qu'il [Roland] doit se sacrifier avec les hommes qui lui sont confiés parce que c'est le seul moyen de pousser Charles à mener la guerre à bonne fin. Logiquement parlant, du moins, c'est faux. Si Roland sonnait du cor au moment où Olivier aperçoit les armées sarrasines, Charlemagne reviendrait; il constaterait la trahison et il écraserait infailliblement les païens, car c'est une donnée du poème (vv. 16-19, 567-9), que les forces militaires de Marsile ne sont pas capables de tenir tête à celles de Charlemagne . . . Olivier a donc raison, du point de vue militaire.

Kibler, having quoted this passage continues:

> But van Emden, in suggesting what might [italics his] have happened had Charlemagne been called earlier, is using a subjective argument which cannot be supported by the text. In reading the poem, one is struck rather by Charlemagne's weariness with battle and his desire to return to Aix, a desire which even his beloved nephew Roland cannot alter . . . and it seems improbable in the extreme that the weary and weak Charlemagne of the Oxford Chanson de Roland would have found the strength to do any more than rescue the members of the rearguard had he returned to Roncevaux before the death of Roland. It is, indeed, Roland's death which creates the vengeance motif that dominates the last half of the poem.


I have certainly always worked to the principle, and sought to instill it in my students, that it is inadmissible to speculate about a fictional text as though it were a factual situation. To be accused of so doing is therefore sobering, and the accusation demands serious examination. Yet the passage quoted by Kibler carries in itself the precise references to the text on which arguments of this kind must indeed be based: the poet tells us, through the mouths of characters in a good position to know, that it is a datum of the story that the whole pagan army cannot withstand the forces of Charlemagne:

16 '...Li empereres Carles de France dulce En cest païs nos est venuz confundre. Jo nen ai ost qui bataille li dunne, Ne n'ai tel gent ki la sue deru[m]pet: ...'

564 'Jo ai tel gent, plus bele ne verreiz; Quarte cenz mille chevalers puis averir. Puis m'en cumbatre a Carle e a Franceis?' Guenes respunt: 'Ne vus a ceste feiz: De voz paiens mult grant perte i avreiz; Lessez la folie, tenez vos al saveir ...'3

If further evidence is required, is not the sense of laisse I that Marsilie's military position is hopeless from the start and that Blancandrin's deceitful stratagem is the only way out? What are we to make of Olivier's statements at vv. 1717-8, 1728-31?

1717 '... S'i fust li reis, n'i oüsum damage. Cil qui la sunt n'en deivent aveir blasme.'4

1728 '... Se·m creïsez, venuz i fust mi sire; Gest bataille oüsum faite u prise, U pris u mort i fust li reis Marsilie. Vostre proëcce, Rollant, mar la ve[ï]mes; ...'

Are we to say that all these statements are made by biassed personages? No one contradicts them (one must not lose sight of the highly dramatic technique of the author), and Ganelon's advice that all

3These and all Roland quotations are from the edition by F. Whitehead (Oxford: Blackwell, 1942).

Marsilie's 400,000 men will be needed to wipe out the 20,000 of the rearguard is amply justified by the event. Is Professor Kibler suggesting that the poet wants his audience to infer that Marsilie could win a straight bataille rangée? Evidently not; it is Charlemagne's willingness to be involved in such a battle that is to be questioned, in his view; but Kibler agrees with me (p. 32) that Charles was bound to return if he heard the Oliphant. How, then, does the Emperor, on this hypothesis, return and extricate Roland without a battle? One would have to imagine some such scenario as this: Charles returns before the pagans have time to start their attack; his approach causes the pagans to flee; in his battle-weariness, Charles returns to France (presumably putting someone else—Ganelon?!—in charge of the rearguard). Alternatively, the Emperor returns to find the battle already begun; his approach causes the pagans to flee; in his battle-weariness, Charles forbids Roland to pursue them, puts him safely in the vanguard, and proceeds as before . . . This is on the assumption that the Saracens flee; were they to stay and fight, that would complicate matters considerably. All this is absurd, of course, but it is precisely the sort of speculation which is logically involved in Professor Kibler's answer to my point. He may wish to suggest another mechanism for extricating Roland while avoiding the decisive combat—I confess I cannot see one more plausible—but surely his hypothesis on any showing involves far more speculation than mine, which is based on two simple propositions, both supported by the text of the poem: Charles would return if he heard the Oliphant (Kibler accepts this) and the Christian army would inevitably beat the Saracen forces (Kibler does not, it seems, deny this).

Professor Kibler is in effect saying that the second of my propositions would not result from the implementation of the first because, although Charles would return, he is so weary with war that he would not fight, however clear the treachery of the Saracens might be. This weariness would, it seems to me, have to be quite as explicit in the text as are my two propositions before we could accept my American colleague's hypothesis. But he gives us only a general reference to "one's" impressions on reading the Roland. Not that he is alone in his view; the figure of a weak, almost decrepit Charlemagne is becoming

5Making the point that this is, indeed, obvious Professor Kibler takes me gently to task for exaggerating Olivier's insight when I say that he is right from the military point of view. I was, on the contrary, suggesting that if Olivier needed little perspicacity to make his assessment of the situation and of the steps to be taken, Roland is the more obviously wrong-headed in his attitude to the clear facts.
something of an established fact among many scholars. I, for one, am far from accepting it; I do not, for instance, see his willingness to act in consensus with his barons (cf. vv. 167, 244 ff. and the trial scene, among other examples) as a sign of weakness, but rather as part of the idealization of the Carolingian monarchy. Certainly the general lesson to emerge from the twelfth century epic is that the king who, like John Lackland and others, takes refuge in the voluntas associated with theocratic notions of kingship is no more highly regarded in feudal fiction than he normally was in feudal reality. The Emperor's willingness to listen to consilium is a positive feature, akin to his refusal to speak in haste (vv. 139-42) and associated with it (vv. 214-6). Nor do I see that, because he (like Roland and others) weeps and shows extreme grief, or because he admits to weariness and discouragement at specific moments (e.g., in the final laisse), he ever fails to do effectively what is required of him. Does The poet leave any doubt in our mind that Reis Vivien will be effectively succoured in Imphe? If the Emperor's life is penus?, it is because he knows that there is no end to his involvement in the fight against Islam. "Le chef d'oeuvre de notre poète," wrote Albert Pauphilet in a passage which would repay meditation by all involved in our controversy, "est sans doute d'avoir

Filoogia Romana, 4 (1957), p. 230 ff.; Emanuel J. Mickel, Jr.,
p. 129 ff.; Normand R. Cartier, "La Sagesse de Roland," Aquila, I (1968),
pp. 37 ff., 41-3; E. Vance, Reading the Song of Roland (Englewood Cliffs,
N.J., 1970), pp. 11-14, 26, 65; P. Aebischer, Préhistoire et proto-
histoire du Roland d'Oxford (Berne, 1972), pp. 205 ff., 208, 221; B.D.R.
Owen, trans., The Song of Roland (London: Unwin Books Classics, 1972),
pp. 21-3. Et j'en passe. My position would be closer to the studies
of A. Pauphilet, Les legs du moyen âge (Melun, 1950), pp. 77-80 and P.

*See W. Ullmann, Principles of Government and Politics in the
Middle Ages, 2nd. ed. (London, 1966), pp. 138 ff., 162. For the exercise of voluntas in the epic, the Charlemagne of La Chevalerie Ogier or
Renaut de Montauban springs to mind, as does the Charles Martel of
Girart de Roussillon; but these monarchs, while certainly not passive
or subject to weariness, hardly recommend themselves as substitutes for
the Emperor of the Roland. (For the evolution from the latter to the
former, and its causes, see K.-H. Bender, König und Vasall [Heidelberg,
1967].)
su unir en lui l'ordinaire et le merveilleux, la commune douleur et l'action prodigieuse."

Let us, however, in spite of the warning Pauphilet gives against overlooking the subtlety of the poet's "équilibres et ... conciliations difficiles," accept temporarily for the sake of the discussion the figure of the weak and weary Emperor. Where does the author dwell explicitly on these aspects? Paradox! Apart from the general "passivity" in council scenes (which is the somewhat loaded term usually applied to his habit of listening to his barons and acting on their collective advice), the main data which have been used to illustrate his weakness: Charles weeping over his fallen vassals, waiting for Naimon to recall him from his planetus to the necessity of action, needing Gabriel to strengthen him against Baligant, expressing discouragement or lassitude—all this occurs, surely, after Roland's death, whereas Professor Kibler's argument depends on the supposition that Roland must first die in order to revitalize the Emperor by giving him a thirst for vengeance. Where is the textual evidence for his incapacity to fight victoriously before Roland's death? The critics whose views I oppose here often state that not only Charles, but also his army, are battle-weary and all too ready to listen to the blandishments of Blancandrin. These views seem to be based on Charlemagne's great age, on the Franks' agreement with the advice of Ganelon and Naimon (V. 243), and on the emotion shown by them

8*p. cit., p. 77.
9*Cf. Foulet, art. cit., p. 147; del Monte, art. cit., pp. 230-1; R.N. Walpole, "Le sens moral de la 'Chanson de Roland'" Travaux linguistiques et littéraires du Centre de Philologie et de Littérature Romane, Strasbourg, 4 (1966), p. 10 (in most other respects, however, I find myself in agreement with this article); Le Gentil, op. cit., pp. 94-5; Cartier, art. cit., p. 40; M. Waltz, Rolandslied, Wilhelmslied, Alexiuslied: Zur Struktur und geschichtlichen Bedeutung, (Heidelberg, 1965), pp. 23-6. In parenthesis, one may ask what a Christian monarch is supposed to do when his enemy asks for mercy in the Name of God (vv. 82 ff., 239-40, etc.) and promises, with the offer of tribute and high-born hostages, to become both the convert and the vassal of his conqueror. Is not Ganelon's counsel, though given—as the poet subtly implies—for the wrong reasons, a priori the right one? It is supported by Naimon, already, it would seem, furnished with his datum of wisdom (vv. 246-51, 774-82, 1790-5, 2423-8), and in any case entails not immediate acceptance but only negotiation. For Charlemagne's motivation, see v. 156: "Uncore purrat guarir."
at the sight of their homeland (vv. 818-22), as well as on the general fact that the campaign is seven years old, which enters into Blancandrin's calculations in outlining his plan (vv. 35-6). But all these features are capable of other interpretations, and Kibler does not, in fact, adduce them; indeed, he does not explicitly question the fighting spirit of the army.

Yet, apart from such fragile indications, it is difficult to see (at any rate before Roland's death) what basis there can be for the weak and war-weary Charles necessary to Professor Kibler's supposition, or for the jadedness of his men. On the contrary, the text shows us, over and over again, an Emperor who is invoked enthusiastically by his men (e.g. vv. 1207-9, 1234, 1253-4), admired and feared by his enemies (e.g. vv. 56, 370 ff., 522 ff., 537 ff., 550 ff., 2114-19, 2149 ff., etc.), and whose name is constantly accompanied by positive epithets (magnes, fiers, ber etc.). His patriarchal prestige is indeed a cliché of Rolandian scholarship, and is taken so far that we see him exercising an idealized priestly function (vv. 339-40)\(^{12}\) One might go further and, building on Pauphilet's study of Charles, suggest that, "au-dessus de la mesure humaine," this patriarch reflects to an extent some of the attributes of God Himself in his holding in tension power, superhuman knowledge of the future, suffering and action, as well as perhaps in the way he allows a large measure of freedom to his men. This is possibly to read too much into the text, but even if the poet had no such idea in mind the parallel may be illuminating. Thus one cannot accuse him of

\(^{10}\)As to the first of these arguments, see Pauphilet, op. cit., p. 77; for the second, n. 9 above; emotion after seven years' absence is perfectly natural and to be expected, not least in literary terms; a campaign of this length argues devotion beyond the call of feudal duty and the sort of high morale shown in laisse VIII, and it remains to be shown that this passage is misleading and that the French are in fact wearied by seven years of (highly successful) campaigning.

\(^{11}\)Professor Kibler will not, I hope, wish to invoke as evidence v. 529, since he considers Ganelon "untrustworthy" (p. 30). For myself, I accept that Ganelon is in general right about the moral qualities of his companions, since he successfully stakes his plan on the correctness of his assessment; I am quite prepared, therefore, to see Charlemagne as less implacably warlike than Roland, who certainly represents the Emperor's "right arm." But one can arguably be less bellicose than Roland and still be a perfectly adequate military leader!

\(^{12}\)Cf. K.-H. Bender, op. cit., p. 9 ff.
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weakness in not overriding the nomination of Roland to the rearguard, even though he strongly suspects Ganelon; for within the rules of the system in which he and they operate, such an intervention would humiliate intolerably the very person he sought to save. Like God, Charles is not free to override the rules by which he works. Be that as it may, the most explicit evidence about him and his army is given by laisse VIII, which is a description of an army in the highest possible state of morale, resting in an idealized setting after an eminently successful campaign, and led by a commander so splendid that there is no need to point him out to a stranger. What evidence of weakness and weariness is there that can withstand comparison with this carefully built-up scene, or be made to harmonize with it? Even the pagans believe that Charles will be las or recreant only in the future tense, if they can kill Roland (vv. 578-9, 593-600, 871-2, 905-7, 1194-5, etc.). They marvel at his combination of patriarchal age and warlike zeal (vv. 523-8, 537-43, 550-56, cf. vv. 370-4). Their mistake is to think that the death of Roland will change this, for, however overwhelmed by this loss, the Emperor and his men have ample energy to avenge it on Marsilie's men and then on Baligant's. But it is important, in the wider context of the views expounded in my earlier article, to note that what above all goes wrong with Ganelon's plan is that Roland does blow his horn while there is still time for Charles to return for vengeance; Ganelon, like Blancandrin, knows that a feudal army (especially after seven years' service) cannot be raised again in the immediate future once it is disbanded (vv. 598-600, cf. vv. 49-51); of course, the audience knew it too.

Professor Kibler's objection to the passage quoted from my earlier paper is not the whole matter of his article, naturally. His major point, to which mine is an obstacle, is the parallel he sees between Tierri, who is certainly right in his lone stance against the intimidated baronage, and Roland, who may then by analogy be considered to be right when isolated in his opposition to any negotiation with Marsilie. Kibler quotes, in support of the parallel, K.-J. Steinmeyer's exegesis of the four dreams in our poem (laisse LVII, CLXXXV-CLXXXCI). According to this interpretation, the second vision (laisse LVII) refers not to Ganelon's trial but to Roncevaux, so that the veltres, instead of symbolizing Tierri twice, refers once to Roland and once (in the fourth dream, laisse CLXXXCI) to Tierri.

A particularly telling example: they consider Charles old and in his dotage now, but recreant only in the future. Baligant and his men, of course, think their battle already won for the same reason (e.g. vv. 2807-9, 3182-3).
Quite coincidentally, I have opposed Herr Steinmeyer's views in an article which Professor Kibler could not have seen in time to take account of it, as it has appeared only very recently, and which by the same token was written without reference to the present debate. May I, for the sake of brevity, be allowed to refer readers to the article for the detail, and simply state here that Steinmeyer's arguments do not, in my view, emerge from close examination of the manuscript tradition and other factors as being as definitive as Kibler takes them to be; and that it remains very possible to argue, from the text, that the first and third dreams refer to the battles against Marsilie and Baligant respectively, each being followed by a prophetic evocation of the trial of Ganelon (second and fourth dreams).

My differences with Professor Kibler are therefore related to both his major lines of argument. No doubt it is the nature of great works of art to call forth divergent and even contradictory streams of exegesis; but I also believe that the Roland, like any work of literature, gains in stature if the outcome evolves ineluctably from a situation in which the rights and wrongs are shared, and in which the "goodies" and the "baddies" are not too obviously white and black, virtuous and wicked, strong and weak. Charlemagne is human, certainly, and shows testiness as well as tiredness and discouragement; but he is not compounded, as much recent criticism suggests, only of these elements, and I find no evidence that the poet intends us to see him as unlikely to rise to any occasion, be it in Spain or Bire.

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