Of the numerous chansons de geste in which Roland appears, the most significant is the *Chanson de Roland*; it is here that the heroic model is drawn for most of the other poems. From this model, subsequent poets of varying talents will fill out the biography of Charlemagne's illustrious vassal, from his birth and childhood (in the Italian *cantari*, the *Enfances Roland* and the *Chanson d'Aspremont*), to the meeting with Olivier and Aude (in *Girard de Vienne*) and the voyage to the East (in the *Pèlerinage*). Although much chronological and geographical distance separates the composition of these poems, their portrayal of Roland is surprisingly uniform. He is, for one and all, the favored nephew, the faithful vassal, the valiant and invincible knight.\(^1\)

Or, almost all. There are variants in the portrait. And in one work, the character deviates rather dramatically from the Oxford model. Indeed, the essence of this portrayal of Roland is escalating conflict with Charles, whose demands for authority become increasingly intolerable to Roland in his desire for autonomy. The spirit of community characteristic of other French chansons de geste, and exemplified in the Oxford text, is radically undermined here by discord threatening the viability of the entire poetic society. The result is physical violence and rupture of the Charles-Roland relationship. The poem is the *Entrée d'Espagne*, a Franco-Italian work of anonymous Paduan authorship dated ca. 1275-1325.\(^2\)

For those accustomed to see in the *Roland* a poem "qui magnifie les rapports parfaits, idéaux, absolu, du vassal et du seigneur,"\(^3\) the iconoclasm of the *Entrée* may be puzzling. How, and why, did the anonymous Paduan identify the *baron révolté* theme with Roland, the heretofore "destre braz" of the emperor? A brief examination of the nine-stage structure of the conflict, developed over the initial 11,000 lines, will help to clarify the issue.

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The friction begins over a rather minor issue: whether Roland shall do battle with the pagan giant Ferragu at Nájera. The Nájera episode occupies some 3,700 lines and is the first encounter of the Christian armies with the Infidel on the "entry"—or, less euphemistically, invasion—of Spain that will culminate at Roncevaux. As one might expect, Roland wants to fight; Charles, fearful for his nephew's safety, is reluctant to grant permission.

The second quarrel echoes the attitudes of the belligerent Roland and the defeatist Charles. Following a series of combats singuliers in which "Ferraçu" defeats and dispatches to prison twelve of the emperor's most illustrious warriors, Charles wishes to abandon the expedition altogether and return to France (vv. 1586-1629). Roland refuses and departs for a three-day single combat with Ferragu (vv. 1630-4136).

Roland's victory at Nájera enhances his heroic status in the eyes of the Christian community and the emperor, who triumphantly enters the city and "gives" it to Roland. Surprisingly, the poet uses this seemingly golden moment to inject further friction between uncle and nephew; Charles, overjoyed by this favorable turn of events, declares that Roland will be crowned King of Marsile's Spanish holdings forthwith (vv. 4440-44). Protesting the premature and prideful implications of such action, Roland declines (vv. 4445-64). He will accept the crown only after the successful completion of the mission, when all Spain has been reclaimed for Christendom. It seems understandable, then, that the young hero be granted a respite to enjoy victory celebrations at Nájera. The poet, in conflict four, again discredits Charles by having him reprimand Roland for unsoldierly behavior (vv. 4501-34). The emperor, with new-found optimism, insists that the expedition proceed immediately to Pampelune.

There, in a skirmish outside the walls, the young Saracen prince Isorée is captured and surrenders to Roland. As a royal prisoner, Isorée has the right to expect honorable treatment from his captors. Nonetheless, Charles orders his execution, despite Roland's insistence that Isorée is his prisoner and can be exchanged for the captured Estout. In any case, Roland is unwilling to assent to the execution of Isorée even if his cousin Estout is dead. Again, discord arises over Charles's self-image as autocrat, countered by Roland's demand that the decision be entrusted to him. Dissatisfied with being merely the emperor's mighty right arm, in this
episode Roland not only seeks more autonomy but gains a new dimension as hero. Less monolithic, more humane, he recognizes the valor of enemy heroes and rejects meaningless slaughter. This fifth quarrel escalates the animosity significantly when Roland begs Charles not to bring dishonor upon either of them: "Mais si vos pri por la vostre douçor / Qe non facés, biaus sir enpereor, / Rien qui vos tourt ni a moi desenor" (vv. 5713-15). The peers take sides. Olivier comments: "Le roi feit vilanie" (v. 5764). Naimon and Ogier urge Roland: "Portés vostre oncle onor e cortesie" (v. 5782). Roland himself, insisting that his position is not "estralois" (v. 5794), threatens to abandon Charles.

At this point the relationship is perilously close to rupture. In five increasingly serious disagreements, Roland has successfully countered Charles's will. Midway, then, the Entrée poet offers the voice of compromise to the more powerful, if less appealing, of the characters. Charles, in an eloquent simile, likens Roland to the merchant's son who has earned his father's trust and his own independence:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{mai de vos entendons} \\
\text{Feir come feit li mercheant prodons} \\
\text{Quant oit noriç fil o niéz grant e lons:} \\
\text{Se il feit bien e ne le voit felons,} \\
\text{Sa marchandise li met tot a bandons,} \\
\text{Aler l'en laise e por vals e per mons;} \\
\text{E cil porchace, chi bien soit sa raisons.} \\
\text{Da Deu, bel niéz, e de ma nuriçons} \\
\text{Vos voi si feit che desor vos metons} \\
\text{Les fais des armes che porter solions.}
\end{align*}
\]

(vv. 6662-71)

It appears that crisis may be avoided, if the vassal-hero Roland is granted a degree of independence equal to his merit. It appears likewise that Charles sees the necessity of compromise and is willing to yield some measure of authority.

Yet the issue of imperial authority, unquestioned in the earlier poems of the cycle du roi, is problematic in the Entrée. One cannot deny the poet's suggestion of tyranny rather than rightful use of power in the following, sixth, disagreement, in which Charles's plot to massacre a group of would-be deserters is discovered and arrested in the midst of a bloody moonlit
ambush. The Thiois episode, covering nearly 500 verses, is dramatically staged not only to pit Roland against an unreasonable and inconsistent leader, but to add several other protesting voices and formulate a hypothetical portrait of what a good leader should be. A thinly-veiled censure of Charles is offered by the character traditionally identified as the embodiment of wise counsel. Naimon declares:

Sor li sers doit avoir un avantaje  
Le grant baron chi ame signoraje:  
Plus rich doit estre e plus fort e plus saje.  
Se son baron, plen de aut vasalaje,  
Feit un defaut en trestoit sun aaje,  
Nel doit tantost destruir par un folaje,  
Mai segunt l'oevre li doit estre salvaje.  

(vv. 7120-26)

The episode concludes as Roland asks pardon for both Naimon and the Thiois. Charles yields.

The seventh conflict offers parallels with the situation of Roland at Roncevaux. In the Pampelune Reinforcement episode of the *Entrée* (vv. 7420-7992), Roland is sent forth with a small force to prevent the Saracens from entering Pampelune. Informed en route that the enemy is receiving massive reinforcements, Roland is encouraged by one of his men to send for help.

"Sir," dit Berart, "il ne ferait folie  
Mander a Çarles a la barbe florie  
Chi'il nos envoi Richart de Normandie  
E Salemons, chi ne nos heite mie.'  
Responst Rolant: "Dehait chil vos otrie!  
Hont n'avroie de ceste coardie,  
Si feit l'avoie, en tretote ma vie;  
Vos voiez bien che dan Hestous s'en rie.'  

(vv. 7643-50)

Shortly thereafter Roland sees the urgency of the situation and acts immediately to send for aid, requesting that Charles himself come. In the meantime, Roland means to hold his ground. Unlike the Roland at Roncevaux who vehemently argued on the one hand that his rear guard could defeat the assembling enemy armies unassisted, and on the other that a call for help, tantamount to an admission of incompetence, would bring dishonor to self, family and France, the Paduan's hero unhesitatingly
chooses self-preservation over self-image. In another innovation of the *Entrée*, Roland has stepped down from his self-constructed, super-being pedestal. In this instance, as in the refusal to accept the Spanish crown, the Paduan explicitly exonerates Roland from the accusation of *orgueil*. The conflict itself arises with Charles's belated arrival, following Saracen penetration into Pampelune and Roland's defeat. In a vitriolic exchange, Roland reproaches Charles: "mout saveç bien dormir" (v. 7913). Charles accuses Roland of *orgueil* and reprimands him for not leaving the fray sooner. Repressing his anger, Roland renews his allegiance to Charles but complains that he has been mistreated (vv. 7960-61). Charles reminds him that "hobedïence senpre orgueil venqui" (v. 7982). One wonders whether the emperor has so quickly forgotten the terms of compromise outlined in verses 6662-71.

Roland's refusal to accept the marshal's post subsequently assigned to him constitutes the penultimate step in the degenerating relationship (v. 8304). Declaring that he will command only his own troops, Roland makes another claim for independence, another protest against autocratic dictates.

Thus the Nobles episode is the culmination of this carefully graded augmentation of tension and must be seen in relation to surrounding episodes. We return, then, to events leading up to the Thiois massacre, at which time Charles had stressed the urgency of taking nearby Nobles, strategic for its wealth, power, and location. Having been advised to fortify Pampelune first, he has temporarily postponed the defense of his front guard at Nobles, which is presently under attack.

During the ensuing battle at Pampelune and only after a fierce struggle, Christian victory at last appears imminent to both Charles and Roland, who are at different points on the field. At this moment, Roland's scout returns from a reconnaissances mission to Nobles and assures him: "Noble vos donrai demain a le maitin" (v. 8991). Thanking God for this opportunity to further the Christian mission, Roland nonetheless hesitates to leave for Nobles:

"Volenter i veroie, mais je redoit le roi
Qi est en la bataille (mais au meilleur le voi:
A la ville s'en vei), e si le feit por moi."
Se rien lui mesvenist en icistui tornoi,
Jameis ne m'ameroit, je le pains bien e croi."
…
Je venrai... mais bien sai q'i foloi.

(vv. 9007-16)

And without notifying Charles, who is not close by, Roland takes 20,000 of his own men and departs for Nobles. The two-week battle there is successful; Nobles won and the dual banners of Roland and Charles raised over its walls, Roland returns to Pampelune.

Unfortunately, Roland’s absence there has altered French prospects for victory. Indeed, no sooner had the French armies noticed Roland’s departure than they began to retreat. Assuming that Roland has deserted and is plotting his destruction, Charles declares that "cest feluns traïtor" (v. 9224) shall be hunted down and hanged. He inwardly relishes the scene of revenge, the moment when Roland enters his tent; he will cut Roland down, whereupon the barons are to rise and slay Roland with their swords. The barons, however, defending Roland as champion of peace and reason (vv. 11065-70), refuse Charles's orders. Thus when Roland comes into the tent, confident that the victory and wealth he can present to Charles will compensate for any anger his uncle may harbor, he hardly expects the reception that awaits him. Charles strikes Roland with his mailed glove, vowing to hang him. Roland, bloodied and bewildered, but restraining his fury, leaves the tent. The two will not meet again for seven years.

Several points may be made regarding the issue of vassal autonomy versus overlord authority as it is presented in the Entrée. First, in crowning Roland King of Spain, Charles will increase not only his nephew's power but his independence. Yet it is Charles who insists on the coronation; implicit is the supposition that King Roland will remain vassal to Emperor Charles. Second, Roland, "senator de Rome," already enjoys some measure of autonomy in the private militia granted him by the pope; he subsequently uses this power to deploy his own troops. Third, Roland is not presented as ambitious or power-hungry. In the opening Christian conseil, we learn that Roland has already bequeathed his hereditary fiefs to the Empire and is said to deserve the Spanish crown in recompense.
The poetic tone throughout the first part of the *Entrée* is distinctly pro-vassal: most of Roland's actions are justified by a poet who clearly aligns himself with the wronged hero. Further, Charles is in violation of feudal ethics when he, as overlord, strikes his vassal. Roland is not guilty, as Giulio Bertoni claimed, of blithely abandoning Charles at Pampelune "in cerca di gloria." Rather, he acts on the autonomy granted him by his overlord, leaves at a moment when he perceives no risk for Charles, and has every intention of turning over the conquered Nobles to the emperor.

However, although Roland's intentions are honorable, he is not totally blameless in the Nobles escapade, as he himself admits. The "folly" he commits includes his unauthorized covert departure and the danger it creates for the French armies. The Paduan describes Roland en route to Nobles: "qe ne garde a mesure: / Comant il en port bleisme, segir veult sa nature" (vv. 9408-9). It is clear that the position of both men is excessive.

Further, a distinctive pattern emerges in the nine phases of conflict. In the first five stages, Roland is "victorious" over Charles:

1. Charles does not wish Roland to fight Ferragu; Roland fights.
2. Charles wants to abandon the expedition; the expedition is pursued.
3. Charles wants to crown Roland at Nájera; Roland refuses.
4. Charles disapproves of victory celebrations at Nájera; Roland enjoys the festivities.
5. Charles threatens to hang Isorée against Roland's protest; Isorée is safely returned to his family.

At this point we reach a plateau. Phases six through nine then display Roland's descending fortunes in his confrontations with Charles; he is either humiliated or "defeated," while the emperor continues to deny the autonomy he previously had extended:

6. Charles avenges the Thiois mutiny; none of his vassals is consulted and their rôle, including Roland's, is reduced to ex post facto disapproval.
7. Roland fails to execute orders to prevent Saracens from entering Pampelune; Charles chastizes his *orgueil* for not withdrawing sooner.
8. Roland refuses assignment as marshal; Charles humiliates him by expelling him to the rear guard.

9. Roland captures Nobles for the Christian cause; Charles condemns him as a traitor and strikes him.

Nonetheless, Charles's "victories" in these confrontations are Pyrrhic; the net results ultimately serve only to weaken both his military strength and his effectiveness as head of state. In phase six, for example, he suffers loss of prestige by excessive unilateral action. In seven, he loses prestige by inconsistent use of authority, first in issuing orders to Roland, then chastizing him for attempting to carry them out. In eight, Charles weakens his military effectiveness by sending Roland, his finest warrior, to the rear guard. Finally, in nine, Charles suffers both loss of prestige and military strength by striking Roland, thereby causing the hero to abandon him. This leads inexorably to rupture of the feudal bond and disorder within the community. The interdependence of lord and vassal, of the director and executor of action, is the essential reality of the Entrée community. The poet suggests that if the relationship is to function viably, there must be unity of purpose between them. From the equilibrium of their personal relationship derives that of the entire community.

The second part of the Entrée, introduced by a second protasis outlining thirteen additional episodes, offers further innovations in the Roland portrait. The blow of v. 11117 is the motivating act for the remaining nearly 5,000 lines. Charles's vociferous threats to slay Roland, as well as the blood drawn by the mailed glove, all suggest the symbolic, if not real, "death" of the hero as we have known him thus far. What the blow has destroyed is, precisely, Roland's identity as hero in the Christian community. He no longer is the favored nourri, the cherished nephew, the emperor's right arm. The blow, suggesting a parody of the feudal paumée, has a paradoxical effect; rather than to "create" the chevalier, like the ceremonial blow, it in fact cancels the hero's knightly position and heroic identity.

Like the rebellious barons of other epics, the hero now abandons Charles and vows vengeance for his undeserved punishment. Roland has
not been deprived of lands or a wife, but he has suffered dishonor. He wants, then, to demonstrate that "Mielz veul morir qe je ni li ensaigne / Se je riens li valloie en la gere d'Espagne" (vv. 11151-2). But this vengeance will be, as Roland specifies, "en stragne guise" (v. 11132). His response to Charles's act will not be further violence directed against the emperor, but, rather, complete withdrawal from the community, a self-imposed exile that takes him to the "Orient" (Persia and Jerusalem).

Two principal episodes comprise this portion of the Rolandian portrait. In the first (vv. 11904-13466), Roland defends the Persian Princess Dionès, who is protesting a political marriage contrived by her father to the aging but powerful Malquidant. Roland enters the Sultan's service and emerges victor from combat with the nephew of the offended suitor. Faithful (as ever) to Aude, he declines the victor's prize, marriage to Dionès herself with its attendant personal and political privileges.

The second Orient episode is a military encounter with Malquidant's armies; after a sizeable lacuna, it concludes with the defeat of Malquidant, coronation of the Christian Ansel's of a conquered Jerusalem, and the imminent departure of Roland for Spain. Dionès has been converted and her father engaged to build churches in "paganie."

It is clear from the above summary of Roland's trip to the East that the Paduan has altered the patterns characteristic of the baron révolté poems. Although Roland and Charles reach an impasse where they become virtually enemies and where both are vindictive, the hero avoids the bellicose postures of Raoul de Cambrai, Girard de Vienne, Issembart, Ogier and Renaud de Montauban. Roland is here spared the dishonor the renoyé and rénégat and the humiliation of the repenti who redeems himself by pious works. The vindication he effects is, instead, the attempt to reconquer his own destroyed identity as hero. Although Roland does enter the Sultan's service and fights in "pagan" armies, the battles he wages are always against other "pagans." Unlike Isembart or Ogier, for example, he never does battle with a Christian foe. Neither does he abjure his faith nor officially renounce his vassalage to Charles.10 The blow, then, becomes the propellant sending Roland outside the Christian community on a quest to recover himself. By expelling the hero, the Entrée poet creates a crisis for
both individual and community. He has disturbed the vassal-lord relationship upon which rests the stability of the society. His final task, then, is somehow to redeem the relationship and return Roland to the Christian community. In the Dionès and Malquidant episodes, Roland, using the several pseudonyms assumed in the East, achieves these ends; by his double victory, he becomes, in the service of the Sultan, the monarch's "right arm" and eminent hero of the adopted community. When he resumes his true name at the close of his prolonged stay, it is because he is, once again, the favored youth (nearly an adopted son by marriage), the valiant warrior and the faithful and invincible knight. He is now ready to rejoin the Christian community and reassume the same rôle alongside Charles.

The reconciliation between uncle and nephew is presented in a spirit of mutual contrition and compromise. Charles, unsuccessful in the long siege of Pamplune, is threatened by the imminent desertion of 200 barons unless Roland returns. He admits "Qe senz vos bras non valdroie un pois" (v. 15800). Roland himself confesses to wrongdoing in the Nobles affair and submits himself to imperial justice: "A vos plaser prenez de moy justisse, / Car enver vos ai fet plus grand fantise / D'ome del secle" (vv. 15767-69). Wiser for his years of exile, Roland upon his return has transcended wrongs committed and endured; the poet stresses instead the superior individual he has become. The death-rebirth motif suggested by the blow and Roland's subsequent "regeneration" in the East is echoed in Charles, who declares that he has been resurrected from death (vv. 15792-3). He, too, suffered a symbolic death by "destroying" the hero Roland. Their interdependence, recalling Thomas Greene's executive-director relationship in epic literature, is underlined by the fact that the two thrive best when together. However, of the two, it is the hero who is the indispensable factor; the poem shows that Roland can do without Charles, but the latter is virtually incapacitated without his nephew.

In the first part of the Entrée, events are based on the issue of balance of power. Textual evidence clearly indicates the Paduan's familiarity with some of the baron révolté epics, notably Girard de Vienne and Renaud de Montauban. It is probable that in addition to the Pseudo-Turpin named by
the poet as his principal source, the Paduan worked from a lost chanson de
geste based on the capture of Nobles, or, as Paul Aebischer suggests, from
an earlier Entrée d'Espagne known also to the author of the Oxford
Roland.  

The second part, however, alters the outcome of the feudal conflict.
Claiming that the remaining material is his own, the Paduan refashions
Roland into a chevalier errant, a knight not seeking war with an unjust
overlord, but in search of the misplaced sense of his own existence. If the
Roland of the first part of the Entrée bears distinct similarities to the baron
révolté, the theme is then significantly modified to incorporate material and
techniques borrowed from romance. Literary considerations may have
been the poet's primary concern; on the other hand, an early fourteenth
century North Italian court public may have been less interested in the
feudal conflict than in the more general—and more pertinent—issue of
balance of power between the citizen and his leaders. Thus the Entrée
presents not one, but multiple tests of the Charles-Roland relationship.
And although the poet's sympathies are unmistakable, his message of
compromise is equally manifest. In a work which is hybrid in genre as well
as in language, the portrayal of Roland nonetheless retains a consistency
attesting to the Paduan's considerable talents. The innovations to the
Rolandian portrait seen here add new dimensions to the character on his
journey into the Italian peninsula, preparing him for the pen of Boiardo
and Ariosto.

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1 Roland, though essentially the faithful vassal, disobeys Charles in the Chanson
d'Aspremont, follows the imperial armies to Italy and there wins his spurs; in the
Quatre fils Aymon, he temporarily abandons Charles out of sympathy for Renaud de
Montauban, with whom Charles is at war. These minor modifications do not
substantially alter the portrait.

2 Although exact dating of the Entrée is not possible, agreement is general that it
was composed either toward the end of the thirteenth century (Paul Aebischer,
"Deux récits épiques antérieurs au Roland d'Oxford: l'Entrée d'Espagne primitive et
le Girard de Vienne primitif," Étude de lettres, 3rd série, I [Lausanne, 1968], 10);
during the late thirteenth to early fourteenth centuries (Antoine Thomas, *L'Entrée d'Espagne, chanson de geste franco-italienne*, Société des anciens textes français, 2 [Paris, 1913], xxiv-xxv); during the "premières années du XIVe siècle" (Léon Gautier, "L'Entrée en Espagne, chanson de geste inédite, renfermée dans un manuscrit de la bibliothèque de Saint-Marc, à Venise. Notice, analyse et extraits," *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, 4th series, IV [1880], 455); or, finally, prior to the mid-fourteenth century (Aurelio Roncaglia, "Les Quatre eschieles de Rollant," *Cultura neolatina*, 21 [1961], 202). References to the *Entrée* here will be to the Thomas edition.


2The question of Roland's pride in the Oxford text remains a subject of lively debate, as the extensive literature attests. I believe that the poet's intention in the two *scènes du cor* was to depict exaggerated self-confidence and self-esteem leading Roland to place higher priority, in the first scene, on his self-image than on the preservation of the 20,000 Franks entrusted to his care. The second scene then sketches the anguish in a Roland "enlightened" by the experience of battle at Roncevaux. Roland's several questions of Laisse LXXXV represent for me a *scène de reconnaissance* in which the hero must confront for the first time his own limitations, his own mortality. In effect, his pleas to Olivier for advice are interrogations directed to himself and the principles on which he has acted until now. It is only after Roland in some way comes to terms with his own limitations, a process not enunciated by the poet although a necessary introduction to the oliphant scene, that he is able to summon aid.


7There is a lacuna in the manuscript between folios 269 and 270, estimated at between 5000 and 6000 lines.

8A manuscript fragment discovered in 1928 by Paul Aebischer depicts two French knights who have come to the Orient in search of Roland and who are unwittingly engaged in combat with him. The poet is careful to point out that a sixth sense prevents the Christians from striking one another. "Ce qui reste d'un manuscrit perdu de l'Entrée d'Espagne," *Archivum Romanicum*, 12 (1928), 261-64.

9A good example of the technique may be seen in *Girard de Roussillon*. If the poet initially sympathizes with the wronged hero, he later censures Girard's violence because of its threat to the stability of the community. The rebel baron is exiled; he is even punished by God for his *démesure*. Finally, via the intercession of two women and a hermit, Girard is made to recognize his errors and is reconciled with the overlord Charles Martel. With reconciliation comes restoration of social order.
The three false names and identities provide further evidence that Roland no longer is the individual he was among the French during the long sojourn in the East. All establish him as Saracen, thus an enemy of Charles. See vv. 11526-29; 11885; and 12138.

Greene, Descent, 18.

Paul Aebischer, Textes norrois et littérature française du moyen âge (Genève, 1954), 8-19; 25-33; 84-89 and passim.