

More Epic than Romance: the *Entrée d'Espagne*

Leslie C. Brook
The University of Birmingham

The *Entrée d'Espagne* is a poem of some 15,800 lines, composed by an anonymous Paduan author in the first half of the fourteenth century, in the language known loosely and traditionally as Franco-Italian. There is now only one complete manuscript of the text, Venice Marciana XXI (=257). The author was probably a clerk, since he displays considerable familiarity with theology and the classics, as well as with French chansons de geste and romance. Some critics have found in his poem a reflection, too, of the contemporary social and political concerns of northern Italy.¹

Despite this implied complexity, the poem is undeniably a *chanson de geste* (epic) basically, although as the Middle Ages progressed, strict genre definition tends to become blurred. The concept of boundaries has in any case exercised critics in the modern era rather than the original writers themselves, and to discover a mix of what we think of as being basically epic or romance material in a late *chanson de geste* is not unusual. Commenting on the *Bâtard de Bouillon*, for instance, Robert F. Cook has recently said: "Like all late epics ... it shares some attributes with romance" (89). The question of the overall nature of the *Entrée d'Espagne* arises principally because at a certain point the hero is obliged in dramatic circumstances to leave the rather hermetic world of the *chanson de geste*, and undertake alone a journey to the near East, thereby taking on some of the characteristics of the romance *chevalier errant*.

Nothing could be closer to the heart of epic than a story dealing with Charlemagne's campaign in Spain, with a major role

played by Roland. The *Entrée d'Espagne* supplies narrative detail of the events not covered by the *Chanson de Roland*, but allowed for in the laconic reference to Charles's previous seven years in Spain at the beginning of that poem: "Carles li reis, nostre emperere magnes, / Set anz tuz pleins ad estét en Espaigne" (vv. 1-2).² Moreover, the poem is written throughout in mono-rhymed kisses, with either the alexandrine or decasyllabic line, both of which are typical of the *chansons de geste*. The opening three laisses form a prologue, pious in tone and epic in content and style, announcing the high purpose attached to the intended campaign, and showing the influence of the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*. We are told that Charles has been ordered by St. James in a dream to liberate the land from the infidel and free the way to Compostela, and so fulfill a promise previously undertaken but forgotten. A second reason for the campaign is also given: Roland, described as "Li melors chevalers que legist en sianze" (v. 18),³ is to be crowned king of Spain, an intention, the author reminds us, that will be thwarted by Ganelon. Thus a dual purpose, spiritual and feudal, is established, and future events in the poem are also sketched out. The poet explains, too, in a kind of *mise en abyme* of the situation concerning Charles, that Turpin appeared to him in a dream and ordered him, for the good of his soul, "Que por l'amor saint Jages fust l'estorie rimee" (v. 53), so that readers other than "gient letree" (v. 49) may have access to his chronicle. What could be more basic to epic than to begin, as the story then does, with Charles at Aix-la-Chapelle, in pensive mood, announcing to his assembled barons that a "miracle" has occurred (the appearance of St James to him three nights in succession), followed by a debate concerning the desirability or wisdom of Charles's proposal to act on his dream? The expression of contrary views in this debate is a distant echo of Charles's council at the beginning of the *Chanson de Roland*, but much longer and devoid of the sharp hostility between the speakers that is evident there between Roland and Ganelon. The arguments are quite subtle, raising issues such as the erosive effects of prolonged inactivity, honor, duty and military tactics.

Olifant

Typically, the last word is that of Nayme, who stresses the importance of heeding the Apostle's call. Following this solidly epic start to his tale, and with the various barons preparing themselves for the coming expedition, the poet briefly addresses his reader with a significant claim:

365 Segnors, car escoltez, ne soit ne criz ne hu,
 Gloriose cançons, c'onques sa pier ne fu;
 Ne vos sambleront mie de les flabes d'Artu.

This deliberate distancing of his "gloriose cançons" from romance is an assertion of the moral value of his tale, and it follows an earlier address in the prologue in which the reader is invited to heed his song and be inspired by it: "Segnors, ceste cançons feit bon ver escouter / Par çascuns q'en bontez veult son cors amender" (vv. 20-21).

When news reaches King Marsille's ears of Charles's intentions, he holds a parallel council to decide how to react — a reversal of the situation in the *Chanson de Roland*, in which action is initiated by Marsille. It is decided that they will try to halt Charles's armies at Nájera, which is seen as a gateway fortification, and his nephew Ferragu is dispatched with 10,000 men to defend it. Ferragu, adapted from Ferracutus of the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, is no ordinary adversary, but a daunting giant-figure, willing to challenge the best of Charles's army in single combat, and the stage is set for a confrontation with Roland. As a giant, he shares some affinity with other epic giants, such as Corsolt, Rainoart, and especially the "good pagan" Fierebras, but he has an individuality of his own.⁴ He is young, handsome, kind, generous, honorable, and well-versed in his faith. In order to accept the pagan's challenge, Roland has to oppose repeated attempts by the somewhat timid Charles to dissuade him. Roland does not take on the challenge through foolish presumption, but as the Christian champion ("le chevalier Jesu," v. 3155) combatting the might of the infidel, symbolically represented by the giant adversary. His more immediate reason for fighting Ferragu, though, is to free the group

of peers who have been taken prisoner by him, and whom Charles would have abandoned to their fate. The fight will last for three days, during which each treats the other with honor and respect, and besides confirming Roland's prowess and demonstrating his moral superiority over his own overlord, it projects him as a learned advocate of Christianity, as he debates doctrine with his opponent on the final day. Roland all but persuades him to accept Christianity, but in the end Ferragu is afraid that conversion might appear to be prompted by fear of Roland. The importance of the encounter between these two representatives of their respective religions is to some extent indicated by the large number of lines devoted to it (some 2500), and Roland's triumph marks him out as a true defender of the faith, and the bravest and wisest among the Christian forces.

With the defeat of Ferragu the inhabitants of Nájera surrender to Charles and convert to Christianity, and after a period of relaxation the emperor decides that the war must continue, and he plans an attack on Pamplona. The struggle to overcome Pamplona will in fact form the background for the whole of the remainder of the campaign in Spain in this text. Over the next 7000 lines, while the conflict continues, mainly around Pamplona itself, little real progress is made by the Christian forces. During this time, however, there are further occasions when Roland and Charles are in disagreement, and, as Nancy Bradley-Cromeley has indicated, the first two-thirds of the text establish Roland as something of a "baron révolté," as questions relating to feudal authority, obedience, and independence are raised, alongside those of honor and duty (27-56). The most significant incident in this regard, and the one which will directly bring about a rift between Charles and Roland, is the latter's capture of the city of Noble. "Ja prist il Noples seinz le vostre comant," says Ganelon in the *Chanson de Roland* (v. 1775), and the *Entrée d'Espagne* is alone in relating a developed version of the relevant episode. Charles learns at one point that the city of Noble has attacked the vanguard of his troops (v. 6682 ff.), but he delays detaching a contingent from his forces around Pamplona and

Olifant

sending them to Noble until he can be sure that the majority left behind would be safely protected. Meanwhile Roland, acting on his own initiative, sends an aide, Bernart, to spy out the situation in Noble, and he later reports that the city is now effectively without defenders, since they have all left to join the pagans in Pamplona and fight a concerted war against Charles. Roland allows himself to be persuaded by Bernart that now would be the opportune moment to attack and capture Noble, for the good of the Christian cause, and he agrees to go secretly with his personal contingent only with some reluctance, fearing Charles's reaction: "—Je venrai», feit li quens, «mais bien sai q'i foloi»" (v. 9016). However, as Charles appears to be winning the battle at that moment, Roland considers that his troops will not be missed. In this he will be proved wrong, for when it is learned that Roland has left there is panic and confusion, and some of the Christian forces flee. Charles is led to believe by Ganelon that his nephew has deserted, and he swears vengeance upon him. Meanwhile, in a 1500-line episode, Roland, with Bernart's tactical aid, brilliantly attacks and overruns Noble, and its leader Féliques and his followers all convert to Christianity. Roland returns after a fortnight's campaign with many riches and 2000 converts to add to Charles's armies.

The author clearly intends this to be a turning point in the fortunes of Roland and in the progress of the story, since he announces at some length in a second prologue the events that are to follow and occupy the remainder of the poem. He anticipates Charles's furious treatment of Roland on his return from Noble, Roland's journey to the East, and his eventual reconciliation with his uncle (vv. 10939-96); and rather as in the initial prologue, he stresses that for moral instruction:

Me sui mis a trover dou meilor Cristian
 Conque seüst canter jogleors en roman
 Ni qi mais donast robes ni cheval ni teran. (vv. 10964-66).

After some build-up of apprehension as he returns from Noble, Roland comes before the emperor, smiling and kneeling, hoping that the gains from the capture of that city will assuage his reported anger.

However Charles berates and threatens him and then strikes him across the face with his mailed fist, drawing blood, and ordering his barons to strike Roland down. Roland angrily springs to his feet, impulsively puts his hand to his sword, and would have struck the emperor had he not recalled what he owed to him. Without a word he simply jumps on his horse and rides away in bitter confusion (vv. 11127-34).

Before following him on his new adventures in a changed atmosphere, it is worth briefly considering whether the poem up to this point contains any elements that could be ascribed to romance rather than epic. In fact, there are very few. Having distanced himself at the outset from "les flabes d'Artu" (v. 367), the author has Charles react critically to the flirtatious behavior of Roland and the peers in the period of relaxation following the fall of Nájera:

As fenestre ert a un avesprement
 E voit Rollant chevaucher bellement,
 Li doçes per avec lui solement,
 Gardand les dames qe as baucons estoient.
 A l'emperere en est pris mal talent;
 Croule le cief e dist: «Trop malement
 «Feisons scenblant d'ostoier longement.
 «Se devons guere mener sifaitement,
 «Ja roys Marsille, a cui Espagne apend,
 «Non perdra mais de sa tere un arpent;
 «Mais, por san Jaches, il ira autrement.» (vv. 4483-94)

This disapproval of potentially deleterious behavior, which could undermine chivalric resolve and strength, is reminiscent of the account of the life-style ascribed to Margariz in the *Chanson de Roland* (vv. 957-59), but a closer parallel occurs in Wace, in the

Olifant

reaction of Cadour to the news of the threat from Rome (vv. 10737-64, Ivor 562-63); and although in both Wace and the *Entrée d'Espagne* it is a question of the dangers of inactivity, in Wace the peace which allows dalliance is strongly defended by Gauvain in response to Cadour.⁵

There is one instance of what might be termed courtly behavior, which occurs in the Roland-Ferragu combat, when Roland places a stone under the head of his sleeping opponent to support it during a period of rest (vv. 3545-47), a gesture appreciated by Ferragu on waking (vv. 3575-78). Nevertheless, Roland's action here could also be seen as one way among several in which the author shows the shared values of honor even between opponents. At another point the rather flamboyant Hestouz uses metaphorical language more in tune with romance than epic in defending Charles's attitude towards the pagan prisoner Ysoré in vv. 5939-44 (Bradley-Cromey 170). The most striking romance motif, though, is to be found towards the end of the Noble episode, when Roland and his companions dine in Felidés's palace, and admire the paintings on the wall depicting the life and conquests of Alexander. The importance of "largeçe" is here stressed, and the archbishop Turpin comments: "Qi volt honor conquere sor son felons vesin / Apraigne d'Alixandre la voie et le traïn" (vv. 10433-34), tacitly implying a flattering comparison with Roland; and in fact not only does the description recall those of the *romans antiques* and references such as that of Chrétien to the generosity of Alexander, but the whole passage serves as a reflection of Roland's generosity and noble actions, with a hint of his future achievements and stature. A further possible parallel with romance occurs after the capture of Nájera, when Roland refuses Charles's premature offer of the crown of Spain to him. He knows that he does not yet deserve the honor and that there is more to do, rather as in Chrétien's

As Roland abandons Charles's army in fury, we seem to move abruptly from the atmosphere of a *chanson de geste* to that of a romance or a *roman d'aventure*, from one of collective effort to lone *errance*. After a short while he pauses and delivers a heart-felt

farewell to his companions and to the life for which he has been trained (vv. 11158-71), rather as did Lancelot as he sailed from Logres into exile in *La Mort le roi Artu*. He rides through the night, fending off wild beasts, and comes upon a monumental fountain, whose intricate carvings are described in detail. The countryside all around is now quiet and deserted, in complete contrast to the bustle of military life. He lets his horse graze freely, lies down to sleep and, like a romance hero, engages in a further introspective analysis of his situation, beginning with a reflection reminiscent of Tristan:

«Rollant, or estes sol en gaudine selvaine,
«Qe soliés avoir en le vostre demaine
«Vint mile chevaler por la glesie Romaine!»(vv.11456-58)

As in the Tristan stories, and also in *Yvain*, the forest represents an abnegation of the life led hitherto, the true life of the hero. In Roland's case it also forms a narrative transition to his new existence, as he rides on for three days without food, eventually reaching a sea-shore in a storm. There he slays two brigands who accuse him of being a robber, but promptly feels remorse, because they were not properly armed. He is aware that outside the social and feudal sphere to which he has been accustomed, he has already allowed his standards of chivalry to slip. However, a Saracen merchant, who was being harassed by the brigands, shows his gratitude to Roland by offering to transport him and his horse overseas to his own city in the East, which he describes in edenic terms, again a topos adapted from romance:

—Amis», dit li prodome, «d'outre mont Oriiaus
«A une noble citei, unques ne veistes taus,
«Qe mout est bien garnie de mur e de toraus
«E de riches maisons, de bruel e de vignaus:
«Qi vult desduit de çaçe, mout les a bon e biaux,
«Riveres de faucons, d'astors, de gerifaus.

Olifant

«Environ la citei cort de eve un gran canaus
 «Que se part e desevre deu bel flum d'Eufrataus:
 «La trovent hom la flor de peison generaus.
 «Le país environ par est tan gloriäus
 «Ja ne queroit nus autre reigne celestiaus.» (vv.11607-17)

On board that night Roland offers up a long prayer (an epic credo),⁶ ending with a request for the safe-keeping of Charles and the peers and the fervent hope that he, Roland, may be able to bring honor to the Holy Church on his journey:

«Et cest çamin me faites en tal gise fornir
 «Que mielz me soit a l'arme par le vos loi emplir
 «E onor n'ait sainte Glise, qe devons maintenir.»(vv. 11760-62)

Roland is being prepared by the author for the next stage in his development as a *miles Christi*. Meanwhile, he spends a sleepless night tormented by mixed feelings of love and vengeance for Charles, and the conflict of feeling is evoked in terms which clearly recall romance:

Pensés, vos que escotés mes parole e mes dis,
 Se mais fustes d'amor de dame tant epris
 Que jalousie n'ist et faites dous devys
 D'amer et desamer, dont une fievre mis:
 Sor ce fu le niés Karles cumbatu e pensis.
 Toute nuit soi porpense del roi de Saint Donis:
 De lui gerpir estoit forment maltalentys,
 Mes tant vient cumbatuz des autre esperis
 Que cunfortent venjance sor ce que i est mespris..
 (vv. 11765-73)

For most of the voyage Roland is lost in thought of Charles and Oliver, as though in this unknown new world he is trying to hang on to the certainties that formed the bedrock of his old relationships and beliefs. Ironically, to try to cheer him up, and not knowing his true identity, the Saracen merchant offers to get

get his men to sing him the song of the love of Galiaine and Charlemagne (vv. 11806-08)!

He eventually reaches his Otherworld, and disembarks at Mecca, where he soon becomes involved incognito in championing the Sultan's young daughter's right to refuse a political marriage to an elderly king as part of a peace settlement—a stand that Marie de France would heartily have approved of! The king's name is Malcuidant, indicative of his character, as was Meleagant in Chrétien's *Chevalier de la Charrete*. In order to defend the daughter, Dionés, Roland has to fight Malcuidant's son Pelias, and he declares his challenge when he intervenes dramatically just as Pelias is about to seize the terrified Dionés and have her burnt to death. The manner of his intervention recalls that of Erec at the Sparrowhawk contest in Chrétien's romance as well as the timely rescue of Lunete by Yvain. Moreover, before the fight there is general weeping at the daughter's plight, and Roland stops her from kneeling before him, reassuring her he will do his best for her (again, shades of Yvain in the fight to rescue Gauvain's niece), while in the face of his adversary's arrogance, Roland remains calmly dismissive, rather as was Lancelot of the arrogant taunts of his final opponent before the crossing of the sword-bridge. As Roland is armed by the damsel he is to champion, the author gives a description of her beauty (vv. 12552-61), which disturbs Roland and reminds him of Aude:

Rolant la garde, trestot le sang li mue;
Non la voudroit le ber avoir veüe;
D'Audein li mambre, tot le vis li tresue. (vv. 12562-64).

To show Roland's ability to resist lust, the relationship between them is subsequently under-exploited by the author; for whereas later on, after Roland has slain Pelias, Dionés begins to be tormented by love for her champion, Roland never reciprocates her feeling, nor is he apparently made aware of it, unlike the unrequited love of the damsel of Escalot for Lancelot in *La Mort le roi Artu*. Roland, in fact, fights for principle, and not through

Olifant

any personal involvement, and the author comments that right has triumphed over pride (v. 13174). As a reward for defeating Peliás Roland is made "baillis" of Persia, a post he will use to help the Sultan assemble troops from throughout the East to withstand a threatened attack from Malcuidant, following the death of his son. In his prayers, Roland thanks God for the success achieved and the honor bestowed upon him, which he readily attributes to God's grace and not to his own worth (vv. 13633 ff). In a further romance topos the text then provides a physical description of the handsome Lionés (Roland's pseudonym in the East), as he returns from prayer in the mosque to the Sultan's palace, admired by the pagan onlookers, and in particular by the women (vv. 13650-61). Likewise when he returns to Mecca after the several months spent away rallying troops, the crowds crane their necks to see their champion:

Le rue furent plaine et charcés li souler
De dames, de poncelle, de vielz, de bazeler,
Soul por le chanpions veoir et remirer...(vv. 13953-55)

A celebratory banquet is then held, at which Roland introduces the courtly custom of eating from individual plates instead of a communal one.

A sizeable lacuna, possibly amounting to 5000-6000 lines, robs us of most of the remainder of the Eastern episode, during which Jerusalem is captured, Malcuidant slain, Roland's true identity revealed, and the Sultan and his people all converted to Christianity (Bradley-Crome 275). Roland now wishes to return to Charles, conscious that his uncle needs him: "Il a sofrate heü de moi, je sui creant" (v. 14037), and he leaves, taking with him three companions, and making the conventional promise to return if needed.

As in romance, the hero emerges from the equivalent of the Otherworld episode having grown in stature and authority. In an echo of Chrétien's savior-heroes, he is revered and respected by all, having rid his hosts of their enemy, brought peace, and in

addition bestowed upon them the true faith. His achievements are on the grand scale, and he has done God's work, so that good has come of his disagreement with Charles. But his departure from the East does not mark the end of the growth of his moral stature, nor of the fundamentally romance atmosphere.

During the sea journey back to Spain they run into a fearsome storm (another romance trait) lasting for several days, and when they land, the forest now becomes the place of awesome mystery, as they come upon a series of hideously dismembered bodies. A chance encounter with robbers deprives Roland of one of his companions, and leaving the remaining two behind in a valley, he rides on ahead and climbs a mountain to try to get his bearings and find the way back to Charles, convinced that he is not far away. In so doing he becomes involved in a mystical experience which owes much to the atmosphere of *La Queste del Saint Graal*. He discovers a small church perched on a rock attended by a hermit, singing the office of compline. After the service is finished, Roland manages to convince the suspicious hermit that he is a true Christian and not a robber, when he catches and kneels before a cross tossed to him by the hermit to test him. The air is filled with the odor of spices, and the church bell miraculously starts to peal of its own accord. The astonished hermit at once welcomes Roland, and tells him of his life of penance following a dissolute early life. Roland also learns that it is the hermit who was responsible for slaying all the pagan marauders whose bodies he and his companions had come across. The hermit is sustained by a daily ration of bread and an apple brought by an angel, and as he leaves for his private prayer, Roland offers up a fervent prayer of his own for the protection of his companions in his absence. His prayer is at once answered, as an angel appears to his companions in the form of Roland, reassuring them that they will join up with Charles the next day, and proposing rest and sleep. One of the companions, Hugues, finds an apple tree with fruit of an unworldly sweetness which they both eat. The angel offers to watch for the first half of the night as the companions sleep. As a further miracle the angel who

Olifant

brings the daily sustenance to the hermit speaks approvingly of Roland and gives him double rations, so that he might feed his guest, and in response to the hermit's question that Roland had requested him to ask, he is told that Roland will live for only seven more years and perish through the betrayal of someone he loves. The hermit is also told that he himself is destined to die the following morning, after confessing to Roland. When the hermit reports back to Roland and gives him the miraculous food, Roland is devastated at the news of his fate, but is determined to use up his remaining days in slaying pagans (vv. 15154-58), recognizing that he must serve God in this practical way. Later, after the hermit's predicted death, Roland witnesses the soul transported to Heaven to the accompaniment of a heavenly choir. He is told by a voice where to bury the body, and that he and his companions should now journey eastwards, regardless of obstacles such as rocks or forests, and the path, which will open up before them, will lead them back to Charles. Following the hermit episode, which establishes Roland as a man designated by Heaven as possessing saintly qualities, the poem ends with the joyous reunion of Roland with Charles and the peers, so that Roland finally returns to the world of the *chanson de geste*. Even here, though, when Roland embraces Oliver, the comparison is clearly of a romance nature:

Con baçaller, quand plus volor l'argüe,
 Prent in ses braz la puçelle tot nue,
 Ne ja por mort non l'averoit rendue,
 Tot ensemant le duc la color mue. (vv. 15530-33).

The *Entrée d'Espagne* goes nowhere near as far in mixing epic and romance traits as does a text such as the *Bataille Loquifer*. In this poem the epic character Renoart is transported by three fairies to King Arthur's court in Avalon in an episode which is nevertheless integrated into the themes of the poem.⁷ One could make similiar claims for the "romance" episodes and elements of the *Entrée d'Espagne*: they are not gratuitous, but are used skillfully

to enhance the image of the hero, Roland, and shed fresh light on such textual themes as independence, authority, honor, duty, and the advancing of the Christian cause. There is no question of cheapening the image of Roland by allowing him any dalliance in Persia. Bradley-Cromey observes: "The discourse of the *roman* in Part Two [i.e., from when Roland abandons Charles] challenges and undermines the primacy of the epico/feudal substratum in the text's first 9000 verses" (137). The loss of several thousand lines from the Eastern section makes it difficult for us to feel the text's overall intended shape and tonal emphasis, but the romance elements we have could be said rather to reinforce and enrich the epic and feudal concerns by enlarging the poem's scope before eventually reintegrating its hero with his heightened status into his primary world. The idea of promoting Roland as a hero and removing him from his usual surroundings by some life-crisis and rift is essentially a romance trait, so well explored by Chrétien in *Yvain*; and Roland's yearning to return to Charles at the end of the Eastern episode, which he expresses in terms of never feeling joy until he is reunited with him and his companions (vv. 14220-22) is not unlike the despair felt by Yvain that drove him to seek out the fountain again. Yet despite Roland's "educative odyssey" (Bradley-Cromey 215), the poem remains fundamentally an epic, a fact of which the style, metre and language are a constant reminder. An epic atmosphere sets the initial tone and status of the poem, while all the main characters, and many of the secondary ones, too, are those of epic. This is the world in which the poet is clearly profoundly steeped, as he prepares his hero for future martyrdom at Roncevaux.

NOTES

1. Notably Krauss (ch. 10), and Bradley-Cromey (ch.3,4). For further recent studies of the *Entrée d'Espagne*, see Mandach, Beretta, Vallecalle, Brook, and the next essay in this volume.

2. Quotations from the *Chanson de Roland* are taken from the Whitehead edition.
3. Quotations from the *Entrée d'Espagne* are taken from the Thomas edition.
4. Giants also figure, of course, in romance, and there is an element of romance motif in the fact that Ferragu represents a rite of passage through single combat for any adversary, and that before Roland's battle with him a dozen other barons unsuccessfully take him on (vv. 1144-580).
5. *Ibid.*, vv.10765-72. At the beginning of the *Entrée d'Espagne*, too, the poet refers critically to the way the barons had spent their time during a period of inactivity, one element of which was dalliance: "A donoier pulcelles e dames en secrois" (v. 106).
6. This essentially epic feature also finds its way into a mainstream late thirteenth-century romance, the *Roman de Silence*, vv. 427-72.
7. See Sturm-Maddox, Maddox and Suard.

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Olifant

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