

"Non par orgoil, mais por
senefiance":
Roland Redefined in the *Entrée
d'Espagne*

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Until quite recently, as Alberto Limentani observed, the Franco-Italian epic generally was considered a type of "sacca morta della cultura," a dead end of literary history ("L'Epica," 339). The relative critical neglect of the *Entrée d'Espagne* in particular may be further attributed to this poem's hétéroclite treatment of the traditional French epic material: the poet announces that he closely follows—indeed, he implies that he even translates—his source, the pseudo-Turpin account of Charlemagne's Spanish campaign,¹ but a substantial segment of the incomplete work—almost 2300 verses—transposes Roland from the battlefield in Spain to the Orient, to recount the younger hero's adventures until his return to assume his destiny as martyr in the Christian army. And this interpolated segment, the invention of the anonymous poet, has seemed to some a digression that fits uneasily in the extant text, one perhaps appropriated from an independently existing poem within the manuscript tradition.² One recent response to this critique is the comprehensive reading of the poem by Nancy Bradley-Cromey, who focuses on the conflict between (overlord) authority and (vassal) autonomy as embodied in the relation of Roland and Charlemagne. I propose here to re-examine the relation between the two obviously disparate parts of the poem in another light, through a focus on the brief segment that sutures them together. The detail of this segment has received still less attention than the

rest of the poem, and it merits scrutiny for the considerable light it can shed, both on the design of the *Entrée* as a whole, and on the reading of the figure of Roland by later medieval writers of the epic.³

It has often been observed that the "new" figure of Roland is a signal feature of the *Entrée*. In the prologue, the narrator promises his audience that Roland's deeds offer the inspiration of an example of "goodness," *bontez* defined in familiar terms: observe divine law, aid the poor, give sustenance to widows and orphans (vv. 20-25). In turn, the Orient segment opens with a secondary prologue that is once again a tribute to Roland's *bontie*: "Car la bontié Rollant ne fait bien a tesir" (v. 10994).⁴ In the course of his major combat in Spain, as the poem's editor observes, he prays and preaches tirelessly, "avant, pendant et après" (lvi);⁵ his command of doctrine earns him the accolade of "le bien endotriné" (v. 1557).⁶ In the Orient segment, it is his strength in argumentation as well as in combat that results in the taking of Jerusalem and the wholesale conversion of its inhabitants, the Persian Sultan, and his entire army.

From these indices we might well conclude, as does Wolfgang van Emden in his review of "La réception du personnage de Roland," that the *Entrée* finds its place among those texts in which Roland "n'est guère critiqué" (1995: 362). The *Entrée* recasts Roland as the incarnation of a new ideal combining all the qualities, not only of *chevalerie*, but of *courtoisie*: a model of the "héros civilisateur" (Vallecalle 77).⁷ The impetuous hero of the *Chanson de Roland*, the "preu" whose heroic qualities are both paired and contrasted with those of an Oliver judged "sage," is at least as remarkable in the Franco-Italian poem for his *sagesse* as his prowess. Vallecalle, among other readers, emphasizes that the new portrait gives us a hero who contrasts to the "fougueux et impulsif Roland of the French *chansons de geste* (Vallecalle 73). In the Franco-Italian epic, he affirms, Roland is no longer carried away by the "élans belliqueux" (73) for which he had been known. Instead, "il illustre avec éclat une vision nouvelle du héros épique, qui se caractérise par une ferme et

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lucide maîtrise de lui-même plutôt que par le déchaînement d'un *furor incontrôlé*" (75)—an illustration of the marked shift in *mentalités* that numerous recent studies have discerned in the northern Italian communes in the fourteenth century (e.g., Krauss; Vitullo, this volume).

As much scholarly debate attests, however, the impulsive nature that marks the hero of the *Chanson de Roland* is often perceived as a corollary of his pride, and the question is serious, because if his impetuosity "avait fait sa gloire," it is the issue of his pride that is critical for an assessment of his moral stature in the Old French poem.⁸ In other late Roland texts, Susan Farrier has pointed out, changes in both structure and discourse serve to "clarify the issue of moral responsibility" (64). And so it is too in the interpolated segment of the *Entrée*, where the issue of *orgueil* is fundamental to a new axiology based on character.

It is for this reason that the transitional episode linking the two major segments of the poem merits close scrutiny, for in fact the positive image sketched in these generalizations holds, with degrees of nuance, throughout the *Entrée* with the single exception of this strategic passage. The traits of the Roland of the *Chanson*, almost obliterated from the *Entrée*, indelibly mark the pivotal episode. Bradley-Cromey has pointed out the importance of the liminal space in which it occurs, a forest that functions not only as "a border space of transition between the radically different worlds of East and West" but also as a "transformational space" for the hero (221). And it is in introducing this episode that the poet hints at the "nature" of Roland: "Or lesomes de Carles, si feruns menteure/ Dou gentil cont Rollant, qe ne garde a mesure: / Comant il en port bleisme, segir vult sa nature" (vv. 9407-09).

The remark refers to the intensely dramatic scene in which Roland, having been struck by an irate Charlemagne following his independent conquest of the city of Nobles, leaves the French camp, his next move unknown even to himself. This response, the poem's editor comments, is a manifestation of the headstrong nature regularly associated with this hero, who here

overcomes his exemplary feudal subordination to the Emperor: his personal resentment "libère momentanément sa conscience de tout ce qui n'est pas honneur chevaleresque. Son patriotisme et sa foi se trouvent également paralysés" (liv). In this reading, it is only when Jerusalem appears on the horizon and becomes the hero's goal that Roland's voyage into the Near East takes on its essential relation to the first part of the poem.⁹ Henning Krauss's reading is similar, in its affirmation that Roland's moral degradation is the essential background to his subsequent adventures: these adventures serve to purify the hero of his guilt, the great fault committed in abandoning Charlemagne's army, and achieve his rehabilitation (230-31). Bradley-Cromeley's tropological reading again emphasizes the link between Roland's feudal and Christian obligations: "From the perspective of a higher law, it is not merely the unannounced departure of which Charles accuses him nor any single event, but the accumulation of conflictual situations in which Roland fails to honor his similarly sacralized functions" (229).

The transitional segment, however, casts a potentially more serious light on Roland himself. While it is incontestable, as Bradley-Cromeley notes (47-48), that the blow delivered by Charlemagne is violently destructive of audience expectations concerning Roland's role as it was traditionally centered in his relation to the Emperor, it is not necessary to invoke extraordinary pride to account for—and to excuse—the hero's departure; the feudal code of honor prohibited the lord's striking of his vassal just as it prohibited the vassal from striking his lord. Marc Bloch cites the *capitulaire carolingien*: "nul ne quittera son seigneur après avoir reçu la valeur d'un sou... sauf si ce seigneur l'a voulu férir d'un bâton" (1: 352);¹⁰ in *Raoul de Cambrai*, it is only when struck by Raoul that Bernier renounces his fidelity. In the *Entrée*, moreover, the Emperor's action is condemned by his men, and he himself soon regrets it as "folor" (v. 11185).¹¹ Now, when Roland pauses at last after riding for many hours across deserted lands, he thinks of his father, his noble lineage, and then of the blow he has received from the Emperor, and still feels intense

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shame at having permitted it: "A grand onte se tient que creature humaine/ Le oüst oseç ferir, se il non portast la paine" (vv. 11452-53). But it is at this point that the poet offers another indirect allusion to Roland's nature: "La couse qe tot jorn un poi li fu germaine/ L'a visitei e dir i fist parole vaine" (vv. 11454-55).

Here the poet, intent upon enriching the psychology of the hero, alludes to his defect according to the tradition, in Limentani's words, to the residue of that pride that his new *sagesse* has apparently not entirely absorbed (*L'Entrée* 410, note 24 and "Il comico" 73). Bradley-Cromey defines Roland's reflection in this passage as an "empty, erroneous discourse immediately lamenting the loss of status, and decrying the cruelty of Fortune," and adds of the narrator's comment: "It then becomes clear that some nature of *orgueil* is the flaw in question" (229). In this reading, this nature involves "what the text terms 'mespreison,' a mis-taking of his proper function" (19), which will be found to be central to the entire narrative: it will "require much time before it becomes clear that his 'parole vaine'... is, in fact, any discourse denying the sacralized hierarchism of all earthly authority" (262). And, unquestionably, the paroxysm of this "parole vaine" indicates both Roland's pride and his acknowledgment of the reversal of his fortune, the nadir of which he has reached and now laments:

«Rollant, or estes sol en gaudine selvaine,
 «Qe soliés avoir en le vostre demaine
 «Vint mile chevaler por la glesie Romaine!
 «Ni soloie descendre ni in camp ni en taine
 «Q'as estriver náüse mant fils de castelaine:
 «Or sui ci cum ermite qe fa la treduaine.
 «Fortune de ces siegles ai bien la plus sotaine;
 «Ja me cuidoie seoir bien prés la souveraine.
 «Mais poi qe vostre roe me vuelt estre vilaine,
 «Verés moi trepaser outre la mer autaine....» (vv. 11456-65).

This lament, as Bradley-Cromeley notes, stresses his anger and shame rather than "consciousness of transgression or readiness to repent" (222-23). Its outcome is the decision to depart, accompanied only by his horse but armed with his perfect command of a plurality of Eastern languages.

With this Roland "monologando con sé stesso," comments Krauss, we find a hero who has lost his identity—"cosa impensabile per la tradizione" (*Epica feudale* 230).¹² Not "impensabile," of course, for an audience very probably familiar with the plight of a Dante-protagonist who confides at the beginning of the *Commedia*, "mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,/ che la diritta via era smarrita." That audience might well imagine that like Dante, who undertakes a journey into the unknown that will enable him to find that lost way again, Roland will at last return to the world he knows, the camp of Charlemagne.¹³ And for that audience, the transitional episode may have suggested that the abandonment of Charlemagne's campaign is not the primary cause of Roland's need for purification. For if the hero has obviously now reached the nadir of his chivalric-heroic fortunes, he has not reached the nadir of his existence, and that soon follows. Arriving on a deserted shore, he is confronted with a sort of crossroads:

De retourner al roi a poi ne forsena,
 Quand un autre penser sorvient, qe revela
 E dist qe ens en la mer ancois s'anoiera. (vv. 11506-08)

Suddenly a boat arrives, and two merchants disembark, settling down to eat on the grass. Roland approaches the two and recognizes from their dress "qe il estoient Païn" (v. 11521); addressing them in their language and presenting himself as a Saracen from Spain, he asks them for passage, only to be dismissed by one of them as a common highway robber, a "Robeor ... naturel de chamin" (v. 11542). A furious Roland, stung by the form of address, responds haughtily to the pagan he now addresses as "vilan" and "fils a puitan" (vv. 11544, 11547);

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whereupon the pagan approaches, seizes the rein of Roland's horse, and is about to strike him. And Roland draws his sword and strikes down, not only the offender, but his companion as well.

This impulsive violence is not without analogues in other Franco-Italian poems; in *Aquilon de Bavière*, in which Roland is developed in a highly positive light, his only major fault appears to be his "fréquents accès de rage" (Wunderli 761, note 11). But consequent to this quite obvious exhibition of the *desmesure* of the epic hero, we are party to another lengthy meditation. And this one, unlike his regret at the loss of his stature as Charlemagne's knight, is ironic and damning, as he berates himself for his violent impetuosity in killing two unarmed men:

Mais quand il pense qe il ni estoient armé,
 Anc plus dolant ne fu en son aé.
 Il les regarde cun un vis esgaré
 E pués a dit: « Roland, or es vengié.
 « Ei! cheitis home e plain de cruauté,
 « Com ais ici ton mautalant montréal !
 « Sor dous sens armes ais ton cuer desanflé;
 « Mais si cum tu eis garnis fusement esté:
 « Tu ne i avroies solemant regardé.
 « Sainte Marie, roïne mer de Dé,
 « En quel desgrâce sui de vos fils entré !
 « Tuit les honor deu siegle ai oblié... (vv.11565-76)

Is this the hero whose "curages," according to his companion Olivier in the *Roland*, is "mult pesmes e fiers" (v. 256)?¹⁴ He had not lamented as a fault his departure from the French camp after being struck by Charlemagne, but rather the reversals of Fortune; now, however, he is prostrated by remorse. Here it is his identity as a Christian that is sorely tried. And it is precisely while he is lamenting this fault—"atant qe il a cist gran duel demené" (v. 11581)—that another boat arrives. Its commander, an aged man of noble mien, finds the two pagans dead on the shore and at once

bows before Roland, declaring, "«Ci t'a envoié/ «Vertuos home, la divine bonté:/ De dous dyables m'ais encui delivré" (vv. 11589-91).

Is there irony intended here? Apparently not, for this man the first of the numerous "good pagans" Roland will encounter, most of whom he will eventually convert, will conduct him to the shores of Mecca and the adventures that will lead to the conquest of Jerusalem and then lead him, in all humility, back to Spain and reconciliation with the Emperor. And should we consider the well-timed arrival of the old man merely fortuitous, it is now described as providential, in his account that resonates curiously with any number of hagiographic narratives: the two "glotons," he tells Roland, had threatened to kill him:

...por qoi ne i avoie amené
 « En lor país e ja avoient juré
 « Qe sol por moi e por mes gran pecé
 « Estoit le oraje e le mal temps levé.
 « Garis m'avés, qe estoie perilé...» (vv. 11593-97)

In fact, this is the turning point in Roland's heroic career as recounted in this poem, established at the moment that the poet offers us a glimpse of an anguished and solitary hero believing himself unworthy. Now he is to embark on a new phase of his epic career; and as he crosses the sea with his host to a pagan shore, he engages in a lengthy prayer. This is, to be sure, but one of many long prayers in the *Entrée*. Wunderli comments that they afford a private portrait of the hero, a sort of "propagande en faveur du protagoniste" secondary to the "grandes scènes dialoguées," the theological debates that punctuate the text and that, couched in an attempt at conversion of the adversary, engage the opposition of Christianity and Islam, resulting in the emergence of a new figure of "Roland théologien" (775). The prayer in the transitional segment, however, has a functional value of considerably greater import. While fully conventional in many of its details, and commented upon by the narrator only as

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"une oraixon...qe mout fait a loer" (v. 11715), it focuses on the trait of pride that has been central, as several readers have pointed out, to the recasting of the hero in the first segment of the poem, which diminishes the suggestion of *orgueil*.¹⁵ Now Roland's prayer is emphatically couched in a discourse concerning pride:

« E! Diex sans començaile, e ja non dois finir,
 « Qe non volis Orgoil en ton reigne sofrir,
 « Ainç le feisis dou ciel trabuçer e chaïr
 « Quand il encontre vos fist penser de fallir;
 « Après de humaine carn volistes pois garnir
 « Les sieges qe as angles fist Orguel relinquir... (vv. 11717-22)

Thus God created the first man *de limo terre*,

« Adam le primer hom, por lui a semonir
 « Q'il non fust orgoilos ne qin devoit ensir... (vv. 11727-28)

Concluding his prayer with a plea for protection for the king who has offended him and for his companion Oliver, Roland now sets his own path under Divine guidance:

« 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. 11761-63)

Thus the function of the transitional passage that recounts Roland's departure from Spain is complex. It affords a motivation for the hero's abandonment of Charlemagne's great enterprise and sets the stage for the exemplary *sagesse* that he will demonstrate in the remainder of the poem, one in keeping with the recasting of Roland in a variety of poems of the Franco-Italian tradition; Krauss has repeatedly emphasized that "L'idéal bourgeois du moyen terme rend nécessaire et la prouesse et la sagesse" (1989: 227).¹⁶ But our anonymous poet, no doubt familiar with another tradition that occasionally ridiculed Roland in works such as the verse *Spagna*, is explicitly concerned with his hero's heroic reputation, as in this

declaration to his public: "Et qui Rolant voldra en nule cort blasmer,/ Ja ne doit estre daigne de preudome loer" (vv. 13982-83).¹⁷ Thus Roland not only becomes *sage*; his well-known *desmesure* is recast here in relation to the sin of pride, and he becomes the champion of its denunciation.

In the Orient segment of the *Entrée, orgueil* in many forms is a defining characteristic of the "bad" pagans. If it is a particularly masculine pride of the old king that is injured by the refusal of the Persian princess, his nephew Pelias is a veritable monster of pride. The trait is the epithet that describes him—"li ergolos Pelias" and it is the verb that arouses him—"cui tot le sang orgully" (vv. 12507,12515); even the Sultan's inexperienced young son recognizes it in his threats (vv. 12425-27). And it is his pride that is brought down by his championing of the wrong cause, as Roland tells him: "Tun pecé hot ton orgoil abatu" (v. 13072); when he is at last dispatched by Roland, the narrator rather sententiously spells out the lesson:

Mort est le Turch por sa desmesurance:
Ce senefie que ceschuns fait enfance
Que contre droit motre orgoil ne bubance. (vv. 13172-74)

The narrator emphasizes, moreover, that Roland himself cannot be reproached here for the same defect: he has killed his colossal adversary "Non par orgoil, mais por senefiance" (13176).¹⁸ The Roland who has confronted his own pride and *mautalent* emerges here not as a self-righteous champion but as a righteous champion, in a cause whose lesson has been hard and duly learned.

Roland's apprenticeship in the East is to be rewarded with the martyrdom of Rencesvalles: in the transition that leads back to Spain after his Orient adventures, in an encounter with a hermit strongly reminiscent of the *Quest dou Graal*, he receives heavenly sustenance and other marks of God's favor and protection, and is identified by an angel as "le ome beneoit" (v. 15039).¹⁹ His demeanor in this scene suggests once again that, as

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Bradley-Cromey comments, "the transformation from 'orguel' to 'onbleté'... [is] the *Entrée's* most critical ethical lesson" (246). And it is the confrontation with his own rebellious and impetuous nature that has prepared him for a new role: as he continues onward to Spain he has become, as the text's editor observes, "non seulement le précurseur des héros de la première croisade, mais une manière d'apôtre, de saint" (lvii).

NOTES

1. The legendary author of the Latin prose chronicle, he tells us, appeared to him in a dream and commanded that he render it in vernacular rhyme to assure its accessibility to a wider public: "A ce qe ele soit e leüe e cantee" (v. 56). All citations are from the Thomas edition.

2. Aebischer alludes to "ce menestrel qui s'en allait par les routes de Lombardie et de Piémont avec son manuscrit de *l'Entrée d'Espagne*--je dirais mieux: de *Roland en Orient*—dans son maigre bagage" (264). Ruggieri (189) concurs.

3. For a reconsideration of this question, see van Emden 1995.

4. On the didactic propensities of the narrator see Morgan (484, 486, 489).

5. The *Entrée* is "une véritable apologie du christianisme, et son principal héros, Roland, en est à la fois le porte-parole et le champion."

6. It is abundantly displayed, for example, in his exposition of the Trinity to his adversary Ferragu (vv. 3678-723). For comment, see Brook 210-11.

7. See Vallecalle for a review of these qualities highlighted by recent criticism.

8. For opposing views on the question, see Cook and van Emden "Argumentum."

9. When Jerusalem appears on the horizon, Thomas affirms, "le sépulcre du Christ apparaît comme but au guerrier chrétien emporté par son ressentiment... Dès lors, ce voyage en Perse, qui ne nous a été présenté d'abord que comme le résultat d'un coup de tête, et qui ne semblait qu'un hors-d'œuvre sans rapport avec la première partie de *l'Entrée d'Espagne*, prend un autre caractère" (liv).
10. "[C]e motif de rupture était encore expressément retenu, au XIII^e siècle, par divers coutumiers français, au début du siècle suivant par le Parlement du premier Valois" (Bloch 1: 353).
11. See Bradley-Cromeey's discussion of *exfestucatio* (185-89).
12. Krauss continues, "Solo nell'*aventure*, lontano da Carlo, Rolando può ritrovare sé stesso"(230).
13. Galent-Fasseur discusses the phase of the hero's alienation in the *Entrée* where, in contrast to the *chanson de geste*, "le mauvais à anéantir n'est plus tant à chercher hors de soi qu'en soi-même" (278).
14. Citations of the *Chanson de Roland* from the Segre edition.
15. For discussion of shifts in the "*orgueil* thematic," see Bradley-Cromeey (178-80). She notes that Roland, accused of pride by an angry Charlemagne, "represses his anger to demonstrate to Charles 'che hobiedïence senpre orgueil venqui' ([v.] 7982)" (181).
16. Vallecalle concludes that "C'est pourquoi, dans la fiction de l'épopée franco-italienne, et grâce en particulier au détour nécessaire d'une aventure exotique, Roland devient sage" (77).
17. For examples, see Thomas, lxxiv-lxxv. For the less reverential portrayal of Roland, see Specht 502.
18. See Bradley-Cromeey's discussion of the passage, which "further advances the exoneration of pride in the hero" (208).
19. For discussion of the passage, see Finoli, 177; Bradley-Cromeey, 238ff; and Galent-Fasseur 277-81.

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