RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES: SUBJECTIVITY AND ALTERITY IN THE *CHANSON DE ROLAND*

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RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES: SUBJECTIVITY AND ALTERITY IN THE
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This dissertation seeks to explore how theological and philosophical traditions during the medieval period lead to the establishment of views on the nature of God, the best manner of living, as well as the best way of remaining faithful to a proper mode of religious worship.   Furthermore, this study proposes that the adherence to such religious truths played a significant role in fashioning subjectivities, while simultaneously determining one religious traditions interaction with other religious communities.   I argue that by identifying with a certain conception of God, the worldview presented in the "Song of Roland" comes to identify the themes of power/chivalry, subjective becoming, and fear as being inextricably linked in the Franks reaction to the Saracen world. Religious identification thus serves to establish dichotomies, worldviews, and religious differences that ultimately justify violent extremism and genocide. My work contributes and innovates upon much of the existing scholarship, yet I break new ground in the field given that the theoretical framework I have chosen to employ seeks to fully develop the philosophical, political, and theological consequences of early Christian anthropology.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Paien unt tort e chrestïens unt dreit.

It is the goal of this thesis to demonstrate that any understanding of the *Chanson de Roland* must begin with this fundamental statement. Such a statement concisely articulates a worldview, a theological and philosophical positioning that establishes a dichotomy in the world. A dichotomy that is characterized by very specific qualities, namely, the existence of cultural and existential distinctions (for, we are after all, dealing with the conflict and contrast between two differing cultures and the divergent modes of living, becoming, and expressing their subjectivity) that serve to establish a separation, a gap, between those subjects who view themselves as embodying the "right" side in this fight, from those that are deemed to be embodying the "wrong" side in the fight. The criteria used to determine the appropriateness of a subject's belonging and becoming in this dispute, is to be found in the terms used by Roland to distinguish one side from the other: religious affiliation and fidelity. Consequently, I will be arguing in this thesis that we must view Roland's statement (and the entire poetic edifice that surrounds and contextualizes it) as an attempt to justify, philosophically and theologically, the origin of such a distinction, of the causes the allow such a distinction to appear, as well as the consequences that follow from the emergence of this point of distinction. In other words, I will endeavour to

articulate the underlying philosophy and theology which is at the heart of the "Chanson de Roland".

I believe such work to be necessary given its absence in the discipline. Curiously enough, although many commentators of the "Chanson de Roland" have emphasized this divide or distinction between Christian and Saracen, few have attempted to explicate the theological origins or philosophical consequences of such a division. This is true of much of the preceding scholarly tradition of the "Chanson de Roland", as well as with more recent articles. Whether it is Bédier, George Fenwick Jones, Pierre le Gentil, Ian Short or others, the dichotomy between Christians and Saracens is largely left in a conceptual *terrain vague*. It is either explained away as *simply* a religious opposition (an opposition needing no further analysis since it is assumed that the nature of the religious, as such, and of a religious opposition, to be more precise, does not need any kind of explanation or conceptual detective work), an easy means of dehumanization (one side demeans the other without any apparent conceptual framework being involved), or as a mere artifice of ideology. My thesis seeks to remedy this situation. I will seek to establish how the discovery, and recognition of a foundational Truth, on the part of the Christians, will inevitably lead to the conception/construction of Saracen difference as a hostile, and necessarily oppositional force that must be eradicated.

I will therefore be theorizing against a certain academic background. The work of Sharon Kinoshita perhaps best exemplifies this hermeneutical nullification of difference[1]. The principal thrust of her argument contends that the apparent differences between the Christians

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[1] This view is best exemplified by Sharon Kinoshita in a series of seminal articles. 'Pagans are wrong and Christians are right: Alterity, Gender, and Nation in the *Chanson de Roland*', in Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies. Vol. 31, No. 1, Winter 2001; Medieval Boundaries. Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2006.

and the Saracens in the "Chanson de Roland" (differences in which the text revels) are neither essential, existential, or of any serious importance. The two sides appear to mirror one another, sharing the same political structures, the same speech and language, the same martial bravado. In two of her articles, she suggests that the real problem in the "Chanson de Roland" is not one of intractable differences, but rather, a menace of nondifferentiation caused by possible cultural osmosis or conversion. What Kinoshita means by this is that the Christians and the Saracens are alike in every conceivable way, **except** for religion, and religion, contrary to what a reader might think, is not a great barrier or divider. Religious differences can be breached. People can convert. Consequently, religious differences are not all that important. This de-emphasizing of religious difference is clearly indicated by Kinoshita's structural use of conversion, as well as her performative description of religious difference as a *"nothing more"*. Kinoshita's article seems to emphasize the point that what looks to be the same, must inevitable *be* the same. Hence the reason her argument moves from the appearance of similarity, on the cultural plane, to the assertion of existential similarity in her negation of difference. In other words, "(s)imilar in language and custom, the two sides arguably differ in religion *and nothing more*". Such a view, I would argue, misses something crucial. It should be remembered that any two things which are virtually indistinguishable *are*, in fact, in actuality, distinguished from one another. The gap between them may be considered small or imperceptible. Nonetheless, a gap exists, and it is maintained. A gad the "Chanson de Roland" maintains rather vehemently. This gap is maintained regardless of any possible conversion, since conversion does not render division unstable. Conversion strengthens divisions and gaps. Conversion does not imply instability, but stability: otherness ceases to be other, inasmuch as what is other is negated, and is replaced with the "same" of some other from which it was originally different. The dichotomy between one

subject and some other is maintained, since you still have differences, but no middle ground because any conversion undertaken by a subject occurs by negating his otherness and embracing a new subjectivity, which one has now made one's sameness. The converted subject is made to recognize himself, and to submit himself, to and through a newly revealed essentiality made manifest by way of the beneficial religious presence of the converting force that makes the convert aware of some inherent value that had previously gone unnoticed.

If we briefly reflect upon the figure of Bramimonde, and of her conversion, we see that this is precisely how conversion is envisioned and structured in the "Chanson de Roland". Bramimonde's conversion does not render the gap between the Christian and Saracen worlds unstable. Through her conversion she strengthens that gap. For Bramimonde ceases to be herself, as Bramimonde, and becomes other than what she originally was through her conversion. She becomes Julienne, adopting a new name and a new manner of being, and her conversion is brought about through her recognition of the essentiality, the truth, of a discursive theological regime that had been foreign to her as the Saracen Bramimonde. In other words, as far as the subject Bramimonde is considered, the converting theological force has made manifest a truth shared by itself, as an other to Saracen culture, and this truth is seen to be a positive thing. It is to this "positivity" as a world-view being posited, and as a type of "good" that the converted subject is supposed to submit.

Furthermore, we also need to recognize that what may be virtually indistinguishable is nonetheless in a state of difference. Whether the degree of difference is large, small, or imperceptible, it remains that the difference is the site where things are disrupted, where the notion of everything being the same is fractured by indicating that what we thought of as being similar or indistinguishable, in fact contains difference. And this smallest degree of difference

implies a continued, a needed degree of separation, or absolute differentiation, that no measure of movement or conversion can breach. The actuality of an infinitesimal difference in the virtually indistinguishable actually negates its virtual identity, since this smallest degree of difference within the virtually indistinguishable corrodes the very possibility of there being any potential identity. If there is any movement implied in the "Chanson de Roland", it is not from one virtually identical realm to its mirror image, it is rather from one difference to another. No matter how slight, or apparently insignificant, differences, even imperceptible differences, are nonetheless fundamental differences representing gaps or schisms between two entities, since it is often these small, yet radically diverging differences, which function as the impetus for the existence of competing or antagonistic discursive regimes.

The deemphasizing of the theological and philosophical distinction suggested by Kinoshita would imply that Christians and Saracens *are* not really different, and that we are not dealing with two radically opposites modes of subjectivizing, since, ultimately, both sides are in fact similar but differ merely in religion. This argument moves the meaning of the text away from its theological/philosophical foundation, and situates the debate in terms of cultural autonomy or sovereignty. It is not the case, in her view, that the cultual grounds the cultural, rather, the theologico-philosophical is simply some other cultural facet among a diverse field of cultural components. Religion being a cultural artefact, the removal of this artefact allows for simple conversion from one side to the other given that both sides are essentially the same.

There are a number of reasons why this line of argument seems erroneous. Firstly, it basically ignores many other passages in the poem where there is in fact an emphasis on difference. Furthermore, as we shall see in chapters 8-14, this difference is almost always expressed as a difference in religious affiliation and the resulting becoming of the subject who

adopts this particular theological view. The poem, after all, takes great pain to indicate that the Saracens and the Christians use different forms of "calculus." Such calculations are always grounded in the moral paradigms made actual by the religious faith of the subjects.   The Saracens, for instance, are perfectly willing to sacrifice others to retain their possessions; the Christians are not so willing. Likewise, the two sides act differently when it comes to martial engagements. The Saracens are more than willing to negotiate, cheat, bribe, use dishonourable tactics, and even evade conflict in order to save their hides and possessions. The Christian heroes, on the other hand, always seem to be spoiling for a fight since they view such an activity in theological terms.   Lastly, Christians and Saracens have different soteriological destinies awaiting them, since Christians are destined to be saved, whereas the Saracens are destined to be damned. The saving or damning of a soul is certainly a religious question, but a religious question with theological and philosophical considerations since what is being judged is the *nature* of the soul. I believe that it is fair to say that Kinoshita's work, exemplifying a certain hermeneutical tradition for one, undervalues the importance of theological matters in the "Chanson de Roland". Furthermore, her emphasis on the "culture" of the text also leads her to imply that those passages in which Saracen warriors are almost judged to be great warriors (if only they were Christian), signals the potential for future conversion. It would suggest that such an enemy is already 9/10th the mirror image of the other. All that would be needed is one final push or conversion. Whereas someone like Kinoshita reads these judgements as positive value judgements, I shall endeavour to demonstrate that these passages are to be understood as negative assessments furthering the divide between Christians and Saracens. The comparison to a potential Christian is necessarily unflattering.

Now I don't mean to suggest that what has been written about the "Chanson de Roland" is unimportant or fruitless. I would rather think that all of these explanations probably bear some kernel of truth, some aspect of the text that needs to be thought through. But they do miss what I consider to be the crucial point: an opposition of worldviews is always dependent upon a philosophical understanding of the subjects involved in such an opposition. It is this "framework" that I believe needs to be explore.

Epic Works of literature like the "Iliad", "the Odyssey", or "The Aeneid" have been the focus of much philosophical work and speculation, and philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Erasmus, Pascal, Hegel, Kant, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Bloch, Heidegger, Habermas, Lévinas, Camus, Foucault etc... have all dedicated works, or some of their work to thinking about these epic texts. Insofar as the *Chanson de Roland* is concerned, there has been an almost universal silence. I cannot mention a single philosopher who has dedicated any serious amount of thinking to this text. As a consequence, and in response to such silence, this thesis will attempt to both remedy this absence and, by exploring what I believe to be an important aspect of the "Chanson de Roland": the manner in which it attempts to justify the creation of a theological dichotomy, and the way in which hat dichotomy receives philosophical justification.

Consequently, throughout this thesis I shall endeavour to show that the crucial factor distinguishing the Christians from the Saracens is that the former are engaged in a subjectivizing process, whereas the latter, by contrast, are engaged in what can best be described as a desubjectivizing process. The existence of such a process is incumbent upon four factors that will be detailed in the varying chapters of my thesis.

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1- Firstly, as we shall see in chapters 1-7, the discovery of a Truth that is thought to be logically rigorous and undeniable will facilitate a subjectivizing process that will, in turn, give rise to the creation of differences. In order for a character or type to become a subject, he must identify a Truth which, with respect to himself, is conditional (it is that without which he would not/could not be what he is - in the case of the "Chanson de Roland", the Creator-God is this Truth, for, without His divine dispensation and creation, the human type would not exist, be what it is, or be in the manner that it is). This means that any potential for his subjecthood to be (for the existence of this particular subject to be rather than to not be) is to be understood as an inheritance or gift from the Creator-subject.

After having identified the existence of such a Truth, the character must identify with this Truth inasmuch as it is seen to be essential to the subjecthood of the character since, not only is the Truth the guarantor of its existence, It is also the ultimate signification or meaning of such an existence. The subject comes to be because he is created by the Creator-subject, but of equal importance, the term of its subjecthood, that towards which it is destined to as belonging, that for which it is meant to strive and turn as the point of its greatest potential fulfillment (the immortality of the subject having been a faithful subject to God- in other words, the permanent continuity of the subjectivizing process). The subject, recognizing himself as a creature of God, also recognizes that the subjectivizing process in which he is engaged should naturally be turned towards God. God is his *telos*.

2- Secondly, as we shall see in chapters 1-10, after having identified a Truth with which it now identifies, the subject then must proceed to persist in the identifying process. In other words, the subject will attempt to remain faithful to the Truth and the subjectivizing process he has identified as following from the discovery of the Truth. He will do this by establishing

parameters of action, of thought, and of belief. These parameters allow the subject to further cement the meaning of the Truth (this, for instance, will involve negating other truths as falsehoods, since existence can only have one meaning or *telos*), while strengthening his own identification with the Truth. In the "Chanson de Roland", such identification will manifest itself in a number of ways:

a) As a form of a theological phobia towards any and all forms of alterity

b) As a call to self-sacrifice, including dying in the name of a theological construct

c) In acts of piety such as prayers

d) In the practised ritualizations of space such as can be found in the creation of pilgrimage sites or "churches". For example, in the climax to the first battle scene, Roland gathers the fallen Franks before the dying Turpin. This gathering has aspects of a ritualized mass, and serves as a poignant example of just how space can become sacralized-

e) By gathering, collecting, and "worshipping" theophanic articles such as relics

f) In the saying/adoration of the Truth in the form of the mass (Charlemagne is usually shown praying and participating in early morning masses)

g) In the proselytizing zeal towards others that are different. A zeal that will masquerade as "freedom of choice" (which in the "Chanson de Roland" is always particularly motivated by the threat of violence and death which make the choice that much clearer and easier).

It is through such "mores" and codes that the subjectivizing process makes itself manifest.

3- Thirdly, as we shall see in chapters 8-10, this faithfulness to the Truth as being subject to that Truth within the context of the "Chanson de Roland's" martial politics, will have a very specific particularization. It will involve the valorization of martial prowess and becoming.

Furthermore, it will lend itself to the creation of a well-defined identity, namely, Christian knighthood. As such, this Christian knighthood, in keeping with the need to establish parameters of action, thought, and belief that serve to strengthen the identification of the Truth as the willful negation of all "other truths", will not particularize itself in isolation or in-itself. Rather, the strengthening of the subjectivizing process and the formation to a specific Christian martial identity, will be undertaken as a continuous process involved in struggling, resisting, correcting, and finally negating other alternative identities (these being understood as other identifications to/with differing "truths"). In the "Chanson de Roland", the greatest embodiments of Christian martial faithfulness to the Truth will be demonstrated by Roland and Turpin, who, at all times and regardless of the costs, will strive to maintain and continue their holy war against what they perceive as the perniciousness of Saracen belief.

4- Lastly, as we shall see in chapters 11-14, given that the faithfulness involved in the subjectivizing process is characterized by an open hostility to any form of theological alterity, the subjectivizing process defended in the "Chanson de Roland" will standardize a portrait of this "otherness" in "demonic" terms. This "other" will be systematically represented in negative terms, as a "desubject" inasmuch as the fallaciousness of his religious beliefs will be presented (one need only think about the episode of the revolt against the pagan idols after the defeat of the Saracens by Charlemagne's forces). Furthermore, his subjectivizing process, or the elemental aspects of his cultural faithfulness will be shown to be lacking (his cowardice, his fear of death are testimony to this); his desubjectivization will be shown to be implicit to a worldview accentuated, not on the attainment or possibility of subjectivity, but by the subsumption of subjectivity by the "mass"; his physical monstrosity will be explained, in part, in terms of his dependent origination in a wasteland, a *terre gaste,* devoid of the life-giving elements

characteristic of lands visited by the sacred. In other words, the subjectivizing process exemplified by Christians will be represented as occurring, side by side, with a concomitant process, that of the demonization/desubjectivization of the "other".

2. CREATION AND THE CREATION OF DIFFERENCES: MEDIEVAL CONCEPTIONS OF THE WORLD AND SIN.

The barriers between the two worlds were formidable: differences of language and script, of race, climate, and manners, of ideology, most of all –hence hot and cold war, which made it dangerous to sympathize- fear, hatred, prejudice, and an incredible amount of ignorance: the exact formula for an iron curtain[2].

The above quotation can ideally serve as a notice to most studies on the "Chanson de Roland". It has often been repeated that the "Chanson de Roland's" narrative strategy is dependent upon a cultural and/or existential division between Christians and Saracens. The poem goes to great lengths to stress that the Christians and Saracens are different, and that they represent two very different worldviews and ways of life. In this thesis, I shall endeavour to demonstrate that these different worlds/worldviews represent different subjectivizing processes. Processes that originate in the recognition of a Truth, and develop from the logic of existence that is associated with that Truth. As a consequence, the "Chanson de Roland" is interested in contrasting different forms of subjectivity as they pertain to the manner in which characters develop, or regress, in their subjectivity depending upon what kind of Truth they have chosen to enact, such that the poem valorizes one form, while demonizing an "other".

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[2] Helen Adolf, 'Christendom and Islam in the Middle Ages : New Light on 'Grail Stone' and 'Hidden Host'', in <u>Speculum</u>, Vol. 32, no. 1, Jan. 1957, p. 105.

As we shall see, this division is so central to the poem's view of the world, that it is continuously reinforced by the poem's particular manner of characterizing the major players of the action. As we shall see in chapters 8 through 14 of this thesis, the poem dichotomizes the two parties, and characterizes/represents the different characters in accordance to their allegiance/adherence to one of the two worlds. Christians, the faithful ones at least, will be the object of positive portrayals, demonstrating the fealty to their lord, their overwhelming martial prowess, and of course, their great and undying piety. By contrast, the Saracens characters will suffer from the exact opposite portrayal. Devious, cunning, cowardly, and above all, idolatrous and pagan, the Saracens in the "Chanson de Roland" have, as we will see, no redeeming qualities. This division, this manner of neatly dividing and segregating the poetic elements into "good" and "bad" camps is so endemic to the poem's narrative, that in the minds of most readers, the poem's catchphrase "Christians are right, and Saracens are wrong", can be said to aptly summarize the text's poetic intentions.

The poem presents the reader with a divided world. There is good, and there is evil. Some characters, mostly Christians, are characterized in a flattering mode, while others, mostly Saracens, are characterized as being devious, cowardly, or downright monstrous. The Christians, as we will shall see, are the heroes, worthy subjects of a religious Truth that brings them Transcendent and temporal immortality, these Christian knights are bearers of righteousness and knightly prowess, proud defenders of the feudal-Christian manner of being. By contrast, the Saracens, as we will see in greater detail in chapters 11-14, are the antithesis to the values being promoted by the narrative. Unworthy subjects of God, their faithfulness to all manners of wickedness inevitably leads them to existential monstrosity. Whereas a knight like Roland, for instance, is the very embodiment of martial valour and "faithful" service (to God and liege),

Saracen warriors are inevitably represented under the guise of cowardice, incompetence, or as bearing a formal "lack" that renders them inherently inferior to their Christian counterparts.

Given the division inherent to the text, what the following sections of this thesis will attempt to sketch out are the various ways in which the "Chanson de Roland" suggests not only the existence of a divided world, but the manner in which this division implies that the very order of Creation is itself split or segmented. The world is divided because God's Creation has been "broken" or altered.

If it is the case that the world is divided, and that Creation has been somehow altered or perverted, we must attempt to explain just how this brokenness originates, and is perpetuated, by man's turning away from God. Theologically, early Christians understood that men create differences, since men are the origin of the fragmentation and corruption of Creation. Such an idea is a central tenet of early and medieval Christian thought. The idea that individual choices made by created beings influences the very fabric of Creation was defended by one of the early Church fathers, Cosmas Indicopleustes, when, speaking of the War in Heaven and of the Fall, he stated:

> *Ceci affligea beaucoup les anges; ils s'étaient attristés pour ceux d'entre eux qui avaient transgressé la loi, mais plus encore pour l'homme, car toute la creation est liée en lui et qu'il est le gage de l'amitié de l'univers entire; en effet, le lien une fois détruit, tout est nécessairement détruit. Les anges pleuraient donc sur eux-mêmes et sur la destruction de l'univers.*[3]

Given the ideological stance of the poem, it will come as no surprise that Saracen characters will embody this continual striving away from God that furthers the brokenness of the

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[3]Cosmas Indicopleustès, <u>Topographie chrétienne</u>. Tome 1, (livres I-IV), introduction, texte critique, illustration, traduction et notes par Wanda Wolska-Conus, preface par Paul Lemerle, collection "Sources chrétiennes", No. 141, les Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 1968.

world. There is something rotten in the state of the world. That rottenness is evil. Not content to merely state a "fact", the "Chanson de Roland" will suggest a remedy to this state of affairs, and the poem's diegetic thrust will be to cleanse its world of just such an evil. Echoing some of the ideology from the early Crusader period[4], the "Chanson de Roland" envisions a world in which the Christian knight must dedicate himself to gloriously ridding the world of the presence of the impious infidels.   A struggle against impiety and idolatry that, within the poem, as in the medieval world of Crusader ideology put forth by Urban II, was expressed in eschatological terms as an all-out struggle against the forces of evil led by a well-defined (and demonized) religious enemy.

> *Car il est certain que l'Antéchrist ne fera la guerre ni aux Juifs ni aux Gentils, mais, selon l'étymologie de son nom, aux Chrétiens. Et s'il ne trouve pas là un plus grand nombre de chrétiens qu'il n'en existe aujourd'hui, il ne rencontrera personne pour lui opposer de résistance ni de quoi attaquer. La venue de l'Antéchrist exige comme une autre, et préalable, **christianisation de la terre**[5].*

I believe that it is fair to state that the historical narrative surrounding the creation of the "Chanson de Roland" finds an echo in the poem's merciless slaughtering of political/religious enemies. The cleansing of the Holy Places, their re-christianization was implicit in Urban's call to arms for European chivalry. Their task, that of a great cleansing of the Christian holy places, was set against the profanation that had been brought about by the Saracens:

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[4] The "evilness" of the Saracens was "obvious" inasmuch as they, belonging to another religious tradition, could be said to be irreligious, or they could be accused of having turned away from worship of the One True God. Speaking of the "Persians" who had conquered the Holy Places, Pope Urban II is reported to have described them in the following terms : "The Persians, an accursed race, a race utterly alienated from God, a generation forsooth which has not directed its heart and not entrusted its spirit to God". Excerpt from the 'Historia Hierosolymitan', in Chronicles of the First Crusade, edited with an introduction by Christopher Tyerman, Penguin Books, New York, 2004, p. 2.

[5] Summary of Urban II Clermont speech in Paul Alphandéry, La chrétienté et l'idée de croisade: les premières croisades, tome I, collection "L'évolution de l'humanité", vol. XXXVIII, texte établi par Alphonse Dupront, Éditions Albin Michel, Paris, 1954, p. 40. The emphasis is mine.

Let the deeds of your ancestors move you and incite your minds to manly achievements;
the glory and greatness of King Charles the Great, and of his son Louis, and of your
other kings, who have destroyed the kingdoms of the pagans, and have extended in these
lands the territory of the Holy Church. Let the Holy Sepulchre of the Lord our Saviour,
which is possessed by unclean nations, especially incite you, and the Holy Places which
are now treated with ignominy and irreverently polluted with their filthiness[6].

In order to justify this division of the world, and its consequent "cleansing", the "Chanson de Roland", and its reader, must recognize that human beings are parceled out, split into various groupings and orders, some of which are positive (the positive nature of such characters will be highlighted, among other ways, by their metaphysical status in the hereafter), others of which are negative, "downturned" (the negativity associated with such characters will be made manifest in their eventually being confined to Hell) and deformed.

But we must ask ourselves if the narrative division that is so central to the "Chanson de Roland" can be justified? For instance, is the "Chanson de Roland's" worldview supported by theological, philosophical, or Biblical fact that would lend it some form of intellectual/theological credence? Are the cultural divisions highlighted in the poem (divisions made manifest by the fact that Christians and Saracens act and respond differently to various situations) also existential ones? Do the poem's Saracens represent a different race of human beings? In other words, is the text's split between Christian and Saracen indicative of a split in being between better and "lesser", or monstrous beings? How is it possible for the world to be so neatly divided between two irreconcilable differences? Where do such differences originate?

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[6] Excerpt from the 'Historia Hierosolymitana', in <u>Chronicles of the First Crusade</u>, p. 3.

3. HARMONIOUS CREATION

I would suggest that the importance of knowing how the origins of differences were explained religiously is crucial to our study of the "Chanson de Roland" given the poem's specific use of a Christian context. The poem clearly argues that Christians are right and pagans are wrong. This difference needs to be explained and grounded in some kind of theological justification. The pretensions of superiority that are claimed need to be argued and defended. The values associated with being Christian or pagan are inherent to the Christian world, and must be understood within the context of the Christian worldview. They could, after all, be meaningless elsewhere. George Boas has argued that pre-Christian societies had no problem reconciling the appearance of differences between peoples or races given the cosmological myths inherent to their worldviews. However, the same cannot be said of the Judeo-Christian cosmological myth. It stresses the absence of difference, and the fundamental unity of all human beings. It is only within the confines of the early Church that diversity and difference become real philosophical and/or theological problems. As George Boas has stated:

> *The existence of non-Hebraic peoples furnished a problem to the early Christians, whereas to the Pagans ethnic diversity was, in general, simply a fact. For the Pagan had no sacred text which led him to believe that all human beings were members of one family with a common ancestor. The separation of the world into Greeks and Barbarians required no explanation and no one thought of a catholic religion until the time of the Roman Stoics*

when the world as a whole was brought under one system of law. The Christian, however,

had to reconcile ethnic diversity with the story of the First Man[7].

This leads us to question the premises of the poem's division of the world. When we compare and contrast the biblical account of Creation, and its existential unity, with the "Chanson de Roland's" fractured image of the world, we are faced with a very specific problem. The problem, in this case, is that the division implied by the poem's worldview does not conform to traditional Christian cosmogony. The Biblical account of Creation makes no mention of "monster-men" with exaggerated or grotesque figures[8]. The hideous creatures presented in the "Chanson de Roland" are absent from the biblical account.   The Book of Genesis only presents one story of creation: that of the human race. It is not the case, in the exegetical tradition, that God created man and monsters separately. So where does this division come from?

Unlike the pre-Christian or pagan worlds, the Judeo-Christian tradition needed to explain, and justify, substantive differences as they pertained to the unity of being suggested in the book of Genesis. In fact, the two different accounts of Creation given in the book of Genesis, regardless of their ordering of the different elements of Creation, both agree that human beings nonetheless share a very basic commonality: all of human history, all human beings are descended from the same basic pair. The many are inevitably traced back to the one original coupling.

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[7] George Boas, Essays on Primitivism and Related Ideas in the Middle Ages. Octagon Books Inc., New York, 1966, p. 129.
[8] I am excluding the angelo-genetic episode mentioned in Genesis 6, 1-4, which does mention the appearance on the earth of "monstrous" or giant beings. However these beings, related textually to God's anger at the prominence of evil on the earth (Gn 6, 5), are not directly related to Creation itself.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it.[9]

And the Lord God formed a man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. ... And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man. ... Therefore shall man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.[10]

As we can see, these differing biblical accounts do converge on a few fundamental points. Firstly, there is a shared belief that the created human element is not sufficient or signified in and of itself, since its meaning comes from the author of Creation, and furthermore (if the account of the Fall as an example of what is to be avoided is to be believed), that this meaning is furthered, broadened, or achieved by continually orienting creation towards the Creator[11]. That human life should be dedicated to the divinity in such a fashion is indicated by Genesis's insistence on the need, for those in Eden, to keep God's law[12]. Already, the book of Genesis is suggesting that being, or becoming a proper subject of God, involves recognizing God's sovereignty, his existence as Law and Truth, while remaining faithful to this Truth.

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[9] Gn 1, 27-28.

[10] Gn 2, 7; 2, 21-23; 2, 24.

[11] "The story of the creation of human beings in Gen 2 makes quite clear the essential components of human existence. Human beings are created by God, and so from the very beginning they stand in a relationship to their creator. A human being as a complete person is a living being because God has breathed life into him". Claus Westermann, Genesis 1-11. A commentary, translated by John, J. Scullion s.j., Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1976, p. 220.

[12] Gn 3, 1.

Recognizing the Truth means recognizing the Truth as essential to oneself: it is one's *telos*, one's end. Beings are made by God, for God, to live in harmonious union with God. Therefore, blissful existence, as a continued existence in Paradise or Eden, involves possibilizing one's essence by being faithful to this end. Union to God, proper human behavior as willed by God, implies, if we are to believe the "genetic code" offered to us in the biblical narratives, that humans intend their actions and their behaviour to some will that is outside and transcendent to themselves[13]. In other words, one recognizes the Truth of God's existence as our Creator, and one remains faithful to this Truth by continually being subject to It. The continued mirroring of God in man, that imaging suggested in Genesis, is achieved in man's faithful service to a God's will.[14] Man is called upon to divest himself of himself, to forego his continued investment in himself, in order to achieve his end: (re)union with God. In this way, Creation is continued inasmuch as man participates in God's perfecting plan for man. In fact, as the Biblical exegete André LaCocque has argued, when God says that the world he has created is "good", this statement is not to be understood in esthetic terms, or as simple expression of satisfaction at a job well done. The word utilized to express God's opinion of His own Creation is *Tob*. This word denotes God's satisfaction not of His creation, but of the world's (and its creatures) ability to satisfy God's plan for Creation. God's satisfaction, his deeming Creation as "good" implies His intention for Man, among other creatures, to participate in God's will:

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[13] This "genetic" or anthropological conception is to be found in the works of Ambrose: "Our soul, therefore, is made to the image of God. In this is man's entire essence, because without it man is nothing but earth and into earth shall return". Ambrose, Hexameron, Paradise and Cain and Abel, translated by John J. Savage, Fathers of the Church Inc., New York, 1961, p. 256.

[14] This obedience to God's will is implicit in the double injunction to "till the soil" and obey the Law, which have been interpreted by Augustine as indications of man's need to orient his being towards God: "Car même que l'homme travaille la terre pour la rendre belle et féconde, ainsi Dieu travaille l'homme pour le rendre saint, à condition que l'homme ne s'éloigne pas de lui par l'orgueil qui est apostasie… Parce que l'homme est un être changeant dans l'âme et le corps, il ne peut être formé pour devenir saint et bienheureux qu'à condition de se tourner toujours vers Dieu qui est le bien immuable". Augustin 'De Genesi ad litteram', in Bible Chrétienne. Vol I, Commentaires, Éditions Anne Sigier, Sainte-Foy Québec, 1989, p. 46.

Tob, en effet, ne qualifie pas une beauté esthétique ou une valeur interne. Tob exprime la capacité de la creature à remplir les espérances de son Créateur. Par conséquent, la bonté est caractérisée par l'ordre dans le désordre (le 'sans ordre'), un ordre établi par Dieu et qui devient opérant, pour ainsi dire, grâce au partenaire humain de Dieu[15].

Secondly, despite the fact that these two passages represent Yahvistic and Sacerdotal theologies respectively, they both emphasize a type of primordial unity. All human beings have descended from a first, original pair of beings. I believe that something of this unity of being is exactly what Adam is hinting at when he states: *"This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh"*[16]. Likewise, all descendants from this original pair, will be, bone of their bones, and flesh of their flesh[17]. That Adam would manifest joy at seeing this fellow creation, this "second self", is evident in the very words he utilizes to describe her.

I would contend that what the biblical narrative is suggesting, aside from any kind of split in humanity along lines of sexual diversity, is that all future differences, whatever they may be, originate from this one fundamental somatic homogeneity[18]. All future creatures are bounded to this one original couple. From these two bodies, from these two forms, all other bodies and human forms shall descend. There is male and there is female. There is Adam and Eve and all of the humans to come. Yet all of this diversity is one.

I would like to suggest that this diversity is unified both in terms of its being, and by its theological orientation. The meaning of the original unity of Adam and Eve in God's Creation,

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[15]André LaCocque/Paul Ricoeur, <u>Penser la Bible</u>, texte d'André LaCocque traduit de l'américain par Aline Patte et revu par l'auteur, Éditions du Seuil, collection Essais, Paris, 1998, p. 20.

[16] Gn 2, 23.

[17] As the exegete H. Renckens s.j. has noted: " Il y a diverses races humaines, mais dans l'ensemble de la création de l'humanité s'impose comme une unité : elle forme un groupe bien délimité. … Ce qui fait un seul couple, un home et une femme. Ils sont à l'origine de toute l'humanité". <u>La bible et les origines du monde. Genèse 1-3</u>, traduit du néerlandais et adapté par A. de Brouwer, Desclée, Bruxelles, 1964, p. 153.

[18] What Renckens has called the "ligne de pensée monogéiste de l'histoire du paradis". <u>La bible et les origines du monde. Genèse 1-3,</u> p. 153.

that meaning which is suggested in the Book of Genesis, will be echoed and re-echoed in further biblical narratives stressing the uniform moral dimensions that arise from just such a unity.[19] To these, one must add the presence of theological dimensions, wherein faithfulness of service and devotion to God are represented in terms of an unbroken and unbreakable bond of marital unity[20]. Not only do Adam and Eve form a pair, but the fruits of this coupling already-always belong to Christ-God, to whom obedience and faithful service are required. These "genetic" passages in Genesis suggest that the unity to be conceived through Adam and Eve is that of Creation itself, and of the human genealogy (the type that is so obviously evidenced in the Sacerdotal or Evangelical narratives) that descends from this original unity, or oneness, of Adam and Eve.

Another manifestation of this view (one that was to have important theological consequences for the history of Christian thought) is to be found in the philosophical considerations of oneness and belonging put forth by many of the early Church fathers. These views often implicitly channel the Pauline conception of the world (Creation as re-Creation given by the new covenant brought forth by Christ) as a body. A body wherein all of the parts are related, all are equally functioning, and all are equally signified in principle by their

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[19] Evidenced, for instance, in Christ's response to the Pharisees regarding questions of divorce and re-marriage. See Mt 19, 3-6.

[20]This is certainly the way that Paul interprets Genesis in the following passage: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband". Ep, 5, 21-33.

belonging to the oneness of the Creator[21]. Because of Paul's view of the "body of Christ", and not forgetting the Genesis account of Creation, many of the early Christian thinkers conceived of the world, and of the whole of Creation in organic, or organicist terms. This view is not to be confused with a pantheistic one, since God as head of the body/creation creates the body/creation himself as a hierarchy[22], one in which, moving through the different ranks of angels, of human beings, to the sphere of the lesser creatures, one finally reaches the base constituents of the created world. Philosophically, this plethora of creation was thought to have been made possible because of God's excessive goodness[23]. Not only are all human beings descended from the original pair of beings, but furthermore, all human beings are situated somewhere along the great chain of beings created by God, and therefore, by way of their participation in this "body", find some degree of blessedness or redemption. As of yet, we are still far removed from the vicious dichotomizing that is to be found in the "Chanson de Roland".

It is God who created the different realms, natures, orders, and beings. Yet it is at this point that one of the potential markers of differentiation appears. God creates the elements of creation, and if these different elements share in this participation in unequal measures, this is the result of the imperfection of these elements with respect to God, and not a result of God Himself.

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[21] "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell". Co 1, 16-19.

[22] This was certainly Augustine's view, and it is safe to suppose that it was probably the dominant view during the pre-Thomistic medieval period: "Le souverain bien, au-dessus duquel il n'y a rien, c'est Dieu, et par là c'est un bien immutable, donc vraiment éternel et vraiment immortel. Tous les autres biens ne sont que par lui mais ne sont pas de lui. En effet, ce qui est de lui c'est ce qu'il est lui-même, mais les choses qui ont été faites par lui ne sont pas ce qu'il est ». Augustin, 'La moral chrétienne', in Œuvre de Saint Augustin, 1ère série : Opuscules, texte de l'édition bénédictine, introduction, traduction et notes par B. Roland-Gosselin, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1949, p. 441.

[23] The unity of Creation, and its essentially positive nature, were explained in this way by Dionysus the Areopagite: "All Communion –in a word, all that is comes from the Beautiful and Good, hath its very existence in the Beautiful and Good, and turns towards the Beautiful and Good. Yea, all that exists and that comes into being, exists and comes into being because of the Beautiful and Good". Dionysus the Areopagite, 'On the Divine names', in Translations of Christian Literature. Series I. Greek texts, edited, with an introduction and notes by C.E. Rolt, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1957, p. 100.

Simply put, the world created by God, and the elements within that world, cannot have or possess the same degree of perfection as God. This significant difference between God and man has been made evident, for instance, in the writings of Didymus the Blind, who suggest that man is made in the image of God when he strives to imitate or attain him and his plan, and not by way of his physical/existential composition which is unlike the uncreated "composition" of God's. Man`s very being indicates his inferiority to the uncreated, eternal God:

> *Or il a été montré que l'homme n'est pas image en tant qu'il est compose, car l'homme intérieur est une essence incorporelle et inintelligible, et l'homme extérieur a un corps dote d'une forme. Il faut donc comprendre autrement le fait qu'il ait été créé à l'image et à la ressemblance de Dieu. Dieu qui a fait l'univers, qui est chef et guide de toutes choses- car étant créateur il est aussi chef et roi- et qui a fait l'homme de telle sorte qu'il commande aux bêtes sauvages, aux troupeaux et aux volatiles qui ont été créés à cause de lui, veut dire que l'homme est son image en ce qu'il participe à son pouvoir de commander.*[24]

Hence, from the divine cause of Creation to the immanent subject as its effect, there is a degree of difference. Likewise, within the order of Creation, there are orders and degrees of perfection. Angels possess a higher degree of perfection than do human beings. Human beings possess a higher degree of perfection than do the beasts. The beasts are higher than plants etc… . Likewise, the angels possess greater beauty than do human beings, who, in turn, surpass the beasts.

By way of such comparisons across the spectrum of the great chain of beings, it is possible to state that the greater beauty of the one represents a difference with respect to the

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[24] Sur la Genèse, tome I, introduction, édition, traduction et notes par Pierre Naudin, Les éditions du Cerf, Paris, 1976, p. 145-147.

other. One thing is differently beautiful from another, just as one thing is differently constituted from another. Obviously, in the great scheme of things, all of the created elements pale in comparison to God. Consequently, that imperfections should appear in the great chain of being is a direct consequence of the very hierarchy of creation in its relation to the Creator. For, it is impossible and illogical for something created by God (hence the Christian emphasis on Christ's having been begotten, and not created) to share in the degree of perfection (or Being) that is God's alone. From such a position, the Judeo-Christian cosmology holds that that which more immediately resembles God in its created being is more perfect than that which less immediately resembles God in its created being. It is therefore apparent that, within a Christian philosophical framework, there is some justification for stating that there are degrees and differences in beings as created beings, and furthermore, that these differences are grounded in the very act, the very intent, of creation by the Creator. It would also follow as a consequence, that a being that strove to emulate God, by recognizing his sovereignty and his Truth, that is to say, by faithfully subjecting himself to this Truth, remaining faithful to It, would more likely be said to resemble the perfection of that Truth to a higher degree than would a being who did not strive to be so faithful. We shall see the consequences of this position in sections 1.4 and beyond.

4. NON-ESSENTIAL DIFFERENCES

So far, we have seen that Christian theology does not propose any kind of religious differentiation that would justify the moral dichotomizing that is so prevalent in the "Chanson de Roland". This is the case since we are still dealing with things and beings as Created things and beings, or, in other words, we are still at the level of theological speculation as a type of *sub species aeternitatis*. As a consequence, I would contend that since there are differences within the great chain of beings, there simultaneously arises the possibility for comparisons to be drawn from one end of the created spectrum to the other. However, we have to view these comparisons in a manner that is quite different from the type of comparisons that are so common in the "Chanson de Roland" (comparisons that we will analyze in greater detail in chapter 12). Those comparisons are vehemently, insidiously negative, and work in such a way as to pejoratively present Saracen existence. The cosmological comparisons, on the other hand, are made possible by the contemplation of the chain of beings, and they are not meant to imply any kind of denigration or rejection.

For instance, the hierarchical superiority of angels in no way demeans the status of human beings. Rather, these cosmological comparisons, by emphasizing the beauty or the "deformity" of one being in relation to another (i.e. by way of comparing angels to human beings), also serve to emphasize the partiality of this individual beauty or deformity, by bringing this particularity back within the scope of the greater chain of beings. In other words, it is not

the case that a created being should be analysed by itself, and thereby judged or valuated as it is in itself, whether beautiful, monstrous, hideous or disproportionate. This individual analysis cannot, and was not thought to be complete, since the true merit, or value/measure of this individual created being, had to be conceived in terms of its relation, or its harmony, to the other elements of creation.

We can say that what may be disproportionate, hideous, or deformed in and of itself, the human being as an earthworm in contrast with the ethereal beings, represents a difference and a deformity that is relativized by its necessary relation to the whole of Creation. Differences of genres (angelic as opposed to human; human as opposed to the bestial etc…) do not seem to be of great importance in terms of any potential valuation. Rather, we must hold to the position that things, elements, and beings, are to be comprehended and evaluated in terms of the celestial harmony, with all things, elements, and beings relating and corresponding with each other throughout the variety of places. Absolute knowledge of this spectrum of beings and relationships would imply that a human being would understand the whole of the celestial harmony, viewing them in much the same manner as God would view them. For God views them in this way, and things, elements, or beings, whatever they are, or whatever they are to be and appear, are signified and valuated within this cosmological harmony. This harmonious vision of the cosmos, for instance, was central to Augustine's sanctification and justification of the created world:

> And to thee is there nothing at all evil: yea, not only to thee, but also not to thy creatures
> in general; because there is not anything which is without, which can break in, or
> discompose that order which thou hast settled. But in some particulars of thy creation,
> for that some things there be which so well agree not with some other things, they are

conceived to be evil: whereas those very things suit well enough with some other things,

and are good[25].

It is clear that for the Augustinian view, the difference between beings was not meant to imply an existential gap, a lack, or a fault among created beings. It does not imply that there are better, or lesser, beings.

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[25] Augustine, <u>Confessions Vol. I</u>, translated by W. Watts, The Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1950, p. 377-379.

5. RECOGNIZING GOD AS ALPHA AND OMEGA

We have seen that differences, at this stage in our analysis of the consequences of Creation, do not yet suggest the kind of dichotomizing that we will see to be so prevalent in the "Chanson de Roland". Yet, as we have seen, differences, as characteristics of beings, things, or elements, are not significant in and of themselves. The different elements of Creation do not stand alone. Rather, it is the case that they stand as created things with respect to their Creator. They stand in relation to the Creator. What the biblical episode of the Fall demonstrates, is that there exists the possibility for some things, or beings, to stand more directly in line with the Creator than do others. It is precisely this fundamental relationship that will allow Christian theology to move away from a cosmological view of Creation, to a more particulate view, one in which individual created things/beings are compared, contrasted, and ultimately evaluated and judged by way of their standing in relation to God. Thereafter, these different individual relationships to God can be contrasted against one another, and a principle of authenticity or moral superiority can be made. In other words, if the "Chanson de Roland" places such an emphasis on the righteousness of Christians, as opposed to the turpitude of pagans, it is because it is because the Christian relationship to God has come to be viewed as foundational, or theologically coherent.   The manner in which a thing or being stands towards God becomes the vital and essential

relationship that acts as the condition for the possibility of the kind of differences that are so important to the "Chanson de Roland's" worldview.

In order for one religious view to claim superiority over another, as is evidenced in the "Chanson de Roland", it must claim not only that there exists something vital in the relationship to God, but also, that its particular form of relationship to God is the best incarnation of this relationship. This relationship to God is deemed important since it is conceived as a necessity. The possibility for a subject's becoming, his subjectivizing, the development of culture and mores are all dependent upon the manner in which the subject chooses to stand in relation to God. The relationship to God stands as a moral and existential imperative grounding the subject's development. The kind of moral rigor Roland evokes when he states that Christians are right, and that Christian knights must fight and die bravely, is in fact embedded within this imperative to stand in relationship to God. It is certainly the case that the "Chanson de Roland" can be interpreted in this manner since there exists a theological framework for such a reading. What needs to be emphasized is that the biblical, as well as the early Christian philosophical narratives, all insist that human beings **must** turn towards God. This necessity is not accidental, it is not something that can be put aside or deemed to be secondary. Human beings, as created beings, are driven to turn towards their Creator. Human beings are naturally, essentially subjected to God, in whom their subjectivity finds its full development and perfecting. Faithfulness to God is an essential element of the human condition without which it can be said that something has gone awry in the subject himself. In being, and in "mind", all things should be directed towards the Creator. Human createdness as being subject to God is itself an argument for the existence of God. For instance, in the Augustinian account of Creation, with

respect to several beings, whenever different beings possess attributes, whether they share these equally or not, this possession of an attribute, a quality, a perfection, or form, is made possible by virtue of something which is inherent to all of them. Furthermore, and equally important philosophically, in order for several different beings to possess a similar attribute, this attribute can only be attributed to a being by way of some other being, which, in itself, possesses this attribute in its highest (or higher) degree. It is this being that gives the inherence to the first being.

Ultimately, if one were to avoid the problem of an infinite regress in the chain of beings, a philosophical possibility that was contrary to the very idea of a universe created in time by God (as is suggested in the book of Genesis), medieval philosophers and theologians needed to suggest that there was ultimately **a** being that was the cause for the existence of all the other beings. A being that exists necessarily through itself and not by mediation through some other being. Medieval Christian philosophers were therefore under the impression that there **must be something** which is supremely good, perfect, or beautiful in and of itself. The necessity of such a self-existent being, possessing the highest maximum degree of perfection, goodness, or beauty, serving as the origin or cause of all Creation, was of course at the core of one the most celebrated pieces of medieval philosophical thinking: Anselm's ontological argument.

> *God is whatever it is better to be than not to be; and he, as the only self-existent being, creates all things from nothing. What are you, then, Lord God, than whom nothing greater can be conceived? But what are you, except that which, as the highest of all beings, alone exists through itself, and creates all other things from nothing? For, whatever is not this is less than a thing which can be conceived of. But this cannot be conceived of you. What good, therefore, does the supreme Good lack, through which*

every good is? Therefore, you are just, truthful, blessed, and whatever it is better to be

than not to be. For it is better to be just than not just; better to be blessed than not

blessed.[26]

Since the early Church Fathers and medieval philosophers could infer that there are

degrees of greatness, they could likewise, echoing the Ancients, similarly infer that there is an

ultimate, or maximum degree, of beauty, perfection, or goodness, and that the being who is the

final cause of all created things, possessing such a degree of perfection, would exist and be good,

perfect or beautiful in and of itself. Given the causal nature of much medieval philosophy (the

emphasis in such thinking being placed on the role of generation in being, with one being serving

as the cause or point of origin for another's attributes or existence), the next logical step in their

thinking about Creation involved the acknowledgment that whatever exists does so by virtue of

some other thing/being. Since it was believed that nothing could exist by virtue of nothing, it

was consequently necessary to posit that whatever did exist existed by means of some definite

thing. Since it follows that all immanent things can exist, through the ages, through many other

things or beings, which, in their turn, exist by way of others still, the need for an end point (more

precisely, a point that is both end and beginning, as in the theological notion of *Alpha* and

Omega) as a counter to an infinite, and non-created universe, emerges as a theological necessity.

Thereby, someone like Anselm, for instance, recognized that there had to be one thing, one

primordial being existing through, and by, himself, and by means of which all other immanent

beings would exist and enter Creation.

He exists before all things and transcends all things, even the eternal things. –The

eternity of God is present as a whole to him; while other things have not yet that part of

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[26] Anselm, 'Proslogion', in <u>The Major Works.</u> Edited with an introduction by Brian Davies and G.R. Evans, Oxford
University Press, Oxford, 1998, p. 89.

their eternity which is still to be, and have no longer that part which is past. Hence, you do permeate and embrace all things. You are before all, and do transcend all. And, of a surety, you are before all; for before they were made, you are[27].

Thus God must possess the attribute, unique to itself, of existing through, and by, itself. And this self-existing being, as the origin of all other immanent beings which exist only through him, is consequently the maximum point in the hierarchy of beings. All created things, elements, and beings, all point inexorably to their ultimate origin and cause: God. The entire chain of beings points in His direction. The entire chain of being is subject to Him, and finds its meaning, its fulfillment and perfecting in its faithfulness to His continuity, whereby these diverse things, continue to be as well. The entire chain of being is created, maintained and succored by his Being. This is the God whom, faithful to his faithful, allows those subject to Him to possibilize their essence, to become true and manifest subjects, as well as granting them the possibility of subjective salvation[28].

This God is the God that is to be implicitly found in the "Chanson de Roland". This is the God for whom knights (both real and fictional) are willing to kill and be killed. This is the God of salvation, and of the just punishment of the wicked. I believe that the medieval worldview, philosophical, theological, and poetic (at least in its epic dimensions), the Christian

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[27] Anselm, 'Proslogion', <u>The Major Works.</u> p. 99.

[28] The association between salvation and martial sacrifice was one of the dominant themes of Bernard de Clairvaux's theological justification of the Crusades as Jürgen Miethke states: "Le circulaire de Bernard se saisit de la mission qui lui a été donnée avec une vue méthodique du but et beaucoup de force. Bernard sait attendre directement son lecteur. Il ne relate qu'en passant les événements de Terre Sainte; bien davantage, il met au premier plan l'attente individuelle du salut. Il en va –son exorde le déclare sans ambages –d'un « negotium Christi », d'une affaire du Christ, c'est clair, mais en même temps d'un échange offert par le Christ. Maintenant est arrivé le temps favorable de la pénitence (II Cor, 6, 2); parce que les péchés des chrétiens ont entraîné ce mal (« peccatis nostris exigentibus »), les ennemis du Christ ont élevé la tête et ils profanent les Lieux saints de la chrétienté. Cependant, Dieu ne veut pas dépêcher ses anges, mais il donne aux pécheurs l'occasion d'une pénitence efficace. Les guerres chrétiennes peuvent désormais ne pas subir les désavantages de la guerre ordinaire, car, à la croisade, la victoire donne la gloire, et la mort est, selon le mot de l'Apôtre, un gain (Phil, 1, 21)". Jürgen Miethke, <u>Bernard de Clairvaux. Histoire, mentalités, spiritualité.</u> Collection "Sources chrétiennes", no. 380, les Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 1992, p. 486-487.

conception of the subject and of God can best be summarized by John of Damascus when he writes:

> *Therefore, we believe in one God: one principle, without beginning, uncreated, unbegotten, indestructible and immortal, eternal, unlimited, uncircumscribed, unbounded, infinite in power, simple, uncompounded, incorporeal, unchanging, unaffected, unchangeable, inalterable invisible, source of goodness and justice, light intellectual and inaccessible; power which no measure can give any idea of but which is measured only by His own will, for He can do all things whatsoever He pleases; maker of all things both visible and invisible, holding together all things and conserving them, provider for all, governing and dominating and ruling over all in unending and immortal reign; without contradiction, filling all things, contained by nothing, but Himself containing all things, being their conserver and first possessor; pervading all substances without being defiled, removed far beyond all things and every substance as being supersubstantial and surpassing all, supereminently divine and good and replete; appointing all the principalities and orders, set above every principality and order, above essence and life and speech and concept; light itself and goodness and being in so far as having neither being nor anything else that is from any other; the very source of being for all things that are, of life to the living, of speech to the articulate, and the cause of all good things for all; knowing all things before they begin to be; one substance, one godhead, one virtue, one will, one operation, one principality, one power, one domination, one kingdom[29].*

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[29] John of Damascus, <u>Writings</u>, translated by Frederic H. Chase Jr., Fathers of the Church Inc., New York, 1958, p. 176-178.

Because no created being, of course, could possess such an absolute degree of perfection, or goodness, or beauty, there is a theological imperative to posit the existence of a deity. Only God could be in possession of such an attribute. This being, God in the Christian cosmological account of the universe, is the end point of all Creation. All of Creation is subject to Him, and realizes its subjectivity in a dual process of Truth-recognition and faithful-subjectivizing of that Truth. God's will drives creation, and all created beings seek Him as their purpose. He serves as the principle of any being's life, and He is the inherent goal of their existence. His goodness compels a being's goodness (an inherent attribute made possible by God) to strive towards Him.

6. **CRACKS IN THE IMAGE: THE CREATION OF DIFFERENCES**

We have now arrived at a crucial point in our study. The existence of created differences, and the way in which such differences were explained by early Christian thinkers such as Augustine, did not reflect the radical dichotomizing that is typical of the "Chanson de Roland". Yet, it is at this precise point that a theological paradigm shift will be put into place, such that the differences to be found within Creation will be reinterpreted teleologically. Things and beings will be reinterpreted in terms of their faithfulness to God, their being subject to God, and it is this guiding principle that will allow for the establishment of moral/religious righteousness or turpitude, Christian superiority, and pagan inferiority. This principle will ground and explain Roland's battle cry *"Paien unt tort e chrestïens unt dreit"*. Henceforth, the cosmological differences inherent to Creation itself, that is to say, the existence of differences as they pertain to the existence of different things and/or beings, will be subsumed by spiritual considerations inasmuch as the manner in which individual existents stand and subject themselves to God will now become the predominant principle wherein things and beings will be evaluated and judged.

Since all of the created world emerges from God, and all things should return to God, ultimately, the relativity of comparisons among the elements of creation are meant to signify their own instability, and the relativity of any comparisons drawn from immanence with respect

to the ultimate arbiter that is Transcendence. As we have seen in the previous sections, these comparisons were not meant to be pejorative in and of themselves. The cosmological hierarchy does not imply any kind of denigration. As such, we do not yet have a firm determination of the type of difference that would justify the violent dichotomizing that is to be found in the "Chanson de Roland". The world is not yet divided so neatly between "good" beings and "bad" beings. It is not yet the case that a philosophical, or a theological, argument can be made that some human beings are righteous (or possess just such an attribute), whereas other beings are wrong, or unrighteous. At this stage in our understanding of Creation, we must only recognize that the world was created as a whole by God, and would perish without God's ever watchful and preserving presence[30]. Likewise, since all beings are created by God, these created things share differing degrees of similarity to God their Creator.

This similarity to God, when it is acknowledged and properly understood in all its theological and philosophical dimensions, opens a vista of new philosophical considerations. Firstly, since all of the beings in the world share a degree of likeness to God, and since man is to recognize himself as having a greater degree of likeness to God than that of other creatures, given his having been created in the image of God, it can therefore can be said that man is more nearly like God than the other beings in Creation.   From this position, it follows that a certain theological possibility is afforded man by way of his having been created in the image of God, since man can come to a better understanding of God and of His divine nature/essence, precisely by coming to a better understanding of himself. This "shared image" between God and man reveals that a religious awareness of one's being subject to God is inextricably bound to an

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[30] As is suggested by Anselm in the following passage: "But you are life, and light, and wisdom, and blessedness, and many goods of this nature. And yet you are only one supreme good; you are all-sufficient to yourself, and need none; and you are he whom all things need for their existence and well-being". Anselm, 'Proslogion' in The Major Works. p. 100. See also Cor. 3, 6-8.

image of subjectivity that is projected and perceived by God. Man is therefore a subject, aware of himself as a living thing, and, if he is theologically aware, cognizant of the fact that this subject which he is, is dependent, if it is to achieve its full potential for development, upon being determined in the direction of, and being perceived to be oriented in the direction of God. It is therefore very much the case that the religious understanding of subjectivity, as it is related to its Creator, puts forth an understanding of consciousness of subjectivity as something that is essentially dialogic, for it is a type of imaging, going from the greatest point of being[31] (and of consciousness one might suppose) to a lesser point in such a way that the lesser point, man, needs to have this image of the other in order to become truly conscious of his own subjectivity, of his nature, and of the right path for his existence. By recognizing himself as a being made in the image of God, man sees himself both as a created object, and a thinking subject cognizant of itself as a caused being. Because of the image of our createdness, medieval thinkers were elaborating on a form of consciousness wherein they could picture themselves as active bodily agents (whose activities could be interpreted in moral terms as either turning away or towards God) ever mindful of the fact that they were under the watchful eye of God's perception. This perception, by God, distributes moral responsibility upon the activities of the subject, such that God recognizes man's subjecthood to God as a proper mode of subjectivizing. Because we are made in the image of God, this image serves as a mirror, however deformed[32], in which man becomes aware of himself, becomes conscious of being an autonomous subject, bearing the full weight of his moral choices and responsibilities, because an other, God, serves as his image or

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[31] "Also I considered all the other things that are of a lower order than yourself, and I saw that they have not absolute being in themselves, nor are they entirely without being. They are real in so far as they have their being from you, but unreal in the sense that they are not what you are. For it is only that which remains in being without change that truly is". Augustine, Confessions, translated with an introduction by R.S. Pine-Coffin, Penguin Books, 1961, p.147.

[32] 1 Cor. 13, 12. The Pauline view is also echoed by Augustine: "Of your eternal life I was certain, although I had only seen it like a confused reflection in a mirror, and I had now been rid of all my doubts about an incorruptible substance from which all other substances take its being". Augustine, Confessions, 1961, p. 157.

mirror. This flowering of man (conscious of himself, and conscious of his relation to God) serves as the great dialogical impetus for Creation[33].

An important theological figure such as Ambrose went so far as to argue that God finds a kind of satisfaction, a restfulness in His having created man in His own image:

Moreover, He did not find rest when He had created such irrational creatures as fish and the various species of wild beasts. He found rest, however, after He had made man to His own image[34].

I believe that this type of theology insists that there exists between man and God a degree of complicity that is to be found nowhere else in Creation[35]. Hence the grievous offense that is committed when man turns away from God by sinning. This mode of theologico-philosophical reasoning also implies that a proper understanding of subjectivity is closely connected to an understanding of the subject's relationship with God. This type of understanding allows human beings to approach the divine. Since the soul exists for the purpose of worshipping God and re-uniting with Him, a proper understanding of one's subjecthood and of God intertwines these two aspects inextricably together.

Secondly, man's similarity to God posits the need to recognize a dual necessity: the necessary existence of God, and the "necessary" existence of the subject which resembles Him. Now, this necessity is not like that of God's. Man's existence is, of course, immanent and

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[33] Jack Miles explains the Creation passage in Genesis in the following terms: "The effective meaning of image is given in the immediately following instruction to master the earth. Why give mankind this version of the divine dominion? Because mankind makes, thereby, a better image of "us". And why fertility and increase? Because when human beings reproduce, they are the image of their creator in his creative act. Reproduction produces reproductions, images. … the motive for all that precedes the creation of mankind is, ultimately, provision for that culminating act by which God creates another kind of creator". God. A Biography, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1995, p. 28.

[34] Saint Ambrose, Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel, p. 261.

[35] Augustine explicitly expresses the hierarchical superiority of man and his relation to the Creator and His Creation in his Confessions when he states: "The animals, both great and small, are aware of it, but they cannot inquire into its meaning because they are not guided by reason, which can sift the evidence relayed to them by their senses. Man, on the other hand, can question nature. He is able to catch sight of God's invisible nature through his creatures". Augustine, Confessions, 1961, p. 213.

contingent. But, as it is contingent, it nonetheless brings forth a type of "necessity": the necessity of being certain of one's existence[36].

In Augustine's philosophical worldview, the argument proceeds along the following lines. Much like Plato, Augustine[37] is of the opinion that immanence is not the site of the Truth. To whatever degree it may be inspired by Truth, or hint at the Truth, the material realm is nonetheless a site of shadows. One of Augustine's critiques against his former beliefs, and the life he led with others who were of the same mind, is that they tried to find answers, and pleasures, to their existence by immersing themselves exclusively in the realm of the material. Now the emphasis on the shadowy nature of the material is important for it suggests that what is truly vital is of course Transcendent in nature. It is also important in that, in the "Chanson de Roland", as we will see in chapters 11-14, Saracens are persistently depicted as creatures of darkness and shadows, that is to say, as creatures having turned away from the light in order to better embrace the shadows. In other words, the Saracens, in the poem, have abandoned Truth for falsity and darkness. The fact that the poem will present Saracen characters as moving in the shadows, dwelling in the shadows, or worshipping idols in darkened spaces all serve to juxtapose Saracen evilness with Christian faithfulness to the Truth. Truth, in Augustinian terms, emerges when one has left the material world, as a world of shadows, in order to elevate oneself into the higher realm of the light. The move from the world of the shadows to that of the world of the

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[36] Descartes is often held to be the originator of modern subjectivism, since he puts so much stress on the irreducible nature of the self, but the *cogito* argument that is supposed to herald this new philosophical arrival is actually Augustinian in origin.

[37] It would be necessary at this point to indicate that the extent of Plato's influence during the middle ages is a hotly contested issue. It is not the purpose of this thesis to suggest that medieval thinker shad any direct familiarity with Plato's texts themselves inasmuch as they would have been able to consult and read them. Rather, this thesis would propose that thinkers such as Anselm and Augustine used much of the Platonic language, the distinction between the realms of reality and illusion, in their own mode of thinking, and that one can fairly assume that this dichotomizing view of nature and reality, filtered down through the ages and did in fact color medieval philosophizing, quite regardless of any direct relationship to extant Platonic texts.

light is of course reminiscent of the Platonic move escape from the cave of fictions. This move is evidenced in the following passage:

> *For those who try to find joy in things outside themselves easily vanish away into emptiness. They waste themselves on the temporal pleasures of the visible world. Their minds are starved and they nibble at empty shadows. How I wish that they would tire of going hungry and cry out for a sight of better times! This is the answer they would hear from us: Already, Lord, the sunshine of your favour has been plainly shown to us. For we are not ourselves the Light which enlightens every soul. We are enlightened by you, so that we who once were in darkness may now, in the Lord, be all daylight[38].*

Not unlike Plato, Augustine believes that the physical world that surrounds man may be in a state of constant flux, and that all things might wax and wane in and out of existence, such that no sure knowledge may be gleaned from living in such a state of constant becoming, and contingence. Yet, something interesting, something dialectical occurs when a man looks to the earth in just such a fashion. For when a man questions the earth, he is struck by the manner (inherent to Augustinian Platonism) in which the questioning of the material dimension, by the spiritual/sentient being that is man, inevitably involves a flight from this materiality towards immateriality. To question the material world is to recognize its absence of immateriality, and to be brought, by one's own immaterial agency (the thinking subject), to move away from the material world.

> *But what is my God? I put my question to the earth. It answered, "I am not God", and all things on earth declared the same. I asked the sea and the chasms of the deep and all living things that creep in them, but they answered, " We are not your God. Seek what is*

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[38] Augustine, <u>Confessions</u>, 1961, p. 188.

above us.[39] *I spoke to the winds that blow, and the whole air and all that lives in it replied, "Anaximenes is wrong. I am not God". I asked the sky, the sun, the moon, and the stars, but they told me, "Neither are we the God whom you seek". I spoke to all things that are about me, all that can be admitted by the door of the senses, and I said, "Since you are not my God, tell me about him. Tell me something of my God". Clear and loud they answered, "God is he who made us" I asked these questions simply by gazing at these things, and their beauty was all the answer they gave*[40].

In this passage that is replete with verbal prosopopeia, the newly converted Augustine can only significantly perceive the world by making it speak, by lending his voice to that of the sun, the rocks, or the earth. By lending his voice to things, and experiencing these things in their purported answer, it is in all actuality, always and already, the "spiritual" or sentient dimension that subsumes and signifies the material dimension.   That the world answers only by way of its beauty is another way of saying that, when you question a cave, the cave does not answer back. It is therefore no wonder that the "enlightened" man must leave the cave. That Saracens, on the other hand, would place their most relished artifacts (their religious idols) in darkened crypts and caves, suggests the extent of their material and spiritual depravity.

Philosophically, Augustine's questioning of the elements of the earth is rooted in a particular philosophical insistence. I believe that it is important to note that Augustine does not disinterestedly observe nature; rather, he inaugurates/officializes the medieval tradition that interprets the literal text in a "spiritual manner". It is precisely this intentional transcending of the material/literal dimension of the text that he insists upon when he commends the religious instruction he received at the hands of Ambrose:

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[39] This "answer" is a telling manifestation of the flight from immanence to transcendence.
[40] Augustine, <u>Confessions</u>, 1961, p. 212.

I was glad too that I at last had been shown how to interpret the ancient Scriptures of the law and the prophets in a different light from that which had previously made them seem absurd, when I used to criticize your saints for holding beliefs which they had never really held at all. I was pleased to hear that in his sermons to the people Ambrose often repeated the text: The written law inflicts death, whereas the spiritual law brings life, as though this were a rule upon which he wished to insist most carefully. And when he lifted the veil of mystery and disclosed the spiritual meaning of texts which, taken literally, appeared to contain the most unlikely doctrines, I was not aggrieved by what he said[41].

Having already remarked that there is in Augustine's work a *mathesis universalis* with respect to degrees of perfection[42], Augustine proceeds to conclude that from these lower degrees, we are required to postulate the existence of the utmost degree of perfection. The material world points away from itself for its source of meaning. In this manner, Augustine signals the adoption, within medieval Christianity, of the Platonic move/shift away from the material towards the spiritual/ideal as is evidenced in the following passage:

By reading these books of the Platonists I had been prompted to look for truth as something incorporeal, and I caught sight of your invisible nature, as it is known through your creatures[43].

Hence we arrive at a situation in which the material, or literal, (whether it is textual, or earthly) can only be said to have a partial or impoverished meaning in and of itself. Its true

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[41] Augustine, <u>Confessions</u>, 1961, p. 115-116.
[42] See section 1.2. Also, in his <u>De libero arbitrio</u>, Augustine clearly states that when we consider the material world, we encounter many kinds/degrees of perfection, of which the three most important are being, life, and knowledge. Ultimately, we find these degrees of perfection within ourselves, since they are intimately connected to our ability to be conscious of ourselves. Augustine supplements this triad with a hierarchy: it is more perfect to be alive than merely to be, and it is greater still to be aware than to merely live.
[43] Augustine, <u>Confessions</u>, 1961, p. 154.

significance comes procedurally when it is questioned, and "its" answer comes "from on high"[44]. The material world is also, itself, subject to a Truth. This transcending of the literal/material is important in that it marked the beginning of Augustine's disassociation with the Manicheans. One needs to stress that Manichaeism is a doctrine which (at least in the eyes of Augustine) insists on a "material" or substantial interpretation of the world[45]. This manner of proceeding and interpreting the world is not without its philosophical consequences. By striving to root out a meaning from the impermanent and shifting world, the hermeneutic effort leads to a situation wherein the questioner's intention for meaning becomes synonymous with the meaning derived from the questioned. As the philosopher of language Jacques Poulain has remarked in his studies on the communicative experience of the real:

> *L'action verbale est une réaction au contexte qui se rend suffisante, en sélectionnant une réalité et en abstrayant de cette réalité ce qui l'intéresse en elle, ce qui en fait une réalité pour l'organisme qui la perçoit, elle inverse ici la direction des pulsions en produisant la perception visuelle qu'elle désigne et sa propre perception comme une seule et unique phase consommatoire. ... Elle le fait en transformant la perception de ce stimulus en but de l'énonciation, en but simultanément atteint par elle et en but de la perception elle-même[46].*

It is therefore not entirely surprising that from within this contingent and immanent world, a world in which man speaks and directs his speech towards God, potentially answering for them in kind, the uncertainty/impermanence allows for the appearance of a "necessity":

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[44] "I had heard one passage after another in the Old Testament figuratively explained. These passages had been death to me when I took them literally, but once I had heard them explained in their spiritual meaning I began to blame myself for my despair". Augustine, Confessions, 1961, p. 108.

[45] Of his understanding of the Truth or the divine as taught to him by the Manichees, Augustine states : "For, ignorant as I was, I thought of evil not simply as some vague substance but as an actual bodily substance, and this was because I could not conceive of mind except as a rarefied body somehow diffused in space". Augustine, Confessions, 1961, p. 104.

[46] Jacques Poulain, L'âge pragmatique ou l'expérimentation totale, Éditions L'Harmattan, Paris, 1991, p. 32.

regardless of the contingency of things, regardless of the impermanence of states and beings, it is nonetheless true that at this very instant, any man reflecting on his particular situation can be sure that he is cognizant of two truths: the necessary existence of God, and the existence of his own subjectivity in relation to the truth of God's existence[47]. It is this certainty that represents the "necessity" of man's existence.

Consequently, the discovery of the certain existence of this subject, and of its intellectual content (recognition of God's existence, and of the subject's relation to Him), furnishes some of the pillars for medieval belief and thought. To the certainties that are, specifically the fact that I know that I exist, and that I know that God exists, there is a third pillar, namely, the fact that I know that I exist in relation/in a relationship to God. On the one hand, this certainty demonstrates that, regardless of my contingent state of being, and regardless of the impermanence and flux that surrounds me, man can be certain of his own existence. This he understands and recognizes. On the other hand, the discovery of this existence is closely connected to man's knowledge of God. It informs him of God's existence, and of His essence as a self-existing being.

> *I ask you: "Do you exist?" Are you perhaps afraid to be deceived by that question? But*
>
> *if you did not exist it would be impossible for you to be deceived. … Since it is manifest*

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[47] "And we indeed recognize in ourselves the image of God, that is, of the supreme Trinity, an image which, though it be not equal to God, or rather, though it be far removed from Him- being neither coeternal, nor, to say all in a word, consubstantial with Him- is yet nearer to Him in nature than any other of His works, and is destined to be yet restored, that it may bear a still closer resemblance. **For we both are, and know that we are, and delight in our being, and our knowledge of it.** Moreover, in these three things no true-seeming illusion disturbs us; for we do not come into contact with these by some bodily sense, as we perceive the things outside us- colours, e.g., by seeing, sounds by hearing, smells by smelling, tastes by tasting, hard and soft objects by touching- of all which sensible objects it is the images resembling them, but not themselves which we perceive in the mind and hold in the memory, and which excite us to desire the objects. But, without any delusive representation of images or phantasms, I am most certain that I am, and that I know and delight in this". Augustine, The City of God, translated by Marcus Dods, D.D., introduction by Thomas Merton, The Modern Library, New York, 1999, p. 370. The emphasis is mine.

that you exist and that you could not know unless you were living, it is also manifest that

you live[48].

Lastly, it is the idea that man has been created in the image of God that will be so important in future arguments dichotomizing the world between those who are faithful, and those who are wayward. For this similarity will furnish the basis for a principle of differentiation that will find its way into and inform the fractured and antagonistic world of the "Chanson de Roland". Because beings are created by God, such beings, in their "created" resemblance or likeness, are also "driven" to approach[49] or resemble God morally, ethically, and theologically. Put simply, human beings should try to resemble and praise the source, origin, and cause of their being. To resemble God, to praise His majesty are fundamental attributes of human existence, since human beings are teleologically oriented to such activities[50]. One cannot underestimate the importance of this idea. It is fundamental not only the early Church's worldview, but also, given the particular circumstances of its articulation, it is also fundamentally linked to Christianity's appropriation of Greek philosophy and argumentation. Both in philosophical terms, as well as in theological terms, the view as to what can be considered the good life conceives of a human-divine association. The "Chanson de Roland", in its radical emphasis that *paien unt tort e*

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[48] Augustine, 'On Free Will' in <u>Philosophy in the Middle Ages</u>, second edition, edited by Arthur Hyman and James J. Walsh, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 1973, p. 34.

[49] "That therefore, is made to the image of God which is perceived, not by the power of the body, but by that of the mind. It is that power which beholds the absent and embraces in its vision countries beyond the horizon. Its vision crosses boundaries and gazes intently on what is hidden. In one moment the utmost bounds of the world and its remote secret places are under its ken. **God is attained and Christ is approached**". Saint Ambrose, <u>Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel</u>, p. 258.

[50] The very first paragraph of the <u>Confessions</u> makes this clear: "Man is one of your creatures Lord, and his instinct is to praise you. He bears about him the mark of death, the sign of his own sin, to remind him that you thwart the proud. But still, since he is a part of your creation, he wishes to praise you. The thought of you stirs him so deeply that he cannot be content unless he praises you, because you made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you". Augustine, <u>Confessions</u>, 1961, p. 21.

chrestïens unt dreit[51], will add a poetic element to this theologico-philosophical teleology. For the poetic narrative is as convinced as any philosophical argument, that what distinguishes Christian existence from its pagan rivals is the fact that its knights (spiritual and martial) are faithful to a Truth (man is created by God to praise and worship God) and to a truth-process (the continuous turning towards God).[52] Man, or in the case of the "Chanson de Roland", the knight's relationship to God as existence's continuous turn towards its *telos* is perhaps best expressed by Turpin, the archbishop, and hence, the incarnation of the text's theological and poetic strivings:

> **Chrestïentét aidez a sustenir!**
>
> *Bataille avrez, vos en estes tuz fiz,*
>
> *Kar a voz oilz vëez les Sarrazins.*
>
> *Clamez vos culpes, si preiez Deu mercit!*
>
> *Asoldrai vos pur vos anmes guarir;*
>
> *Se vos murez, esterez seinz martirs :*
>
> *Sieges avrez el greignor pareïs[53].*

This emphasis is hardly surprising. Turpin's speech re-echoes a long tradition with Christianity, one that starts with Paul's missions in the Greek speaking world. That human beings are driven (or should strive) to unite with God and praise Him was at the cornerstone of Paul's anthropology. It is, in fact, the way that Paul, channeling Plato's ascent towards the Pure Forms, attempts to philosophically present his Christian "anthropology" to a Greek audience. In Paul's way of thinking, human beings are called towards this ultimate Good, God.

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[51] La chanson de Roland, édition critique et traduction par Ian Short, 2ᵉ édition, collection 'Lettre gothiques', Le Livre de poche, Librairie générale française, Paris, 1990.verse 1015. Henceforth, all references to the text are taken from this edition, likewise, all verse references (i.e. verses 56-57) are also taken from this edition.

[52] These themes will be explored in greater detail in chapters 8-10.

[53] Verses 1129-1135. The emphasis is mine.

God that made the world and all the things therein, seeing that he is Lord of Heaven and

earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands,

as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and

hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and

hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they

should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not

far from every one of us: For in him we live and move, and have our being; as certain

also of your own poets have said, for we are his offspring[54].

I would propose that this drive that Paul puts his finger on, this need to resemble God by understanding him and imitating his ways or laws, serves as the groundwork to a philosophy that will argue for God's necessary existence, and, furthermore, attempt to establish an entire worldview wherein an understanding of God's necessary existence will impel a need to worship and adore him in a very definite way[55]. To adore him in a certain way, to remain faithful to one's subjecthood to God, will inevitably entail recognizing that some modes of becoming are antagonistic to this drive, that they are wayward or hostile, and, in consequence, must be resisted against or fought. As a consequence of such reasoning, it will become obvious that the refusal to worship God and acknowledge His preeminence will result in a life of sin and damnation. In other words, that which does not adhere to the strict code of subjectivizing that will be suggested by the Christian narrative, will be worthy of punishment and negation. This is precisely what we find in the Pauline Epistles. The Pauline narrative was itself inherited by Augustine who pursued

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[54] Acts, 17, 24-28.

[55] This move from necessary existence to orthodox belief is certainly evident in Anselm's opening chapter of the 'Proslogion' : "Look upon us, Lord; hear us, enlighten us, show Yourself to us. Give Yourself to us that it may be well with us, for without You it goes so ill for us. … Teach me to seek You, and reveal Yourself to me as I seek, because I can neither seek You if You do not teach me how, nor find You unless You reveal Yourself. Let me seek You in desiring You; let me desire You in seeking You; let me find You in loving You; let me love You in finding You. I acknowledge, Lord, and I give thanks that You have created Your image in me, so that I may remember You, think of You, love You'. Anselm, 'Proslogion', in The Major Works. 1998, p. 86-87.

its exploration. The drive or *telos* identified by Paul becomes a source of philosophical questioning in Augustine who sought to philosophically explore the full weight of the consequences of just such a turn away from God and one's own *telos*. For Augustine, this sort of endeavor is not only an exercise fraught with existential peril, it is, within the truth-process recognized and adhered to by early/medieval Christianity a gross and base sin. In fact, Augustine describes it in the most categorical of terms:

> *So the soul defiles itself with unchaste love when it turns away from you and looks elsewhere for things which it cannot find pure and unsullied except by returning to you. All who desert you and set themselves up against you merely copy you in a perverse way; but by this very act of imitation they only show that you are the Creator of all nature and, consequently, that there is no place whatever where man may hide away from you.*[56]

Augustine's argument suggest not only that human existence is altered in a dramatic fashion (his language on this point is without equivocation: existence is sullied, defiled, and unchaste) by turning away from God, but also, that any life lived away from this center is "illusory". Such lives are not centered in the Truth or in God's being, for they live on the periphery, in the realm of duplicates, copies and facsimiles. In other words, they have exchanged the life lived in the light for the comforts of the cave. To be even more precise, those who live away from God are perverse copies of the real thing (those living in connection with God). Consequently, such an existence is inauthentic, a wicked façade rejoicing in its relationship to a copy or stand-in (and in this respect, the "Chanson de Roland's" attribution of idolatrous practices to the Saracens is historically untrue, but conforms theologically with a

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[56] Augustine, <u>Confessions</u>, 1961, p. 50.

conception of that way which, alone, can be considered the good life) rather than striving for the real thing[57].

Therefore, adherence or non-adherence to this drive or *telos* can explain just how it is that the multiplicity of degrees in created beings can come to resemble, or, in moral terms, imitate God. It is adherence, or non-adherence to God's call for us to find him that explains the reason for such diversity in the world.

> *How wretched man's lot is when he has lost that for which he was made! Oh how hard and cruel was that Fall! Alas, what has man lost and what has he found? What did he lose and what remains to him? He lost the blessedness for which he was made, and he found the misery for which he was not made. That without which nothing is happy has gone from him and that which by itself is nothing but misery remains to him. Once "man ate the bread of angels", for which he now hungers; now he eats the "bread of sorrow", which then he knew nothing of. Alas the common grief of mankind, alas the universal lamentation of the children of Adam![58]*

By turning away from God, man makes himself other than what he was intended to be. By turning away from God, man alters, deforms, and perverts his given nature. Given that the drive towards God is the mechanism by which the subject becomes and conforms to that which he is supposed to be as subject to God, any decisive turn away from this drive, naturally engenders a process of de-subjectivizing or dehumanization.

Echoing the teachings of Paul, the medieval philosophers that inherited his worldview contended that by ignoring such a drive, men were rejecting, altering something essential in the

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[57] "And when I asked myself what wickedness was, I saw that it was not a substance but perversion of the will when it turns aside from you, O God, who are the supreme substance, and veers towards things of the lowest order, being bowelled alive and becoming inflated with desire for things outside itself". Augustine, Confessions, 1961, p. 150.
[58] Anselm, 'Proslogion', The Major Works., 1998, p. 85.

make-up of their being. Men were no longer subjects faithful to a given Truth[59]. In their turning away from the Truth, in their betrayal towards God, they ceased to be the subjects of a becoming and a perfecting, and became "other", objects, decomposed things, mortal animals, whose very being, given over to death in a way that was hitherto unknown, initiating the complete transformation of the created being. This new "man", alienated from his origin and his end, consequently transformed, is perverse inasmuch as he is the origin of his own decomposition[60]. This idea was further strengthened by biblical "fact" as presented in the Genesis account of the Fall. It was obvious, in the medieval mode of thinking, that human beings no longer were what they had once been. The important idea retained by most medieval Christian scholars was that the Fall represented a schism in the history of the world, a break in Creation. Because of the Fall, this first turning away from God, this primordial rejection of the principle of adherence, things have been dramatically altered. Rejection of God, as a goal or a *telos* is an act of defiance. Defiance of God is a sin. It is important to remember the degree to which the medieval mind was saturated by the conscience of sin. Consequently, the idea that moving away from God (by disobeying his Laws for instance) could alter the fabric of existence and sow discord into the world was fundamental to the early/medieval Christian account of Creation and salvation.

Because of this, it is very much the case that salvation (that is to say, recognizing as a fundamental Truth that redemption through the death and resurrection of Christ) is seen as a means of fixing human beings and their manner of existing, since both have been perverted by sin and the turning away from God. What the early Church and the medieval philosophers believed was that theological choices (like that of turning away from God) had deep existential consequences. In fact, one could argue that this line of reasoning formed the basis for the

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[59] The Truth, in this case being the necessary existence of God as our Creator.
[60] "Since disobedience was the cause of death, for that very reason, not God, but man himself, was the agent of his own death". Ambrose, Hexameron, Paradise and Cain and Abel, p. 313.

Christian interpretation of the post-created world[61]. This view is clearly present in the doxology

of St. Paul who was the early Church's most important and influential theologian. The

persistence of this view is to be found in Anselm's lamentations on the present state of man's

wretchedness.   Echoing St. Paul, the medieval lament of man's wretchedness argues that sin, as

a mode of participation in God's Creation, has fundamentally altered two aspects of this creation:

i)   It has facilitated, eased, and led those who are already astray, into further acts of

depravity. Someone who refuses to recognize the existence of the particular Christian

Truth will be likely to live a life that does not conform to the logic which is

consequent to that Truth. They will, by not recognizing the Truth, stray further and

further away from It. Sin begets sin, and decadence begets decadence. The Book of

Genesis is replete with examples of successive generations besting one another in

perversity and decadence. Likewise, Paul's analysis of the life of the flesh, a life one

leads away from God, is irremediably a life of death[62]. One crime, one monstrous act

makes another one easier. And such foul acts are willingly committed in full defiance

of God[63].

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[61] One could also argue that this argument is still prevalent today, as its influence is still present in the writings of someone like Pascal whose entire "anthropology" (in the first section of the 'Pensées') is influenced by the notion that sin and ignorance of God have altered the very core of man's nature.

[62] The persistence of this Pauline narrative can also be found in Ambrose's description of how pleasure, as sin, although appearing beautiful, actually leads not to Paradise, but to a palace of confusions : "Pleasure scatters its fragrance because it has not the fragrance of Christ. Pleasure looks for treasures, it promises kingdoms, it assures lasting loves, it pledges undreamed of intimacies, instruction without a guardian and conversation without hindrance. Pleasure promises a life bereft of anxiety, a sleep devoid of disturbance and wants that cannot be satiated. We read: Entangling him with many words and alluring him with the snares of her lips, she led him even to her home. He was beguiled and followed her. The hall had all the splendor of a royal palace with walls in relief work. The floor reeked of spilled wine and emitted the odor of unguents. It was covered with the remains of fish. The flowers, now faded, made walking hazardous. Everything there was confused and contrary to nature". The general idea expressed in this passage is that pleasure, as sin, not only leads us away from God (a first mistake), but eventually leads us to a place of greater and greater iniquity. Ambrose, Hexameron, Paradise and Cain and Abel, p. 371.

[63] See Rm 1, 20-32.

ii)   Sin has changed the dynamics of human existence. No longer is it the case that man

is the "image" of God, rather, the image of man is now a mortal one, since sin has

introduced a "void" into the order of creation, thus altering the fundamental character

of its existence[64].

What is interesting in the Pauline narrative (Rm 1, 20-32) of the depravities of certain

Roman citizens is that it already hints at the kind of dichotomizing which the "Chanson de

Roland" will employ. It presents the reader with a world where evil increases steadily, where

there are hateful people, guilty of monstrous acts, who take pleasure in committing evil deeds,

and who define themselves by openly opposing God.

Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness,

maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters,

***haters of God.**[65]*

We find this very dynamic in the "Chanson de Roland" when the poem describes certain

Saracen characters:

Devant chevalcet un Sarrazin Abisme,

Plus fel de lui n'out en sa cumpagnie :

Teches ad males e mult granz felonies

***Ne creit en Deu, le filz seinte Marie.**[66]*

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[64] Rm 5, 12-21; Ambrose explains the anthropological/existential change in man in the following way: "The "image" of God is virtue, not infirmity. The "image" of God is wisdom. … Adam before he sinned conformed to this image. But after his fall he lost that celestial image and took on one that is terrestrial. Let us flee from this image which cannot enter the city of God". Ambrose, Hexameron, Paradise and Cain and Abel, p. 254-255.
[65] Rm 1, 29-30. The emphasis is mine.
[66] Verses1631-1634. The emphasis is mine.

The Pauline narrative adds to this dichotomous world, where the forces of God and evil are opposed to one another, a cosmological constant[67], since such inherent wickedness is irredeemably lost, given that it already bears the mark of God's vengeful wrath.

*Thy hardness and impenitent heart treasureth up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of **the righteous judgment of God**[68].*

Once again, this notion that God's judgment/punishment awaits the enemies of God is also present in the "Chanson de Roland":

Li reis Marsilie la tient, ki Deu nen aimet;

Mahumet sert e Apollin recleimet :

Ne s' poet guarder que mal ne l'i ateignet[69].

The framework that is found in Paul's thinking about sin and the destruction of sin can be said to serve as the skeletal structure of the "Chanson de Roland".

That such evil beings should die is perhaps justice served, since the Pauline narrative insistently repeats that human beings are no longer the same after they have turned away from God. By turning away from God, human action has allowed death and nothingness to enter the world[70]. That Paul, and his medieval inheritors, would choose to emphasize the presencing of death occasioned by sin leads us to believe that in their conception of the post-created world, an element, or rather, a void, a gap, a nothing, has been brought to bear there where it had formerly been absent. The DNA of Creation has been changed. For we must remember that the biblical narrative in Genesis does not suggest that death figures into God's plan for man so long as he

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[67] A soteriological final solution if you will.
[68] Rm 2, 5. The emphasis is mine.
[69] Verses 7-9. The emphasis is mine.
[70] Rm 5, 12.

dwells in Eden. Death is something new. Death adds a new dimension to human existence. Things, and beings, more precisely, human beings, are no longer as they once were. Inasmuch as St. Paul is concerned, the work of sin is such that being, both as existence and as a manner of existing, are profoundly vitiated. The philosophical and theological consequences of this view are that, once existence has been "downgraded", made susceptible to death and decay, it is an easy road for this same existence to move on to other forms of perversion and perdition that mirror, morally, this death and decay. Turning away from God leads to other unrighteous manners of being[71]. Darkness engenders darkness. Evil begets evil.

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[71] Étienne Gilson has offered a useful summary of the conception of sin that was held by the early and medieval Christian thinkers: "Since natures are natures because God made them so, to deviate from their own essence is the same thing as to contravene the rule laid down by God in the creative act. The rectitude of the human will is therefore measured at once by its accord with the divine will". Étienne Gilson, The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy. Translated by A.H.C. Downes, Scribner's Sons, New York, 1940, p. 328.

7. FAITH AND ITS ENEMIES

I believe that we need to give full weight to the theological point articulated in section 1.5 if we are to understand how and why the "Chanson de Roland" demonizes the Saracens as enemies of the faith. When reading the "Chanson de Roland", we need to keep in mind that its worldview is essentially inherited from the doxology of the early Church, and more specifically, from Pauline theology. Pauline theology states that by turning away from God, we transform the absence of divinity in our lives (that is to say, the only True divinity) into the presencing of a generalized perversion of human being and behavior. In the "Chanson de Roland"[72] not only is there a sustained representation of this generalized perversion, but also, this perversion takes on many forms. For instance, it is represented and expressed:

i) by physical monstrosity : *E l'altre après de Micens as chefs gros/ Sur les eschines qu'il unt enmi le dos/ Cil sunt seiét ensement cume porc .*[73]

ii) by moral decadence : *E la disme est de Balide la Fort/ C'est une gent ki unches ben ne volt .*[74]

iii) by verbal/gestural acts of blasphemy : *D'altre part est Turgis de Turteluse/ Cil est uns quens, si est la citét süe/ De chrestïens voelt faire male vode/ Devant Marsilie as*

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[72] As we will see in chapters 11-14.
[73] Verses 3221-3223.
[74] Verses 3230-3231.

altres si s'ajustet/ Ço dist al rei : Ne vos esmaiez unches!/ Plus valt Mahum que seint Perre de Rome[75]

iv) by pejorative nominations : *Li reis apelet Malduit sun tresorer*[76]*; E va ferir un paien Malsarun*[77].

The dichotomy between adherents and betrayers of God that one can find in the "Chanson de Roland" is mirrored in Christian cosmology, specifically in the Pauline contrast between the first man and the last man[78]. By way of the first man, human nature has been dramatically altered. Man's being is no longer "complete" by way of its expulsion from Eden[79]. And his manner of being, his having to be has also been altered and transformed. This existential shift in focus is also highlighted by the biblical narrative itself. Man will no longer enjoy the fruits of Paradise; he will have to work and suffer in order to obtain the necessities of life.

> *To the woman he said, " I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." And to Adam he said, " Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, `You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants in the*

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[75] Verses 916-921.
[76] Verse 642.
[77] Verse 1353.
[78] See Rm 5, 12-19.
[79] If we apply an Anselm-like reasoning to this situation, we might conclude that, much as a being with existence is greater than a being without existence, a being that does not die (a being without the possibility of its own continued existence) is greater than a being that can die.

field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of

it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return[80].

It is interesting to note that the "Chanson de Roland's" martial ethic, the principle guiding and determining the valiant warrior, also justifies the same type of hardships and struggles that are to be found in the Book of Genesis:

Respont Rollant: E Deus la nus otreit!

Ben devuns ci estre pur nostre rei :

Pur sun seignor deit hom susfrir destreiz

E endurer e granz chalz e granz freiz

Si' n deit hom perdre e del qui e del peil.[81]

Although the *seignor* in this case is Charlemagne, and not God, the fact that the duties of vassalage can also be understood in religious terms (as a spiritual struggle) is evidenced in Roland's concluding remarks to his speech when he states that Christians are right, and pagans are wrong. I believe that it would be mistaken to interpret these two passages in exclusively material terms. It is not just the case that the descendants of Adam and Eve must struggle with the earth. Nor is it the case that the Christian knights are merely fighting a battle. In both instances, the injunction to toil or suffer can be said to express a need for human beings to strive

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[80] Gn 3, 16-19. Ambrose has interpreted this injunction to toil as an impetus towards spiritual toiling and struggle, as is evidenced in the following passage: "The law of the flesh wars against the law of the mind. We must labor and sweat so as to chastise the body and bring it into subjection and sow the seeds of spiritual things. If we sow what is carnal, we shall reap fruit that is carnal. If, however, we sow what is spiritual, we shall reap the fruit of the spirit". Ambrose, <u>Hexameron, Paradise and Cain and Abel</u>, p. 356.
[81] Verses 1008-1012.

and struggle in a spiritual sense. The upshot of such struggles and sufferings is that it is not in vain, since it can lead to salvation.

Once again, we are faced with man's *telos.* Man must strive in the world, much as he must strive towards God. From a very simple axiom (turning away from one's *telos* by turning away from God = bad), the Christian account that one finds in the biblical narratives, as well as the one that we find in the "Chanson de Roland", puts forth a type of "anthropology" that explains how different kinds of subjects could arise, and how these, in turn, could lead to greater and greater degrees of perversion and moral monstrosities. In Paul's theology, men become more perverse as they are estranged from God. In the "Chanson de Roland", there is a correlation between those who *Ki Deu nen aimet* and the monstrosity of their deeds and character.

Of course, if the Saracens are evil it is because they reject God. Roland's entire moral reasoning rests upon this very assumption. But the specifically Christian element in the "Chanson de Roland" adds another dimension. The God from whom one is not to turn away is not an abstract principle, but an embodied, Incarnate, being. It is consequently important to remember that if death enters the world by way of the first man, then salvation and redemption enter the world by way of this Incarnate being. I would surmise that this is why, in Roland's mind, Christians are right, whereas Saracens are wrong. Such a straightforward argument compels a straightforward choice: you either choose to go astray, like the first man, or you choose redemption (you choose to become the subject of a Truth) by adhering to the tenets and principles of the last man. Salvation comes by struggling and suffering for these tenets and principles. In the "Chanson de Roland", Turpin, that strange figure straddling the sacerdotal and the martial, best exemplifies and gives voice to this belief:

Chrestïentét aidez a sustenir

Bataille avrez, vos es estes tuz fiz,

Kar a voz oilz vëez les Sarrazins.[82]

I believe that Turpin is giving voice here to Pauline tenets. Paul's ideas were so prevalent during the early Church that one also finds them in the works of Gregory of Nyssia and John of Damascus. Both of these authors believed that the origin of evil could be explained, by way of an Aristotelian reading of the relation to the Christian God, as the retreat from goodness, much in the manner that darkness could be thought of as the withdrawal of light. You get evil when you move away from the good. In both circumstances, evil was understood to be non-substantive since it was a particular accident, and not some thing. The sin of Adam, that of having disobeyed God and turned away from the proper observance of his law, becomes, in the theology of John of Damascus, the universal condition of a human nature that is under the influence of the forces of evil. Man's state is one of a generalized degradation, corruption, and death. By turning away from God, man's transgression transforms the human condition into one that is now subject to death and sin. This does not, however, divest him of his freedom of choice, or of his ability to recognize and adhere to a principle of goodness since this drive is still inherent to him as a being created in the image of the divinity. In other words, human beings can be given over to evil actions, yet, the possibility of salvation and redemption is still afforded to them since they can always turn back towards God. I believe that such a notion of an afforded possibility for salvation (for subjection to God) that remains unfulfilled goes a long way in explaining certain passages in the "Chanson de Roland" where Saracen warriors, apparently noble and valiant, are nonetheless demeaned by the textual description that portrays them.

De vassalage est il ben alosez:

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[82] Verses 1129-1131.

Fust chrestïens, asez oüst barnét.[83]

Such a passage suggests that all worthiness, in this one Saracen character, is not lost, inasmuch as there remains, for him, the possibility of turning himself back around, that is to say, of using his free will in a manner that would fix the situation of his moral decadence: it would no longer be the case that he would only appear noble and valiant, rather, by turning back to God (the Christian God, that Incarnate being indicated by the term *chrestïens*) this Saracen warrior would actually *be* noble and valiant. It is not at all exaggerated to interpret such passages as expressing a moral lament: a lament with respect to this particular Saracen's not being Christian, a lament with respect to his poor use of his free will. Here is someone susceptible of becoming a full blown subject, of having recognized a Truth, of having become faithful to that Truth, and of living towards the perfection of his end, and yet, this possibility is snuffed out. One can still, and one must or should choose to turn towards God, rather than in the other direction. This is exactly what this Saracen has not done, and what he persists in not doing as evidenced by his boastful will to fight the Franks (and therefore, fight the agents of the True God).

Devant Marsilie cil s'en est escrïet :

En Rencesvals irai mun cors guïer;

Se truis Rollant, de mort serat finét.

E Oliver e tuz les duze pers :

Franceis murrunt a doel e a viltét.

Carles li magnes velz est e redotez :

Recrëanz ert de sa guerre mener,

Si remeindrat Espaigne en quitedét.[84]

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[83] Verses 898-899.
[84] Verses, 901-908.

The boast, is of course, part and parcel of the reason why, despite his appearance of nobility, he remains a figure that is negatively characterized. "If only" he used his free will wisely, the way to freedom and salvation, as a consequence, would still be open to him so long as he chose the proper exercise of his intellect and conscience in recognizing and adhering to the knowledge of the one true God. This explains the "Chanson de Roland's" oft repeated lament with respect to certain Saracen warriors: *Fust chrestiens.* There is a lamenting judgment in such an expression since it is saying that if they, the Saracen warriors, were but Christians… something more and better might be expected of them.

Now such an idea is not mere poetry. The view expressed in the "Chanson de Roland" is founded upon ideas that were prevalent in medieval philosophy. Notably, it echoes Anselm's conception of how sin creates effects on existence. Philosophically, Anselm's view of the consequences brought about by sin was not unique. It was in fact the dominant view of both layman and scholar who, equally, believed that sin had transformed human existence in such a way that it no longer enjoyed the felicitous state of being for which it had been created[85].

The medieval conception of sin's disastrous consequences did not involve a world wherein there are human and sub-humans (physical monstrosities), "normal beings" alongside of monsters. For medieval theology and philosophy, the crucial difference between beings lay elsewhere. It was rather the case that the multiplicity of the distinct degrees of form (and forming), of goodness (being good or bad), and beauty (cultivating beauty by adhering to the principle of Beauty, or by way of a turn away from such a principle in the adoration of ugliness)

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[85] A piteous state, if one judges by Anselm's prolonged lamentations : "But alas! Wretched that I am, one of the sons of Eve, far removed from God! What have I undertaken? What have I accomplished? Wither was I striving? How far have I come? To what did I aspire? Amid what thoughts am I sighing? I sought blessings, and lo, confusion. I strove toward God, and I stumbled on myself. I sought calm in privacy, and I found tribulation and grief, in my inmost thoughts. I wished to smile in the joy of my mind, and I am compelled to frown by the sorrow of my heart". Anselm, 'Proslogion', <u>The Major Works.</u> 1998, p. 86.

were interpreted as diverse paths and means whereby God could be understood, resembled, and imitated. It is in this respect that a human being can be said to be beautiful or ugly, saintly, or monstrous. From this two important points follow:

1) Initially, individual differences between elements were less significant than the fundamental difference between elements in the chain of being and God Himself. Augustine certainly proposed that an understanding of the cosmos implied that the differences between individual elements could be harmonized in such a way as to retain an appreciation both for the order of the whole and the individual components themselves (even the disagreeable ones) in their relation to the whole[86].

2) Given this previous point, the key turning point in an understanding of how differences could become instruments of terror, those which allow for the kind of dichotomizing, and demonizing, that one finds in the "Chanson de Roland" and other medieval accounts of Saracens or of alterity, is to be given when stress is put on the notion of the differentiation of these particular modes of "striving" as living embodiments of an understanding, imitation, and resemblance to God.

This latter point is particularly emphasized in the "Chanson de Roland". Saracens, or at least some of them, are monstrous in appearance, however, their true monstrosity lies in the manner in which they conduct themselves and live out their lives. Their monstrosity is embodied

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[86] "God forbid now, that I should ever say, These things ought not to be; for should I see nothing but these, verily I should want the better, yet even only for these ought I to praise thee; for that thou art to be praised, these things of the earth do shew: dragons, and all deeps, fire, hail, snow, ice, and stormy wind, which fulfill thy word; mountains, and all hills, fruitful trees, and all cedars; beasts and all cattle; creeping things and flying fowls; kings of the earth and **all people**; princes and all judges of the land; young men and maidens; old men and children, let them praise thee, praise thee O our God, in the heights, thine angels and all thy hosts, sun and moon, all the stars and light, the heaven of heavens, and the waters that be above the heavens, seeing that these praise thy name, I did not now desire better, because I had now thought upon them all: and that those superior things were better than these inferior things, **but yet all things together better than those superior by themselves**, I resolved upon in my bettered judgment". Augustine, Confessions Vol. I, 1950, p. 379. The emphasis is mine.

in their sinful idolatry that opposes them to the One True God[87], in their wrathful and mad opposition to the champions of that God[88]. These are the acts and modes of being that make the Saracens into monsters.

Consequently, if the differences between elements are rather unimportant in and of themselves, as is suggested in Augustine's cosmology, where all of the parts, no matter how beautiful or misshapen, participate in a harmonious totality, then there arose within medieval speculation a need to explain the appearance and existence of differences by way of a theological divide. One in which these different elements would be judged by the manner in which they strove towards their ultimate destination or *telos*. For this striving, as an adherence to something essential, could explain the appearance of evil in terms of human being's "second nature". In order to understand this, we must ask ourselves how does one turn away from God?

An answer to this question is given in the works of Tertullian. Tertullian postulates that God is to be considered as the superrational being (and man is drawn to Him), and the goodness in the world, as such, is itself rational because it emanates from God, it therefore follows as a consequence that evil must be considered as posterior to goodness, much as irrationality is posterior to rationality, to Creation, and human nature. The turning away from God, if it is to be explicated, finds its source in the biblical narrative of the Fall, whereby human beings have let themselves be seduced by the temptations, the illusions, and the deceits of the devil. It is therefore the diabolic and the demonic, as turns away from the Truth, which are precisely those elements which "engineer" the appearance of evil and moral deformity.

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[87] This, of course, is exactly what one finds in the opening lay, wherein two kings (Charlemagne and Marsile), and two religious ideologies are set up against one another. To partake of the one (idol worship) is to refuse and reject participation in the other (religious "orthodoxy"): "Li reis Marsilie la tient, ki Deu nen aimet/ Mahumet sert e Apollin recleimet". Verses 7-8.

[88] « Plus valt Mahumet que seint Perre de Rume/ Se lui servez, l'onur del camp ert nostre. / En Rencesvals a Rollant irai juindre/ De mort n'avrat guarantisun pur hume ». Verses 921-924.

Now, the "Chanson de Roland" is quite explicit in its attempt to portray the Saracens as adherents to a demonic theology. Not only are the Saracens "evil" because they have turned away from the True God, they augment and increase their level of "evilness" by transforming this turning away into a turning towards agencies of evil. Their damned mode of being is further solidified by their having theologized such a mode of being. Spiritual abandonment has become ritualized. Such a portrayal of Saracen evil is given in the very first laisse when Marsile, the Saracen king, and therefore the very embodiment and incarnation of the entire Saracen way of life or worldview, is represented as being a devotee of pagan idols, most notably Mahomet, the false prophet[89] who compels and convinces the unwise to turn away from the True, Incarnate God, and Apollyon[90]. Unfortunately, this is not the only manifestation of the Saracens demonic congress. Saracen nobles and warriors ride in and out of battle, sally back and forth from this world to the next accompanied by evil agencies. The demonic is extent to the Saracen world, and would seem to underpin their understanding of the world:

Siglorel, L'encanteür ki ja fut en enfer

Par artimal l'i cundoist Jupiter.[91]

This pre-Dantesque, non-Christian trip to the underworld is more than mere demonization. It must be understood as a means, on behalf of the Christian community[92], of typifying the cultural expressions of the opposed community. Within the logic of the "Chanson de Roland", the Turpin/Siglorel opposition is meant to signify that Siglorel, the magician (which already stands as a red flag indicating his evil ways), does not stand alone. The Jupiter that

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[89] See the introductory chapter to John Tolan's <u>Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination.</u> Columbia University Press, New York, 2002.
[90] Apollyon being, in the book of Revelations (9, 11) a demonic agent of destruction.
[91] Verses 1390-1392.
[92] It is not without interest to note Siglorel, the Saracen magician, is killed by the archbishop Turpin, the embodiment of Christian spiritual-martial prowess.

accompanies him in fact symbolizes an entire worldview. Siglorel belongs to a society and a culture in the sense that, having gone down into the underworld, he has unquestioningly interiorized the norms and mores of his society. Norms, and mores, that he eventually reactualizes in his own practices as a magician. The disapproval of magic and magicians stems not only from an imagined congress between the human and demonic spheres, but also from the fact that a magician is a practitioner. Through Siglorel, magic is used, it is known, as such, when it functions in his world. His descent into the underworld, accompanied and guided by Jupiter, reveals the extent to which he is deeply rooted with this demonic "otherness". It reveals the moral imperatives that guide his observations of that underworld, as well as his actions in this world. Siglorel's actions, his struggling against the Christian foe, are an acting and a struggling for something. Something that is made significant by the tacit and explicit concourse he has with the demonic, pagan, and non-Christian. His visit and congress with Jupiter count, or are important and relevant, within the particular mode of inquiry of his theological context. Consequently, given the logic deployed by the narrative of the "Chanson de Roland", it is not surprising if, when struck by death, Saracen warriors as members of a demonic community return to the underworld with which they have already been in congress:

Li paiens chet cuntreval a un quat:

L'anme de lui en portet Sathanas[93].

Perhaps this is a means of expressing a type of hermeneutic, or theological, circle. If yours is a hellish pre-understanding, then inevitably you end up right back in hell. Before the ultimate and final destiny of the soul can be expressed, it has already been predisposed to end up in a certain place. As poetic or apologetic subjects, the Saracens can only set forth from where they already happen to be.

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[93] Verses 1267-1268.

I believe that it is safe to say that the world of the "Chanson de Roland" is one in which the opposing forces of Truth and the demonic are at play against one another. It is a world where there is one truth, that of the True God, and two radically opposed modes of reacting to that truth[94]. Since these differences are at play, I would suggest that in choosing to be rational and moral, by adhering to the truth of the One True God, as opposed to being irrational and immoral, different ways of life, differing answers, vocations, and philosophies or theologies are also brought into play.

Consequently, if faithfulness to one's essence implies an adherence to becoming subject to God, then the moving away from Him allows for the appearance of a second nature in man. A second nature facilitated by the devil himself. What needs to be retained when reading the "Chanson de Roland" against the backdrop of medieval theology and philosophy is that it posits the existence of moral differences, as well as the existence of differing natures, in terms of moral choices and ways of life. One either lives rationally/morally, by adhering to God through deeds and faith, or one lives irrationally/immorally by wallowing in the deceptions and illusions of a demonic congress.

I would contend that this latter option also includes deeds and its own brand of "faith". Clearly, inasmuch as the "Chanson de Roland" is concerned, the apostles of the demonic have a very different way of approaching situations, of living, acting, and of course, adoring a "deity". Naturally, in keeping with the apologetic tenor of the poem, these differences are roundly denounced as false and pernicious. For it is a trope within the Christian tradition that the devil, idols, or pagan deities, are falsifiers, both of Holy Scripture, and of human nature.

Leaving aside the question of the devil's origins, we can see that the medieval need to explain the existence of moral differences (pertaining to the question of the origin of evil) gives

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[94] We will be exploring these modes of reaction in greater detail in chapters 8 through 14..

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rise to a dichotomous world where opposing "forces", "logics" (rationality versus irrationality), truths (the real versus the illusory), and cultures (as modes of life dedicated to the above criteria) are at war and conflict with one another. Sides have been drawn. Henceforth, righteousness is linked to that nature which adheres to that which derives from God as the rational ordering of reality. The forces of evil, on the other hand, derive from the demonic that has facilitated the introduction of a second, fallen, nature, which, since it no longer coincides with the original nature for which it was intended, is irrational and morally evil.

As we can see, it was this striving impulse, this adherence or non-adherence towards God that, by turn, became highly significant, and indicative of a correcting, or a coarsening of the elements within Creation. If difference, in-itself, is not important, we can at least suggest that the manner in which these differences manifest themselves for-others, or for-themselves, is important. These modes of manifestation, these different forms of striving, or turning towards and turning away, would truly distinguish beings as they would stand in their natural relationship to God. This, I would dare say, becomes one of the crucial points for our understanding of the "Chanson de Roland" since these differences figure so significantly in the poem's narrative.

An important consequence of this view, and one that will have an impact on our study of the "Chanson de Roland", where it will be pushed to its furthest logical consequences to suit the text's narrative needs, is that it became possible, in a medieval theological and philosophical framework, to view adherence and non-adherence to the eventual truth of God's existence as differences-in-striving, as manners of being a coherent subject, or an incoherent other. The narrative thrust of the "Chanson de Roland", its battle cry, is best expressed in Roland's *cri du coeur*, his assertion that Christians (and therefore, the Christian way of being a subject) *is* right, whereas the Saracens (and their concomitant way of being) *are* wrong. *Paien unt tort e*

chrestïens unt dreit.[95] And for Roland, righteousness or unrighteousness, being Christian or being Saracen, are modes and states that are expressed through deliberate acts, practico-theological in nature, which serve to constitute, both for others, and for the character, an idea of subjectivity (as faithful subject hood to God), in opposition to an idea of "otherness", that helps to distinguish him from others, and most notably, from the "other". It is because he is a Christian knight that Roland views himself a certain way, and considers certain actions to be necessary and unavoidable. In fact, Roland's very conception of pride, of that which is due him as a subject bearing certain obligations, responsibilities, and occupying given societal roles, is intimately connected to his recognition of the interplay between his own subjectivity and its striving/working in the greater order of God's plan. His being Christian, his being a Christian knight, is, for him, a manner of striving and connecting this own immanent thing that he is with the transcendent. This connectivity between a sense of subjectivity, or how one can view oneself, and its relatedness to God is highlighted each time Roland is asked by Olivier to blow his horn and summon reinforcements, since his refusal to do so is couched in terms that clearly evoke the fact that his view of his own subjectivity (and its posterity in future songs of glory or infamy) is best understood in the light of the Truth, as indicated in the following passages:

> *Respont Rollant: 'Ne placet Damnedeu*
>
> *Que mi parent pur mei seient blasmét' .*[96]
>
> Or,
>
> *'Ne placet Deu' ço li respunt Rollant*
>
> *Que ço seit dit pur nul hume vivant*
>
> *Ne pur paien que ja seie cornant!*[97]

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[95] Verses 1013-1015.
[96] Verses 1062-1063

Or,

Respunt Rollant : 'Mis talenz en engraigne!

Ne placet Deu ne ses seinz ne ses angles

Que ja pur mei perdet sa valur France!' [98]

These passages indicate that inasmuch as Roland is concerned, honor, pride, martial valor, courage and therefore, a sense of the worth and merit of his own subjectivity are to be weighed against the backdrop of a theological understanding of the Christian knight's relationship to God. It is in God's name that such an "ignoble" act is rejected. It is once more in God's name, and that of his angels, that Roland rejects what he considers dishonorable.

Roland's assertions, brief though they may be, nonetheless allow us to view these markers (being Christian as opposed to being Saracen, acting "Christianly" as opposed to not acting in such a way) as bearing or manifesting differences that could be expressed in overtly theological and existential terms. The idea that beings strive, correctly or incorrectly, towards their point of origin and destination, lends itself quite easily to discussions of moral ordering. Given the theological construct in which the soul is both made by God, and made to turn towards God, as its Creator and its final destination, then it follows that one must imagine that it is in the soul's nature to move naturally towards this very specific fulfillment.

The horrors, the errors, or the misdeeds of men arise from the grievous mistake of living a life that is not turned towards God. The "Chanson de Roland" stresses this point repeatedly. Beings, or things, that resist this forming purpose inevitably give rise to all sorts of moral and/or existential depravities, heresies, or monstrosities.   The interconnectedness of the moral and the existential dimensions stems from the manner in which the moral conception, the idea of God,

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[97] Verses 1073-1075
[98] Verses 1088-1090

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and of one's response to that idea as an act of turning towards or away from God, determine how a life itself is conceived, and thereby practiced. The recognition of a theological truth, the moral response to that truth as a turning towards, leads into the existential dimension, and the moral paradigm that one has adopted, since it leads into and contributes to the formation of the leading of a life, is thereby essential in determining , within the confines of the thinking made manifest by the "Chanson de Roland", a person's worth, the degree to which a specific subjectivity can be said to be in conformity with rational teleology, or in contrast, must be viewed as being both morally and existentially degraded and perverse.   It is precisely this kind of moral scheme that is evidenced in the very first laisse, when Marsile is characterized as an "enemy" of the Franks. He is a bad guy, and this characterization is driven home by emphasizing the extent of his theological-moral perversion, that is to say, his religious opposition to the God of the Franks. Time after time, the Saracens are demeaned, degraded, and demonized in the poem's narrative, and in the majority of these cases it is the theological dimension of Saracen existence that serves as the justification for such a pejorative characterization, as is the case in the following passages:

> *Devant chevalchet un Sarrazin Abisme*
>
> *Plus fel de lui n'out en sa cumpagnie:*
>
> *Teches ad males e mult granz felonies,*
>
> *Ne creit en Deu, le filz seinte Marie.[99]*
>
> Or,
>
> *E la disme est d'Occian le Desert:*
>
> *C'est une gent ki Damnedeu ne sert-*
>
> *De plus feluns n'orrez parler jamais.[100]*

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[99] Verses 1631-1634. It is interesting to note how Turpin, the theological head of the Christian host reacts upon seeing this particular Saracen: he immediately suspects him, and judges him of heresy, and deems him fit for death : "Cel Sarrazins me semblet mult herite;/ Mielz voeill murir que jo ne l'alge ocire!". Verses 1645-1646.

I would argue that, at least with respect to the "Chanson de Roland", adherence to a moral impulse originating from the Creator implies that some beings come closer to God, to imitating Him, whereas some other beings do not, or worse yet, seem to turn away from the Creator. This turning away, this ignorance of God denotes a degree of moral perversity in those who are so inclined, even when, as we shall see later in chapters 11-14, they appear to be upstanding or outstanding individuals.

At this point, it is more important to our purposes to focus on the fact that adherence, or martial militancy, as is the case in the poem's narrative, to a godly worldview, with the consequent benefits to be reaped from such faithfulness[101], posits that there are right and wrong ways of being subject to God, or imitating the Creator. Now one could say that the "Chanson de Roland" certainly presents an extreme view of such a theological argument, however, this view is not without its philosophical grounding. Anselm, for instance, went so far as to posit that imitation as resemblance was, in fact, inasmuch as human beings are concerned, a mode of theological and existential participation in the plan of Creation as willed by God. Human beings must involve the whole of their being in their recognition and worship of the Truth of God's existence as a foundational event.

> *It is as patently obvious, therefore, as can be, that rational creature is made for this purpose: to love the supreme essence above all other goods (insofar as the supreme essence is, after all, the good above all other goods). Indeed its purpose is, in fact, to love the supreme essence and only to love other things for the sake of the supreme essence. This is because the supreme essence is good through itself, while everything*

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[100] Verses 3246-3248.
[101] « Pur Deu vos pri que ne seiez fuiant,/ Que nuls prozdom malvaisement n'en chant/ Asez est mielz que moerjum cumbatant/ Pramis nus est : fin prendrum aitant/ Ultre cest jurn ne serum plus vivant;/ Mais d'une chose vos soi jo ben guarant:/ Seint pareis vos est abandunt;/ As Innocenz vos en serez seant ». Verses 1473-1480.

else is only good through it. But it cannot love the supreme essence unless it strives to

become conscious of and to understand it. So it is quite clear, as a result, that what

rational creation ought to do, is to put all its power and all its will into becoming

conscious of, understanding and loving the supreme good. This is what rational creation

recognizes that its existence is for[102].

Anselm is clearly identifying a number of features which he believes are characteristic of

correct religious belief in this passage. On the one hand there is the recognition of the

ontological argument of God's existence[103]. This recognition is doubled by a concentration of

will. I take this to mean that man must come to understand that his life is best lived when lived

in conformity with the supreme essence. Such conformity is both mental and existential in

character[104]. It involves the mind as well as the body. This "holistic" approach is precisely what

one finds in the "Chanson de Roland". Not only are the Christian knights (Roland and Turpin at

the forefront) conscious of their allegiance to God and the veracity of His existence, they are, of

course, absolutely willing to lay down their lives in order to defend this position, in order to live

and die in conformity with God's plan.

To understand its created nature, and to seize that the purpose of its soul is to strive

towards God, is also to recognize that the creature which most resembles God, by striving to love

Him or approach Him in His eternity, will also exist eternally, although, given the moral

positioning of the individual human being and his understanding of his soul, given also its

positioning towards God as a participative striving (or the absence thereof), not all souls, despite

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[102] Anselm of Canterbury, 'Monologion' in <u>The Major Works.</u> Edited with an introduction by Brian Davies and G.R. Evans, Oxford World's Classics, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998, p. 74.

[103] Kant was the first to name Anselm's reasoning as an "ontological argument", however, we shall keep the term for the purposes of this thesis.

[104] This existential dimension is undoubtedly what Anselm has in mind when he criticizes "dead faith" in chapter 78 of the 'Monologion'.

their same eternal nature, will enjoy the everlasting joy of union with and in God. Theological participation as subjection to God and His plan therefore does lead to existential differences, in at least two varied ways: firstly, it implies that there are different modes of existence or different ways of leading one's life, and secondly, it puts forth the idea that these differences will be ultimately grounded in a transcendent reality with regards to the ultimate destiny of the soul.

In the "Chanson de Roland" of course, this becomes a very crucial point. The poem's repeated emphasis that Christians are right, and that Saracens are wrong is a theological insistence, and not merely a cultural one. It suggests that one way of thinking (and acting upon that thought) about the deity, as opposed to another way of idolizing deities, is correct. Insofar as the text is concerned, ultimate proof is given by the fact that Christians are saved. Saracens are not saved. The souls of Christian warriors are beatified, visited by angels and divine messengers, brought up to Paradise, whereas Saracens, by contrast, are damned, and their souls are sent to the underworld and the abode of devils.

This is why such participation, conceived of in military terms within the poem's narrative, inevitably leads to some form of continued existence in the afterlife. Having been subject to God, death is erased and the subject continues to be subject to God in the hereafter. Whether such expression is affirmative in nature (as is the case with the sermons of Turpin) or cosmological (as is the case with the otherworldly events surrounding Roland's death), it demonstrates the continuity of an immanent participation in an event of Truth that transcends the purely contingent plane. The cosmological incidents that give importance to Roland's death, for instance, overwhelm the immanent domain, they shake it and rip it up, and they go beyond themselves as mere material incidents and echo some Transcendent Truth or event.

En France en ad mult merveillus torment:

Orez i ad de tunerie e de vent,

Pluie e gresilz desmesurëement;

Chiedent i fuildres e menut e suvent,

E terremoete ço I ad veirement:

De seint Michel des Peril josqu'as Seinz,

Dés Besençun tresqu'al port de Guitsand,

Nen ad recét dunt del mur ne cravent.

Cuntre midi tenebres i ad granz :

N'i ad clartét se li ceils nen I fent.

Hume ne l'veit ki mult ne s'espoënt;

Dïent plusor : 'C'est li definement,

La fin del secle ki nus est en present'.

Icil ne l'sevent, ne dïent veir nïent :

C'est li granz doels por la mort de Rollant.[105]

The cosmological sequences in the "Chanson de Roland" are obvious references to the death of Christ[106], and the world's lament at his Crucifixion. In this respect, they are not only intertextual references employed to buttress the *auctoritas* of the poem, they also demonstrate the continuity of a mode of existence and participation in Creation. Regardless of how one views the poem's martial theology, the passage quoted above clearly seeks to establish a correspondence between Christ and Roland. This latter character resembles, and imitates, the former character. Roland's death is signified in a manner that corresponds to the manner of Christ's death. Roland's chauvinistic theology, his physical bravado are embedded in a

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[105] Verses 1423-1437. Emphasis is mine.
[106] See Mt 27, 45-54.

participatory framework. Roland's understanding of his religion, his understanding of just how his life is to be lived and fashioned by this religious belief are celebrated by Creation itself when it echoes the Creator's very signification at the moment of His death. Roland's recognition of the truth of God's existence, to be more precise, his recognition of the Christian truth (*chrestïens unt* dreit), which cannot be thought of other than as an evental truth, allows for his immanent subjectivity to be transcended, "cosmologized". The fact that Roland, as well as other Christian knights, is lifted up into the heavens can be seen as the poem's crowning theological argument. It is the conclusion of a long reasoning, inherent in much medieval theology and philosophy, wherein one moves from Creation, to the recognition of Creation and a Creator, to the adherence to this Creator, to a life lived in conformity with Him, to ultimate everlasting participation in Creation itself. It is this very process of subjectivizing which is at the heart of the "Chanson de Roland". This ability to participate in and continue to exist in truth is the fundamental difference between the Christian Franks and the "pagan" Saracens.   To participate in the continued elaboration of a truth, such as that of God's existence, makes possible the transformation of an immanent participation into something eternal. It is this suspension of the immanent, this potential leap into the transcendent which, ultimately, both defines and distinguishes modes of conduct, ways of life, and elects or damns the theologies which are at the root of such modes of living.

Such modes of living and adhering to a Truth constitute the cultural mechanism whereby a religion can propagate and maintain itself. In the case of the "Chanson de Roland", the specific subjectivizing process put forth by the Christian vision is designed to propagate ideas, to resist other ideas, to capture and/or enthrall members (conversions that are forced, or willed), as well as resources. By adopting the Truth of God's Creation, and of man's subjection to that Creator,

as a Credo, members of the Christian community accept certain texts, rules, and manners of being as sacred, and thereby, members of this community have a specific duty and obligation to support the "infrastructure" surrounding/expressing that Truth. This requires the adoption of certain specific ways of acting which are justified by the ideology stemming from the Truth. One of the more useful distinctions that will arise from the recognition, and adherence to a Truth, will be the conscious competition between competing visions, wherein members will intentionally harness evolutionary and expansionist goals. Within the framework of Western Christianity, as well as within the framework of the "Chanson de Roland's" narrative[107], the propagation, the continuity of a subjectivizing model implicitly related to the divine, is not so much an ancillary request, as an ethical demand. It is incumbent upon the Frankish king (Charlemagne) to set out to guarantee the continuity of his own culture (and his subjectivity) by destroying competing cultures. Turpin, Roland, as well as Charlemagne, all represent instances of subjects, faithful to, and representative of a culture, who voluntarily or involuntarily (inasmuch as Charlemagne is directed to further conquests by angelic/divine advice and/or command) charge themselves with reproducing the elemental Truth that is foundational to that culture, and to their understanding of subjectivization. Hence the curious mix of military strength, and missionary zeal (Turpin), as two instances where the culturally aggressive and the moral principle are bound together. The unavoidable result of such a logic will be that, when two cultures, two competing subjectivizing processes come into contact, one will prosper in the competition for members, subject-adherents, and space for social expansion, while another will not.

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[107] As evidenced in the very first and last lays of the poem where the conquering motif of Frankish Christianity are expressed, and receive an ideological/soteriological tenor.

8. SUBJECTIVITY AND COMMUNITY IN THE *CHANSON DE ROLAND:* FIGHTING SUBJECTIVITIES

Or guart chascuns que granz colps i empleit,

Male cançun de nus chantét ne seit!

Paien unt tort e chrestïens unt dreit.[108]

Chivalry is combat personified. In martial societies, fighting is paramount, but more importantly, fighting well is honoured because it allows a hero to achieve and attain immortality: that of union with God, but also the immortality of having a glorious name that is remembered by posterity. I would suggest that for a Christian knight, these two elements are connected. One fights for God, by dying nobly, bravely, on the battlefield, yet at the same time, this death, since it has been faithful to a Truth which is seen as foundational (belief in the True God, as we have seen, is the essence of one's being and that towards which you must turn), is inscribed in the continuity of that Truth (its immortality in the hereafter), as well as the continued striving (the memory) of the rest of the members of the religious community in their continued faithfulness to the Truth. By dying once, a Christian knight can expect two forms of immortality. When Roland is encouraging the men under his command to fight bravely, lest they be shamed by the ill-repute of songs that transmit their misdeeds to future generations, he is evoking this notion of a subject's participation in some mode of temporal continuity. To be remembered shamefully is

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[108] Verses 1013-1015.

to attain infamy, and its perverse continuity wherein the hero as a subject is continuously associated with evil, betrayal, cowardice, and other elements of social disrepute, such that this infamy becomes a type of archival hell, where deeds are reckoned, and the abjection that weighs on those who are so remembered is the community's mode of punishing subjects for what they have done in their lives. Such situatedness in the collective memory is a form of second death, of temporal punishment as continuity, since it serves as a vehicle whereby subjects suffer endless suffering –the suffering of ill-repute or infamy- as the community proceeds to perpetuate a punishment against one of its own. It is far different in kind from the type of immortality wished for by Roland, and the benefits it can bestow on the hero. Both of these dimensions are present to Roland, and Roland is very aware of the fact that when he is spurring his men to "be-glorious", this call is intensely connected to the local faithfulness in the service of arms (fighting for God, against the enemies of God), that it is historical (as a present situation, and as a possibility for cultural continuity), grounded in a time and a place, yet it is by its very nature associated to an interpretation/truth that is not of this world.

Furthermore, Roland's appeal to glory implies that the question of his "being-glorious" is a question and a concern for him. Roland's statement clearly indicates that his is a world where there is, to some extent, concern for subjectivity[109]. Roland is a subject who is concerned with the manner in which he will be faithful to a Truth, the manner in which he will face his enemies, and lastly, the manner in which he will be remembered by posterity. If Roland did not have a sense of his own subjectivity, with distinct attributes and capabilities, with unique possibilities and a singular destiny, there would simply be no need for him to worry or to press for the

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[109] Or, as Hegel would have it: "The subject is thus so far a person. It is implied in personality that I, as a distinct being, am on all sides completely bounded and limited, on the side of inner caprice, impulse and appetite, as well as in my direct and visible outer life". Hegel, Philosophy of Right. Translated by S.W. Dyde, Batoche Books, Kitchener, 2001, p. 52.

attainment of momentous glory. To strive for personal glory, battling against the enemies of God, in the face of certain death is to recognize that, the care and the questioning he exhibits as a subject (and the way in which such caring and questioning shall appear to his family and all of posterity), is characteristic of the subjectivizing process wherein, as a faithful Christian, he is turned towards the metaphysical (Roland knows that his death will grant him access to Paradise), and such a turn is complicit with the drive of the community that will remember him. To insist, as he does, on the necessity of "being-glorious" in the face of death can only mean that Roland is cognizant of the fact that he is responsible for the cohesion between himself and the process of subjectivization. That he alone at this moment of his life must be faithful to his turn towards the Truth by choosing to live or die in only one way.

Given that this awareness of his subjectivity appears as a response to death, it makes the case for the continued process of subjectivizing all the more compelling. If death is the possibility from which none can escape, then Roland's reference to *chansons de geste* signals a move around such an inescapable possibility. If death and negation are constitutive elements of "desubjects[110]", immortality, whether transcendent or communal, serves as both a goal for subjectivizing, as well as implementing the process of its continuity. In this respect, immortality, and the care or concern for such a question, indicates that you have a subject who is cognizant of the saving grace of a Truth (if Christians are different from Saracens, in Roland's mind, it is certainly because they are *dreit*), who knows that he is to become a subject by being faithful to that Truth, and lastly, who expects his faithfulness to that Truth to guarantee the continuity of his subjectivization through a Transcendent and a communal process. I would argue that Roland's concern for glory allows him to layer his subjectivity over and above death

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[110] As we shall see in chapter 11, Saracens are defined by their fear of death, their dying (collectively or otherwise), and their negation: after dying physically, they suffer a second death, that of their soul.

itself. If we focus our attention on the communal immortality granted by songs of repute, we can see that the *chanson de geste*, as an end-product, continues subjectivity in such a way that through repeated references, singing, and reading, the text becomes the apparatus (the process) for the permanent referral of the subject who both precedes and actualizes it. In this manner, *chansons de geste*, are consolatory and hopeful. Any book about Roland (including the one we are reading) is to be read in a dramatic way, wherein the reader temporarily focuses attention on some of the catastrophic episodes (the death and suffering of the heroes), yet, in the end, the struggle will come to an end, the forces of opposition will be vanquished, the hero will come to unending joy, and the community, both as memory and body, will have traversed the period of trial and have obtained happiness and a strengthening of itself in that which has just ended. The poetic discourse sets itself up as the performance of subjectivity.

If Roland puts such an emphasis on the importance of these songs of glory and ill-repute, it is because he is aware of the fact that these poems do not merely transcribe the acts of great heroes. A *chanson de geste* is not merely a set of inscriptions on a piece of paper. Such texts become the principal means by which subjectivity is staged, and then restaged.   To refer, as he does, to the continuity of subjectivity through songs requires a heightened awareness of subjectivity. For it suggests that there is at least one subject (Roland) who is projecting *his* meaning (the meaning of himself as a faithful Christian knight) into/beyond the world. Regardless of what might be happening in the situation that is presented to him (the massed Saracen army, certain death etc…), it is Roland who chooses how his subjectivity will signify his encounter, and his Transcendence, of that situation. As a subject conscious of his duty and faithfulness, he transforms this situation by his choice of possibilities and meanings.

Furthermore, this constructed/staged meaning is meant to interact continuously with both the immediate environment that Roland lives in (it is destined to act as a testimony for those in France who will not have been witnesses to his glory), and the future environment of France (future generations will know of his deeds). Roland's insistence on glory, his referencing of *chansons de geste* to come, betrays the degree to which such elements are vital to the needs and interest of subjectivity as he understands them. Roland is neither a determined brute, nor a mere instantiation of physical brutality.

The kind of subjectivity that Roland secretes when he evokes such meanings and values, suggests the presence of something unique that is both practical and perceptual, expressing itself in emotional sensitivity and thought. In choosing to die one way, in honor and in homage to one thing (Lord-God, and lord-king) as opposed to reacting differently (a possibility evidenced by Ganelon's treacherous behaviour[111]) with respect to other possibilities, Roland's choice manifests the degree in which his subjectivity is equated with freedom, inasmuch as his expression of his subjectivity demonstrates the he is free in giving it meaning in a particular situation. A situation which he is constructing.

After all, a subject unaware of himself, would not really care whether he lives on gloriously or not in the hearts and minds of other men. To care about such matters, is to indicate, however faintly or incompletely, that you are a unique subject, distinct from others, free, and possessing, to which ever degree, some elements of rights or privileges, namely, those of

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[111] And does Ganelon not himself best incarnate the kind of betrayal of subjectivizing evidenced in the thought of Badiou:" To keep going, then, presumes the ability to identify and resist the various forms of corruption or exhaustion that can beset a fidelity to truth. This corruption defines what Badiou calls "Evil". Evil can take one of three main forms, each one a perversion of truth: a) betrayal, the renunciation of a difficult fidelity … is a fairly straightforward matter of temptation and fatigue". Peter Hallward 'Translator's Introduction', in Badiou, <u>Ethics. An Essay on the Understanding of Evil</u>. Translated by Peter Hallward, Verso' New York, 2001, p. xi-xii.

continuity of process through faithfulness. For these myriad elements are the aspects of subjectivity that will be celebrated in the "songs of the bards".

Consequently, I believe that Roland's repeated utterances about the need to avoid the ill-repute that would befall him and his men were they to fight ingloriously, suggests that the world of the "Chanson de Roland" is thoroughly imbued with notions of subjectivity, and furthermore, that this subjectivity is related, or distinguished, from alterity. There is one, correct way, of becoming a subject, and there are "other" incorrect ways. The possibility of being heroic, of dying nobly for God, is a possibility that emanates from the subject's living in a given world[112]. Preceding generations of Christians (those members of the family that Roland mentions when suggesting that he can only die fighting gloriously) have already answered the question as to what is the Truth, and they have already formulated the proper way of participating in a process of subjectivization by being faithful to that Truth. This does not make for a form of determinism, since evasion or betrayal is always a possibility (as evidenced by Ganelon). Roland is continuing this process, and continuing in that process. Consequently, Roland's heroism is shaped not only by his immediate present, or by the sedimentation of a chivalric past, but also by his envisioned project, his projecting and willing a future for himself into the future. Roland is shaping his subjectivity through this martial last stand. Roland's plea is a *mise en garde* against reductionist readings, for it suggests that, in his own thinking, his subjectivity is

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[112] As Heidegger explains, a subject possibilizes elements of the worldview that he inhabits: "Possibility, as an existentiale, does not signify a free-floating potentiality-for-Being in the sense of the 'liberty of indifference'. In every case Dasein, as essentially having a state-of-mind, has already got itself into definite possibilities. As the potentiality-for-Being which it is, it has let such possibilities pass by; it is constantly waiving the possibilities of its Being, or else it seizes upon them and makes mistakes. But this means that Dasein is Being-possible which has been delivered over to itself –**thrown possibility** through and through". Heidegger, Being and Time. Translated by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson, Harper SanFrancisco (a division of Harper Collins), New York, 1962, p. 183. In the case of the "Chanson de Roland", this implies that the subject possibilizes hostility to alterity since this possibility is inherent to his world.

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neither an object, nor a mere physical process that can be manipulated at will, nor is it placid and helpless against the indifferent universe that would render all action absurd.

Consequently, not only does Roland's plea represent a burgeoning consciousness of subjectivity, it also serves to frame the question of subjectivity's relationship to the rest of society. The songs of glory or infamy that will be sung about the deeds of a warrior are social markers, lending credence or opprobrium to a manner of subjectivizing. Perhaps as fundamental as any kind of religious chauvinism, Roland's assertions of his possessing *dreit* (given his participation in the Christian possession of *dreit),* and his will to glory indicate that he possesses a strong sense of the importance of his own subjectivity. A subjectivity which is desirous of one form of the good (being well considered) suggested by his environment. As Alasdair MacIntyre has aptly argued:

> *We live out our lives, both individually and in our relationships with each other, in the light of certain conceptions of a possible shared future, a future in which certain possibilities beckon us forward and others repel us, some seem already foreclosed and others perhaps inevitable. There is no present which is not informed by some image of some future and an image of the future which always presents itself in the form of a telos- or a variety of ends or goals- towards which we are either moving or failing to move in the present.[113]*

Given Roland's insistence on glory, given his avowed recognition of the potential weight of future glory/non-glory, given that Roland, as a Christian, would be cognizant of the hereafter awaiting him, I would contend that Roland wills his life to-be oriented towards some *telos.* In Roland's case, it is a double *telos.* On the one hand, given the martial nature of the poetic

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[113] MacIntyre, <u>After Virtue.</u> Second edition, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame Indiana, 1984, p. 215-216.

narrative, there is a sense of military honour that the warrior must respect by fighting for his noble lord.

>*Ben devuns ci ester pur nostre rei:*
>
>*Pur sun seignor deit hom susfrir destreiz*
>
>*E endurer e granz chalz e granz freiz*
>
>*Si'n deit hom perdre e del quir e del peil.*[114]

Aside from this allegiance to his king and lord[115], there is also a religious duty that requires that one fight for one's God. This religious duty is evidenced not only in Roland's assertion that Christians are right and pagans are wrong, but also in his questing for combat, in his religiously motivated request for combat against the Saracens. This theological duty to fight against the enemies of God is a manner of striving towards God. It allows a subject to recognize a Truth, to recognize its antithesis, and to strive towards that Truth in a continuous process that concomitantly hardens and arms itself against any "other". Faithfulness to one Truth implies animosity towards another mistruth. This is precisely what we see happening in the "Chanson de Roland". The two characters who are the most religiously motivated (Roland and Turpin) do not afford the Saracens any respite, respect, or recognition. They are "other", and as such, must be treated as suspect, at best, and as enemies to be slaughtered of the time.

When Olivier informs Roland that the Saracen armies are just over the next hill, and that a great battle will have to be fought[116], Roland not only welcomes this prospect, he seems to relish it. Furthermore, if we pay close attention to what he expresses in the poem, we can see that he welcomes combat with the Saracens in theological terms: *Respont Rollant: E Deus la nus*

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[114] Verses, 1009-1012.

[115] "Le service militaire dû par les vassaux à leurs seigneurs est un devoir rappelé par tous les théoriciens de la vassalité ". Jean Flori, La chevalerie. Éditions Jean-Paul Gisserot, Paris, 1998, p. 37.

[116] « Dist Oliver: Sire cumpainz, ce crei/ De Sarrazins purum bataille aveir ». Verses 1006-1007.

otreit![117] . Such a passage shows that Roland is eager for battle and does not think about turning away from the upcoming fight. The passage implies that such a battle is to be viewed as something of a blessing. Clearly, Roland and his peers are willing to die for God because their conception of themselves as Christian warriors (a conception, let us remember, which is at the heart of Roland's thinking) implies that if the world was created by God, if it received the totality of its being from him, participation in God's perfection is an intrinsic necessity[118]. Service to God secures subjective immortality. By dying gloriously, Roland fulfills his duties towards his lord, and his devotion towards his God in a manner which, although contested (by Olivier), is nonetheless indicative of a recognition of subject-agency. Roland's actions, mysterious when analysed as caprice or *démesure* or as cultural-instinct[119], can best be described as a subjectivizing flourish.

All of this leads us to conclude that Roland clearly cares about his future. He clearly worries about the kind of things that will be said of him. That a degree of "subjectivization" would be present in the "Chanson de Roland" and its main protagonist should not be surprising. After all, one could argue that the very mechanism of service, especially in its religious dimensions, helps to foster a strong sense of identity or subjectivity. As Foucault has stated, the

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[117] Verse 1008.

[118] "This theology, by claiming, on the basis of Christianity of course, to be rational reflection founding a faith with a universal vocation, founded at the same time the principle of a knowing subject in general, of a knowing subject who finds both his point of absolute fulfillment and highest degree of perfection in God, who is also his Creator and so his model". Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject. Lectures at the Collège de France. Edited by Frédéric Gros, translated by Graham Burchell, Picador, New York, 2005, p. 26.

[119] Josephine Miles is indicative of this one-sided, communal school of interpretation, when she states: "Roland is far less individual and aloof. … In the *Roland* it is rather a familial and chivalric mutuality that prevails and, when it fails, tragically fails". 'The Heroic Style of the Song of Roland', in Romance Philology. Vol. XI, no. 4, May 1958, p. 360.

type of pastoral power at work in the Christian tradition also leads to the creation of subjectivities[120].

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[120] "Christian pastorship implies a peculiar type of knowledge between the pastor and each of his sheep. This knowledge is particular. It individualizes". Foucault, "Pastoral Power and Political Reason", in <u>Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault</u>. Selected and edited by Jeremy R. Carrette, Routledge, New York, p. 142.

9. THE OTHERNESS WITHIN

Roland's sense of subjectivity, were it to be an isolated phenomenon, could be dismissed as a textual or hermeneutical aberration. However, such is not the case. Roland is not alone in shaping his faithfulness to a Truth. He is not alone in caring for his immortality, or in having a sense of subjectivity. In fact, the "Chanson de Roland" is replete with examples of characters expressing their subjectivity in unique ways. The wealth of such examples can only lead us to conclude that a concern for subjectivity is one of the central aspects at work in a comprehension of the poem. I believe that the analysis of a few other examples of "subjective flourishing" will suffice to demonstrate my argument.

A key part of the narrative plot of the poem is, of course, Ganelon's betrayal of Roland. A great deal has been written about this episode, and some of the more interesting analyses have concentrated on the "Christological" aspects of Ganelon's betrayal. As such, this episode is meant to evoke and recall the Biblical betrayal of Christ. Ganelon turns from the Truth and its defense (or defender) much in the same way the treason of Judas allows for the persecution and death of the Truth-Incarnate. Consequently, Ganelon is rejecting the *ethos* of medieval Christian knighthood. Brewster Fitz, for one, has argued just such a point by stating that Ganelon must be interpreted as a Judas-like figure inasmuch as his betrayal of Roland's Christian leadership undermines the very logic of the Christian military ideology characteristic of the Crusader period.

Ganelon is rejecting belief in Roland, whose death is an Imitatio Christi. Hence, he is rejecting the logic of the Crusade, the quest for a martyr's death while taking vengeance on the enemies of Christ, and the quest for penance and absolution provided by the Crusade. Typologically speaking, he is imitating the Jew's rejection of Christ, who often in the iconography of the Crusade was depicted riding in the vanguard with sword in mouth. [121]

Such an interpretation has its merits, one of which being that it facilitates the demonizing of Ganelon as a character. It also serves to indicate that Ganelon, by betraying the Franks, is also turning away from a model of subjectivizing that is faithful to the Christian Truth served by the Franks, and therefore sets himself up for subjective negation. Ganelon is a man who had recognized the Truth, and had been faithful to it, but who has now decided to move away from that Truth. By striking at the rearguard, Ganelon is striking at the king, who, as embodiment of Frankish Christianity, stands in place for God. By extension, Ganelon is striking at God. Having moved away from that Truth, he has also moved away from the continued process of subjectivizing that is actualized by being faithful to such a process. Consequently, there is no immortality waiting for Ganelon. Certainly, he will be granted damnation and infamy, but not immortality. After his betrayal has been discovered, and after his plot has been unmade, the other Christian knights participate in the solemn process of memory[122], and thereby perpetuate into Transcendence and the communal memory the subjects who have been killed. For Ganelon, on the other hand, the poem clearly indicates the extent of his spiritual demise: he is absent from the participation in a process that sees itself as subject to God, and furthermore, he is no longer seen to express belief in the process itself. The process of subjectivization has been abandoned

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[121] Brewster Fitz, 'Cain as Convict and Convert? Cross-Cultural Logic in the Song of Roland', in <u>MLN.</u> Vol. 113, No. 4, Sept. 1998, p. 817.
[122] The ritualized burying, and "idol-making" of Turpin, Olivier and Roland. See verses 2951-2973.

by Ganelon (or abandoned for him). This much is made clear given that nowhere does Ganelon say that he expects to participate in a continuous process, nor does he ever appeal to such a process. Rather, his last means of recourse are legal, and not transcendent. He appeals to family, law, ritual, status, and role. This recourse to the legal mechanisms suggests that Ganelon does not believe that his own subjectivity will be continued through faithfulness to God, or through communal participation in that faithfulness, since Ganelon now believes that the only means of guaranteeing his survival are immanent in nature. We should also recognize that the text does not suggest that any form of honorable immortality should be expected for Ganelon, in other words, the reader never is presented with a scenario wherein the continuity of Ganelon's subjectivity is to be expected. If he is to survive, and to continue, it is in Hell as nothingness. In fact, the poem's narrative implicitly suggests that the opposite view, that denying Ganelon's continuity, is true: ill-repute, as the embodiment of the faithfulness of the Christian community will propagate an image of Ganelon as a man having gone from a true embodiment of subjectivity, to a flawed, corrupted embodiment. We remember Ganelon because he was a traitor, and we remember him as a traitor.

But perhaps Ganelon had never really been a subject, had never really been faithful to the type of subjectivizing made manifest and celebrated by the poem's main hero. If we review the instances of narrative tensions that arise between Roland and Ganelon, it seems rather obvious that these tensions are the result of subjective antagonisms playing each other out. Simply put, Ganelon and Roland have two very different visions of how to become, or maintain, subjectivity. These antagonisms are, in effect, manifestations of differing, or subjective, modes of establishing a sense of honour. It is important to remember that honour is binary. On the one hand, honour is a physical and ritualized manifestation of a social "code", since it is an amalgamation of a

complex structure of rites, gestures, and varied outward markings which all serve to establish degrees of propriety and status within a given society[123]. Honour is related to propriety inasmuch as honour serves to institute what is proper or due to one in such and such a situation. Now what is proper, what is honourable, can only be proper or honourable to the degree that it is a function of a difference from what is not itself. A subject can only be honoured if the process honouring him is distinguished from those manifestations where other subjects are not being honoured, or, are being dishonoured. The social dimension of honour serves as a marking for the subject. Rituals of honour, for instance, would mean nothing if its function of differentiation were not in relation to other terms, rituals and gestures of honour or dishonour.

On the other hand, honour is also a deeply subjective, or a personal "sentiment". Honour displays the degree to which a subject is interested in his social status, and the recognition that such a status confers upon himself. Honour suggests that the subjectivizing process is not disinterested but to the contrary, characters are vexed or pleased by the honour they receive since such displays contribute to their view of the relationship they must maintain to their continued fidelity to the subjectivizing process. It is here that the subjectivizing model evidenced in the « Chanson de Roland » distinguishes itself from the kind of model proposed by Alain Badiou. The poetic model is deeply interested in subjectivity, in cultural formation and identity, and in the gratification (temporal and Transcendent) that can be sought and obtained from pursuing the logic of this model. This is far removed from a vision wherein:

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[123] As Huizinga has remarked : "Every order and estate, every rank and profession, was distinguished by its costume. The great lords never moved about without a glorious display of arms and liveries, exciting fear and envy. Executions and other public acts of justice, hawking, marriages and funerals, were all announced by cries and processions, songs and music. The lover wore the colors of his lady; companions the emblem of their confraternity; parties and servants the badges or blazon of their lords." Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages. Translated by F. Hopman, Penguin Books, London, 1987, p. 9.

(F)idelity, the commitment to a truth, amounts to something like a disinterested enthusiasm, absorption in a compelling task or cause, a sense of elation, of being caught up in something that transcends all petty, private or material concerns. [124]

As a consequence, honour, with respect to a situation and the determinate aspects of that situation, varies according to the manner in which the subject chooses to remain faithful to some code, morale, or creed that he identifies with, and which, in turn, in the case of Roland, orientates subjectivity in its turn towards continuity, or away from it. But all of this suggests that there can arise contrasting views as to what may count as "faithfulness", or the best procedure to maintain the subjectivizing process. As Hegel has demonstrated, the sense of having been honoured/dishonoured is directly related to one's private sense of self-worth:

Ici l'offense ne regarde plus la valeur réelle de l'objet qu'il s'agisse de propriété, du rang, d'un droit etc... ; mais la personnalité en soi, l'opinion que le sujet a de lui-même, la valeur qu'il s'attribue. Or, cette valeur, au point où nous sommes, est infinie, comme le sujet est infini à ses propres yeux. Dans l'honneur, l'homme a donc la conscience la plus intime de sa subjectivité infinie, comme étant indépendante de son contenu. ... la mesure de l'honneur n'est donc pas dans ce qu'est l'individu en lui-même, mais dans ce qu'il pense être [125].

In many respects, it would not be an exaggeration to say that honour is closely connected to a subject's understanding of himself. Any given knight or warrior (or any given individual for that matter) can have a particular sense of what is honourable for himself, of what best allows for his subjectivity to continue in the here-and-now, or in the hereafter. Honour is to be understood

[124]Peter Hallward 'Translator's Introduction', in Badiou, Ethics. An Essay on the Understanding of Evil. Translated by Peter Hallward, Verso' New York, 2001, p. x.
[125] Hegel, Esthétiques. Textes choisis et traduit par Claude Khodoss, PUF, Paris, 1953, p. 197.

as that which is due a subject. Any particular knight or warrior can assign this idea or sense of honour as his subjectivizing standard. Where honour is lacking, the subjectivizing process has been diminished or impeded in some fashion. Where honour is lacking, as would be the case with the songs of ill-repute that Roland fears so much, the subjectivizing process would be both continued and perverted: continued inasmuch as the subjects fallen at Roncevaux would be remembered, and perverted insofar as they would be remembered for not having gained immortality (the transcendent version), while being set up as the very antithetical paradigm to Frankish Christian subjectivizing.

That members of the same society could disagree as to the best means of actions, allows us to understand that these members are not all the same, nor should they be viewed merely as "types" (the traitor, the hero, the wise etc…). The differences which separate these characters unites them in their all having subjectivities that are to be. They are united in that all of them must choose to recognize a truth, they must choose a manner of adhering to that truth (or betraying it), and they must choose how they will be continue in this decision, playing out their subjective decision with respect to this adherence or betrayal. It is precisely this subjectivizing presence within the Frankish realm that creates the potential for conflict, and disaster. Simply put, a subjective appreciation of how to best establish honour fixes its meaning in a manner that inevitably engenders tension and conflict, since there is bound to be a degree of misunderstanding between the quotidian expression of honour (ritualized and outwardly

expressed), and the subjective valuation of honour that generates a highly volatile standard[126] that is hard to define[127].

This is precisely what we find in the "Chanson de Roland". The tension between outward expressions of honour/respect, and a subjective sense of injury or dishonour, is at the very heart of the conflict between Ganelon and Roland. The first "subjective" flourish or insult happens when Ganelon, in the presence of all of the king's most noble barons, publicly belittles Roland's counsel to the king (itself a violation of the code or etiquette of counsel, since Roland, faithful to his faithfulness in warring against the enemies of God, speaks first, an "honour" that is not his by rank[128]) by counselling Charlemagne to discount the advice of fools[129]. Notwithstanding the content of Ganelon's rebuke, one could argue that he is, to some extent, correct in chastising Roland for having violated the ritualized order of the council chamber. However, it is not the outward expression of rebuke that seems to chafe Roland, but rather, the fact that Ganelon's attack is an attack on his very subjectivity, on the legitimacy of his subjectivizing process. To be called a fool, is, of course, a way of discrediting a person's subjectivity, by indicating that there is something rash, hazardous, or unstable about that subject. In other words, what this subject says, and is willing to do (thereby evoking its subjectivizing

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[126] Standards that waxe and wane with the precariousness of the sense of personhood, as Hegel states: "Car, aussi loin que j'étende mes prétentions, quelles que soient les objets sur lesquels elles se portent, leur fondement est toujours ma volonté arbitraire". Hegel, Esthétiques, p. 198.

[127] Questions of personal honor are not unrelated to questions of private languages, and the volatility of the former is also suggested in the volatility, the uncertainty (epistemological, sociological and linguistic) of the latter. As Wittgenstein has stated: "The essential thing about private experience is really not that each person possesses his own exemplar, but that nobody knows whether other people also have *this* or something else. The assumption would thus be possible –though unverifiable- that one section of mankind had one sensation or red and another section another". Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations. Translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1958, p. 95e.

[128] As Ian Short remarks in his translation of the "Chanson de Roland" : "Roland, le premier à prendre la parole, et cela aux mépris de l'ordre hiérarchique féodal, est le seul à s'inscrire en faux contre la politique de l'apaisement". La chanson de Roland, n.194 à la p. 41.

[129] "E dist al rei: "Ja mar crerez bricun". Verse 220. Now it should be remembered that Ganelon says this immediately after Roland has advised Charlemagne to ignore Marsile's pleas for peace, and to continue his military endeavours in Spain.

process) is not to be trusted. Given the terms of Ganelon's critique, given the words he uses to describe Roland, his negative description of Roland serves to demean and undermine his worth both as a warrior/counsellor to Charlemagne, and as a subject proposing a manner for subjectivities to be conducted. Simply put, Ganelon is stating that Roland simply cannot be trusted, there is a degree of unreasonableness, of madness in his speech (and likely, his acts) and therefore should not be listened to since he is rash, unwise, and a fool. Ganelon is personally attacking Roland. He is attacking the subject-Roland. As T. Atkinson Jenkins has remarked:

> *Ganelon, then, in a fiery speech (vv. 220-29), refers to Roland as a bricon (which seems to mean "a worthless fellow"), again as a fol, and accuses his step-son of criminal indifference to dangers run by others than himself: Roland, says Ganelon, has given us counsel in the spirit of pride and haughtiness*[130].

Ganelon has publicly insulted Roland by calling him a fool. Ganelon has insulted a subject in a place of ritualized honour, a public space. If things were to remain as they were, Roland might be vexed, but the damage would indeed be limited. Such, of course, is not the case. One insult will give way to another, and this second attack will be both verbal and physical (at least by proxy) in nature.

Undoubtedly vexed at having been "made the fool" in front of his peers, Roland then designates Ganelon to lead the king's embassy, publicly instituting him in a role rife with the potential for great personal harm. Roland, by naming Ganelon, places Ganelon's subjectivity in harm's way, and endangers Ganelon's potential for continuity. If Roland has been attacked by Ganelon, he reverses the field by placing Ganelon in a situation where:

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[130] Jenkins, 'Why did Ganelon Hate Roland?', in <u>MLA</u>. Vol. 36, No. 2, (June 1921), p. 121.

a) Ganelon will be dishonoured if he refuses to accept the king's mission and is replaced by Roland[131]. In this case, Roland will be allowed to continue in his subjectivizing process (warring against the enemies of God) while Ganelon will be contained in his potential process.

b) Ganelon risks certain death if he accepts the king's mission given the prior treachery of the Saracens[132]. It is interesting to note that this death would allow Ganelon to continue his subjectivizing process since: i) he would, in a sense be dying in "combat" against the enemies of God. ii) his fateful mission would, as with Basan and Basil[133], allow him to be remembered by the collective body of the Franks, and, most likely, would also guarantee him transcendent immortality. That Ganelon does not consider these possibilities undoubtedly says something about his devotion to the Frankish/Christian cause.

What we should retain is that Roland's designation of Ganelon is itself an insult to him as a subject. Roland seems to be condemning the subject-Ganelon to certain death as one of the Franks who should not benefit from the king's protection. As Robert Hall has stated, the context within which Roland's designation is situated further demonstrates his undermining of Ganelon's subjective honor:

> *As shown by the fate of Basan and Basile on an earlier mission (verses 207-13), this*
>
> *mission is so dangerous as to be almost certainly fatal; consequently Charlemagne is*
>
> *absolutely unwilling to sacrifice any of his best men, and rejects their offers to go, with*
>
> *such emphasis that his reason should be evident to all (verses 244-73). The resultant*

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[131] That such a substitution would be seen as a violation of status and honour is suggested by Ganelon himself when he responds to Roland's suggestion : "Guenes respunt : Pur mei n'iras tu mie!/ Tu n'ies mes hom ne jo ne sui tis sire". Verses 298-299.
[132] See verses 201-209.
[133] See verses 205-209.

implication is that anyone chosen for this mission must necessarily be of second rank, and clearly "expendable".[134]

This undermining of Ganelon's subjectivity is compounded further when Roland proceeds to publicly insult him by treating him as a fool in turn[135]. Once again, this is clearly a means of devaluing his subjective worth.

I would suggest that the best way to understand the goings-on between Roland and Ganelon is to recognize that, in both cases, we are confronted with situations in which a subject deems that some slight has been made to their sense of honour, and therefore, to themselves. In other words, one injury to the subject necessitates a return of injury, a correction or punishment of some kind. Any offense made against one's honour must be revenged[136]. It is no exaggeration to say that the entire first part of the poem, leading up to the fateful first battle between Roland's forces and those of the Saracen king, is driven by subjects who are motivated by this "vengeance" motif. Ganelon, before leaving for the enemy's camp, warns his fellow Franks that the insult that has been made against him will be paid in full. He, as a subject, vows to return, and he, as a subject, vows to exact revenge against Roland. Ganelon has every intention of seeking vengeance, and getting vengeance. This emphasis on "vengeance" in the "Chanson de Roland" allows us to further highlight the existence of this sense of subjectivity in the characters. For subjects' sense that something is menacing, that something or someone is threatening their subjectivizing process, that is to say, their way of life and their very life itself. This subjective need for vengeance is expressed in the following verses:

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[134] Robert A. Hall Jr., 'Ganelon and Roland' in <u>Modern Language Quarterly.</u> Vol 6., No. 3, Sept. 1945, p. 264.

[135] Verses 277-279; 292-295.

[136] This type of logic, or need for "reparations" contributed to the extreme violence of the medieval period, and effectively countered the ideal of tolerance and forgiveness promulgated by the Church. As Huizinga has noted: "In the blind passion with which people followed their lord or their party, the unshakeable sentiment of right, characteristic of the Middle Ages, is trying to find expression. Man at that time is convinced that right is absolutely fixed and certain. Justice should prosecute the unjust everywhere and to the end. Reparation and retribution have to be extreme, and assume the character of revenge." Huizinga, <u>The Waning of the Middle Ages</u>, p. 22.

"Se Deus ço dunet que jo de la repaire,

Jo t'en muvrai[137] *une si grant contraire*

Ki durerat a trestut tun edage[138]*" ;*

' Einz i ferai un poi de legerie

Que jo n'esclair ceste meie grant ire' [139].

As this passage demonstrates, there is a degree of vengeful antagonism between Ganelon and Roland. These two different subjects, with different ways of viewing how best to continue being subjects, with all that this involves, are at loggerheads. Ganelon feels that he has been injured by Roland, and, furthermore, he, Ganelon, desires to seek vengeance against another man, Roland. The presence of this dynamic in the poem should lead us to believe that the characters have at least a modicum of interiority and subjectivity. Clearly, they care and question their own existence as subjects. This is the case because the characters live, and respond, in a world where relationships, although clannish and ritualized, are nonetheless experienced on a subjective plane that serves to motivate their actions and responses to one another.

The subjectivity of these responses and actions is further enhanced if we remember that vengeance is not simply an instinctive response, nor is it simply an animalistic reflex. Might it be said that vengeance is irrational or blind? One could argue that it is morally unworthy of being enacted, or consequentially pointless since it does not bring about the desired results, given that, in this society, it merely fuels a greater blood fuel (after all, Ganelon does get his "just

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[137] The emphasis is mine. Clearly, we see how Ganelon, the person, needs to secure punishment or vengeance on the person of Roland.
[138] Verses 289-291.
[139] Verses 300-301. Once again, we find here an expression of the need to vent and satisfy one's sense of injury against another.

dessert" in the end). But I think it would be inappropriate to categorize vengeance as innately

irrational. As Jacques Poulain has asserted:

> *Or cette image d'un homme luttant contre ses désirs et leur irrationalité est la plus*
> *grande des injustices. Car l'homme pense nécessairement vraies les propositions par*
> *lesquelles il fait apparaître à ses yeux et aux yeux d'autrui ses perceptions, actions,*
> *désirs et paroles. En ce sens, le rapport au désir est, en son fond, rationnel et non*
> *irrationnel.*[140]

This rationalizing process is precisely what we find in the "Chanson de Roland", where

Ganelon's vengeance is a drawn out affair, a carefully prepared staging wherein a complicated

plot is hatched between differing parties, requiring duplicity, negotiation, and the highest degree

of *mise en scène.* We see this when we understand that Ganelon's vengeance requires

    i-   A series of "discovering" discussions with Blancandrin.

    ii- A risqué presentation of Charlemagne's offer to Marsile.

    iii- Marsile's indignant response.

    iv- Blancandrin's intervention.

    v-   A reconciliation between Ganelon and Marsile.

    vi- The conclusion of a "blood oath".

    vii- The ceremonial giving of gifts, and Ganelon's deceitful return to the Frankish camps

        wherein he designates Roland to lead the rearguard.

All of this plotting, deceiving, rationalizing suggests a complicated (de)subjectivizing

process. The desire for vengeance, the staging put into place by Ganelon, shows that there is a

subject, aware of himself and of others, who is striving towards something which it intends. In

Ganelon's case, what is intended is the death of Roland. Ganelon, in his dealing with the

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[140] Poulain, 'Horizons-débats', in <u>Le monde</u>, dimanche 26-lundi 27 mars, 1995, p. 12.

Saracens, asserts that Roland's presence is a threat for the Franks since he is likely to lead them into foolhardy endeavours[141]. Yet, aside from Ganelon, none of the other Franks see Roland's death as a necessary means for obtaining peace. There is only one subject who plots to have Roland done away with: Ganelon. There is only one subject for whom Roland's presence is perceived as a threat against the collective subjectivizing process of the Franks: Ganelon. Ganelon's reaction to Roland must therefore be understood as unique, as subjectivizing the character Ganelon in a way that distinguishes him from all the other Franks. Certainly others imagine other means for establishing peace between the two sides[142]. Yet, it is his desire for vengeance which distinguishes Ganelon from the other Frankish subjects, and this desire for vengeance demonstrates a unique way of striving towards some intended goal, which, in turn, signifies the extent to which his subjectivity is contrasted to the greater world by this very degree of intentionality. These are not poetic characters which are merely driven by cosmological or cultural forces. These are characters which act, react, plot, and are willing to die as subjects, conscious of themselves and their relationship to Truths and manner of beings to which, alone, they can remain faithful or betray.

Consequently, we can describe vengeance as a subjective response provoked by a sense that one has been slighted, and that the slight, since it has not been corrected (or is not being corrected) by any collective body (government or kingship), must be made right through the exercise of a particular will. Such an understanding of how "vengeance" calls into being a sense of subjectivity, allows us to state that there is just such a dynamic in the "Chanson de Roland", where several subjects are playing themselves out. The subject that pines for glory and worries about his temporal immortality, is also the subject that frets over having been wronged while

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[141] See verses 544-549; 557-562; 580-600.
[142] Most notably, the duke of Naimes. See verses 230-243.

plotting a way to even things out. In both cases, you have a worry, a very real concern for the subject.

I would argue that what is being evidenced in the "Chanson de Roland" is a case in which the importance of one's "facticity", as a means of understanding the socio-culturally contingent circumstances or facts of an individual life[143], is being taken up by characters such as Roland and Ganelon, who choose just how such elements will be correlated, as well as the meaning these circumstances will have for them. In consequence, I think that it would be mistaken to assume that the characters (Roland especially) in the "Chanson de Roland" are merely instantiations of character "types"[144], or passively reflect and repeat the patterns of signification or importance that are relevant to their epoch and place. Unlike the Saracens, the poem goes to great lengths to demonstrate that the Christian heroes choose and manoeuver. They do not act *en masse*[145], thereby suggesting that they are not simply instantiations of a collective "group-think". Saracen culture, in its opposition to Christian culture, represents a world in which it is true that within the social framework, there is the potential for a mode of patterned behaviour, wherein, the existence of a specific individual as an ensemble of means and actions is nothing more than the inauthentic *mimesis* of the essence of the community or epoch. A character, a "subject" acts like everyone else, repeats the same patterns of speech (or, as is the case in the "Chanson de Roland's" portrayal of the Saracens, they all talk as one at the same time), of thought, and desires. This is undoubtedly part of the reason why the poem refuses to acknowledge any kind of Saracen authenticity or subjectivity. Within this patterned subjectivity, roles and attitudes bear no mark

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[143] In other words, whether Roland is born in the "now" of the text as opposed to a previous generation or a future, whether or not he is the nephew of Charles or not, the friend of Olivier or not, the fiancé or Aude or not, all of these textually important elements are nonetheless historically and narratively contingent, the whims of either history, or the author's passing fancy.

[144] Sarah Kay, among others, neatly divides the poem in terms of thinking character types (Ganelon, Olivier), and physical types (Roland). See, Kay, 'Ethics and Heroics in the *Song of Roland*', Neophilologus. 62:4, October 1978.

[145] As we shall see in chapters 11-14.

of their own intentional or purposive activity, but are the impositions of their class and other material conditions.

If we take the poem's ideology seriously, we must admit that the Saracen social context is apt to create a situation wherein facticity becomes binding, and any hope for the appearance of subjectivity is laid waste since the "one" comes to be interchangeable with any and all others. This means that the subject, speaking in unison with all-others, acting in unison with all-others, becomes a "they-self"[146]. The poem certainly tries to demonize and dehumanize the Saracens in just such a manner. However, I believe that such an accusation cannot be leveled against the "Chanson de Roland's" portrayal of its Christian protagonists. The poem never suggests that social constraints and concepts (such as the notion of glory) are a type of *habitus* to any of the central characters. In fact, I would propose that the text motivates an understanding in which glory (or treason) is freely chosen, and motivated by personal, subjective concerns and interests. The poem promulgates the idea of free choice, and of actions that are freely chosen.

Perhaps this should come as no surprise given the poem's stated theological colouring. The Christian underpinning of the poem should certainly lead us to consider such an emphasis. Likewise, to suggest that such considerations are present in a poem that is so decidedly pro-Christian in its orientation is not a stretch of the imagination. We should remember that Augustine's theology was one of the predominant schools of thought during the early middle ages. The Augustinian view stresses the centrality of a subjectivizing process, articulated

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[146] This is one of the dangers that Heidegger is pointing to when he articulates the potential inauthenticity of a Dasein that conforms itself to modes of universality: "Thus the particular Dasein in its everydayness is disburdened by the "they". Not only that; by thus disburdening it of its Being, the "they" accommodates Dasein if Dasein has any tendency to take things easily and make them easy. And because the "they" constantly accommodates the particular Dasein by disburdening it of its Being, the "they" retains and enhances its stubborn dominion. Everyone is the other, and no one is himself. The "they", which supplies the answer to the question of the "who" of everyday Dasein, is the "nobody" to whom every Dasein has already surrendered itself in Being-among-one-other". Heidegger, Being and Time. p. 165-166.

around the notion of responsibility, since it highlights the practical relationship that any given man had to both himself, and towards any actions that he might commit[147]. As Linwood Urban has stated:

> *When St. Augustine was first converted to Christianity, he believed that human beings had free will and thus were responsible for their deeds. He also believed in God's foreknowledge of every future event, including all human actions; but he saw no conflict between human freedom and God's precognition[148].*

Human beings are clearly free to choose. By choosing, they also choose the type of subject they are to become. In the Augustinian model, the recognition of a Truth (God's existence, and God's existence as an omniscient being), serves as a kind of template with which to measure and respond to the potential choices. Yet such a Truth does not bind or impede action. A subject can choose to turn towards righteous action, or to turn away from righteous action. In other words, a subject chooses his manner of subjectivizing by choosing the manner in which he will remain or resist becoming subject to God. The early Church, and the medieval world that the Church helped to shape, was profoundly influenced by this Augustinian model. The manner in which the different Christian protagonists act is the trace of this conception in the "Chanson de Roland".

That Christians are *dreit* is to be understood both as a modal statement, and a comment on the just how the Christian protagonists view the subjectivizing process. Over and over again, we see that a hero chooses what he shall be by choosing his "environmental alliances". The character moulds his own character by his choice of friends, allegiances, actions, occupations, or

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[147] "When I chose to do something or not to do it, I was quite certain that it was my own self, and not some other person, who made this act of will, so that I was on the point of understanding that herein lay the cause of my sin". Augustine, Confessions. 1961, p. 136.

[148] Linwood Urban, A Short History of Christian Thought. Revised and expanded edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995, p. 181.

amusements.   The existence of multiple conflicts within the text, the divergent paths through which subjectivity appears in the different characters, paths as varied as treason (Ganelon), wisdom (Olivier), hesitation[149], or dashing prowess[150] all suggest that, inasmuch as the characters are concerned, their actions, desires, and beliefs are potentially expressive of, but **not** subsumed by, their class background and historical milieu, since these "environmental alliances" are ultimately signified and decided upon by themselves. Living for the Truth to which they adhere, having turned towards God and having recognized that the continuity of one's subjectivity is best manifested there, the faithfulness expressed by a given character necessarily involves the presencing of determinates/conditionalities that are formative of the identity this subject puts into play. What is at play are such things as:

i-   Markings such as relics[151]

ii-   Sites and spaces cordoned off for their Christian specificity. One need only think of the pilgrimage sites indicated and constructed in the text.[152]

iii- Codes such as the songs of repute and other "gestes" that are referred to in the poem.[153]

iv- Rituals (prayers and masses in which the heroes participate[154])

v-   The theophanic irruptions of which the Christian protagonists are both witnesses and participants[155].

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[149] One need only think of those multiple scenes in wish Charles seems to dither or be uncertain as to what course of action he should adopt. One could also include those scenes where Charles, having received a dream-vision, omits to commit himself to any action that might have negated the tragedy.

[150] Prowess being the very word with which Olivier describes Roland's actions. See verse 1731.

[151] Roland's sword is described thusely : « En l'oriét punt asez i ad reliques/ La dent seint Perre e del sanc seint Basilie/ E des chevels mun seignor seint Denise/ Del vestement i ad seinte Marie ». Verses 2345-2348. See also verses 2962-2969.

[152] See verses 3684-3694.

[153] See verses 2095-2098.

[154] See verses 667-670; 1124-1138; 2200-2205; 2445-2450.

[155] See verses 1420-1437; 2451-2459; 3992-3998.

All of these elements demonstrate that these characters choose freely, signify aspects of their world, create a cultural identity for themselves and their community because they act freely, and represent distinct subjectivities.

The conflict between Roland and Olivier is another example of how differences in the subjectivizing process enter the poem. Many commentators have insisted on the fact that the two characters are categorized differently. Such a difference between the two men has even become a well-worn trope best expressed in the very terms put forth by the poem itself: *Rollant est proz e Oliver est sage*[156]. (Roland is brave and Olivier is wise). Simply put, the two men have varying conceptions of honour and knightly duty. In laisse 81, for instance, Olivier has just witnessed the immense size of the Saracen army, and, alarmed by the potential slaughter that may befall the rear guard of Charlemagne's army, he asks Roland to blow the Oliphant in order to secure some reinforcements. Roland refuses. His refusal stems from the fact that, unlike Olivier who believes that securing reinforcements would be a wise decision that would avoid the senseless slaughter of so many worthy men[157], Roland feels that such a gesture would be dishonourable[158]. A dishonour stemming from Roland's initial assertion to the king that nothing would happen to his rear guard[159]. Roland had assured the king that no harm would come to his army as long as he (Roland) was present. The subject-Roland is assuring the king that he will

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[156] Verse 1093.

[157] This is, in essence, what Olivier is attempting to communicate to Roland in lay 87: "Rollant, vëez en alques!/ Cist nus sunt prés, mais trop nus est loinz Carles/ Vostre olifan, suner vos ne l' desgnastes;/ Fust li reis, n'i oüssum damage/ Guardez amunt ça devers les porz d'Aspre:/ Vëeir poëz dolente rereguarde;/ Ki ceste fait, jamais n'en ferat altre". Verses 1099-1105.

  It is also the meaning of his later accusation against Roland in lay 131 : "Cumpainz, vos forsfeïstes/ Kar vassalage par sens ne nest folie:/ Mielz valt mesure que ne fait estultie/ Franceis sunt morz par vostre legerie;/ Jamais Karlon de nus n'avrat servise/ Se m' creïsez, venuz i fust mi sire;/ Ceste bataille oüssum ja fenie/ U pris u mort i fust li reis Marsilie/ Vostre proëcce, Rollant, mar la veïmes!/ Karles li magnes de nos n'avrat aïe/ N'ert mais tel home entresqu'al Deu juïse/ Vos i murrez, e France en ert hunie". Verses 1723-1734.

[158] Roland responds to Olivier in the following terms: "Jo ferie que fols!/ En dulce France en perdreie mun los/ Sempres ferrai de Durendal granz colps;/ Sanglant en ert li branz entresqu'a l'or/ Felun paien mar I vindrent as porz:/ Jo vos pelvis, tuz sunt jugez a mort". Verses, 1053-1058.

[159] Verses 755-759.

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signify any potential battle, rather than merely suffer a battle to befall him[160]. Consequently, blowing the Oliphant would signal a disavowal of his prior statements. It would also indicate that Roland no longer shares the unbridled confidence he had in himself when he had sworn his oath before the king. In terms of bravado or martial prowess, there would be a lessening in the manner in which his subjectivity would be viewed, by himself and others[161]. By blowing the Oliphant, Roland would be expressing, in front of all of his peers, that contrary to what he had previously said, he is in fact incapable of assuring the direction/protection of the rear guard, and furthermore, that his inability is commensurate to his necessitating outside help. Roland would be abdicating his freely chosen decision to risk his life by faithfully fighting the Saracen enemy. Consequently, he would also be abdicating, or modifying, the subjectivizing process involved in such faithfulness to fighting God's enemies.

It seems that the tension between the two men is also indicative of a distinction in perception as to how best to maintain/continue the subjectivizing process of faithfulness to Lord and God. Roland's *modus operandi* as a knight is to become-glorious, whereas Olivier's *modus operandi* is to act with reasoned caution. Both men are reacting differently with respect to values of a shared community, and with respect to a shared context. Both men are participating in the same situation, yet acting differently, according to subjective constructs, and thereby, proposing different codes (or meanings to the codes), spaces, and rituals. This difference in the modes of reacting towards a shared situation suggests that these characters are not identical to one another. They are not cut from the same narrative cloth. These are discretely different[162], and differing, subjects which look on the events of their world as a locus of meanings and

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[160] See verses 787-791.
[161] See verses 1049-1058.
[162] The poem is discrete in that, the interiority of the characters is indicated by their purposive manner of acting, wherein the discretion of their subjectivity (their "hidden" inner sphere) is made manifest. Consequently, these actions are not broad brushed "types", but particularized forms of becoming, exclusive to each of the characters.

possibilities by reference to which they can understand themselves and their relationship to that world. Roland does not view a massed enemy in the same fashion as Olivier. They both perceive a situation differently, and act/react differently to that situation. Once again, confronted by the same facts, these facts are organized/reorganized[163] in such a way that they now serve differing purposes and goals: for Olivier, the best manner to proceed and continue being, is to engage in a reasoned and strategic deployment of forces; for Roland, the best manner involves an idealized adventure. In this precise military situation, two subjectivities factor into how the material world is signified. The subject-Roland lives by symbols and images that are not the same as those of the subject-Olivier. For both, the immediate world in which they live is constituted by their subjectivizing process, by the drives and forces to which they adhere, such that what they perceive, and what they choose to live out, is a life-world, overlaid on the situation, saturated with order, meaning, and value that is projected by the subject. In other words, we have two Augustinian subjects who freely choose to act in different manners. These are not characters which look upon the events unfolding in front of them as neutral domains of facts, or mere contingently correlated elements that can be traced into an ever expanding, rigidly determined meta-narrative. Their world is a world in which subjectivity is possible and possibilized, it is an open world[164].

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[163] If Roland reacts differently from Olivier when confronted by the news of the Saracen army's advance towards the rearguard, it is because the facts of the situation (the numbers involved, the combat ground, the logistics etc…) have been reorganized in such a way as to suggest a different meaning.

[164] Georg Lukàcs's literary criticism had long ago proposed that medieval Christian literature was paradoxical given its presentation of a systematically closed world, understood by theology, yet nonetheless open given its soteriological orientation: "Et, chez Giotto et Dante, chez Wolfram d'Eschenbach et Pisano, chez saint Thomas et saint François, le monde redevient une circonférence accomplie, une totalité saisissable d'un seul regard. … Le cri d'appel au salut devient dissonance dans le parfait système rythmique du monde et permet la constitution d'un nouvel équilibre non moins coloré et non moins achevé que l'équilibre grec; celui des intensités inadéquates et hétérogènes. Le caractère insaisissable, éternellement inaccessible du monde racheté est rapproché jusqu'à un éloignement visible. Le Jugement Dernier devient réalité présente et ne constitue plus qu'un élément dans l'harmonie des sphères conçues comme déjà réalisées. Il fait oublier sa véritable nature qui exige que le monde soit frappé comme Philoctète d'une blessure empoisonnée que seul peut guérir le Paraclet". Lukàcs, La théorie du

Roland and Olivier both know that something must be done, they both "intuit" some knowledge of the situation, but the difference separating them is not epistemological. It is "existential" since their quarrel centers on how they as subjects must act, on how their response to the Saracens is "to-be" done. Olivier prefers a more practical approach, whereas Roland perceives, imagines, and chooses to live out the situation ideally, with a notion of glory and immortality. Indeed the Roland/Olivier dichotomy allows us to understand that there is a relationship between a situation and subject's continuity[165].

For instance, Olivier's repeated requests for reinforcement[166] can be interpreted philosophically: the proper manner to act/react in a situation (the manner best allowing for the continued process of subjectivizing) is to place oneself in a dynamic connection that cannot be reduced to abstract terms. Simply put, Olivier is stating that Roland is not taking the situation seriously, that he is not interpreting the facts correctly. His interpretation of the situation is being colored, or distorted, by his vanity, his idealized notion of a warrior's glorious death for Lord and God. It is the "concreteness" of having to choose how a subject will respond in a situation, as opposed to the abstractness of a notion, which is at the heart of the quarrel between Roland and Olivier. His reproach is that Roland has sacrificed the lives of his men, of real living subjects, to fulfill his own sense of personal honor or glory and immortality[167]. Roland, in the mind of Olivier, is overemphasizing his subjectivity against that of the other Franks. For Olivier,

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roman. Traduit de l'allemand par Jean Clairevoye, et suivi de 'Introduction aux premiers écrits de Georg Lukàcs' par Lucien Goldmann, collection "Tel", Gallimard, Paris, 1968, p. 29.

[165] "And even when Dasein explicitly addresses itself as "I here", this locative personal designation must be understood in terms of Dasein's existential spatiality. In interpreting this we have already intimated that this "I-here" (sic) does not mean a certain privileged point –that of an I-thing- but is to be understood as Being-in in terms of the "yonder" of the world that is ready-to-hand- the "yonder" which is the dwelling-place of Dasein as *concern"*. Heidegger, Being and Time. p. 155.

[166] See verses 1005-1086.

[167] "Cumpainz, vos forsfeïstes,/ Kar vasselage par sens nen est folie:/ Mielz valt mesure que ne fait estultie ". Verses 1723-1725.

the existence of others (and the respect afforded these other subjects) is primordial (as is their continued service to Charlemagne as a continued process of subjectivizing), whereas honor/immortality for itself is an abstract notion. The reverse is the case for Roland, inasmuch as a life lived without honor (without the kind of immortality that allows for another form of subjective continuity) is unworthy of consideration. Consequently, as far as he is concerned, it is better to die, honorably, than to continue living[168].

If we recognize that, each in his own way, Roland and Olivier are developing and defending a sense of subjectivity that is to be defined dynamically in relation to a sphere of values, we must recognize that their participation in the battle, as well as their self-positioning with respect to the battle, involves a very specific mode of subjective participation. Participation as the practical relationship between real, determinate, distinct subjects which, despite the relationship, remain distinct. I believe that this subjective distinction is precisely what the poem is hinting at by having Roland and Olivier argue and quarrel.

> *Vostre proëcce, Rollant, mar la veïmes!*
>
> *Karles li magnes de nos n'avrat aïe-*
>
> *N'ert mais tel home entresqu'al Deu juïse-*
>
> *Vos i murrez, e France en ert hunie.*
>
> *Oi nus defalt la leial cumpaignie :*
>
> *Einz l'avesprer ert gref la departie.[169]*

Their argument, their quarrelling suggests that there is a very strong personal investment in their vision of the situation, and their approach to what may be considered proper action and the best manner of living/dying. These two men do not agree as to the proper way of remaining

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[168] "Melz voeill murir qu'a huntage remaigne". Verse 1091.
[169] Verses 1731-1736.

faithful to Lord and God. Their disagreement is not with regards to the Truth itself (both are Christians, both are willing to fight, and die if need be, for Lord and God), but to its application. Quarrelling, it should be remembered, can only arise in a field of differences contesting one another. A static world of absolute identity knows no quarrels. That these two best friends could quarrel leads us to believe that for Roland, as for Olivier, subjectivity implies differentiation from those around us.

We can see that, for both Roland and Olivier, being placed before a situation is not merely to occupy a location. Rather, it supposes the mobilization of values and subjective involvement. To be somewhere, to act or respond differently to a given situation implies that each subject is incomplete and inconsistent, and in need of developing further possibilities through a relationship with all the otherness to be found in the world. It involves an act of decision, different in each case, since both characters must decide to be with a valued response, or not to be with a valued response. Both Roland and Olivier, faced with the same situation, must differently decide to enter in communion with the values proposed (in this case, those values proposed by Roland's leadership; values against which Olivier rebels, in part), or to pull back in separation (a separation at least partly indicated by Olivier's temporary withdrawal from his friendship with Roland[170]), to identify with a subjectivizing process, or to take the position of detachment. The development of any and of all of these possibilities requires an active receptivity that involves both undergoing and outgiving, that is to say, an active giving and opening of the subject to "others".

In choosing to act, or to respond in different manners to the situation unfolding, both Roland and Olivier have chosen to live their lives differently, to subjectivize in their world in a manner that distinguishes each from the other. This distinction is made manifest in their heated

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[170] The two friends will, of course, be reunited later in the poem. See verses 1989-2009.

exchange and argument. It is one thing to be inculcated a set of values, or to have values, it is another to exercise them in a varied set of circumstances.   Both of these men are facing death, and therefore, both men are reacting differently to the context of their potential demise. Faced with the potential negation of their subjectivity, one could argue that Roland fetishizes immortality (Transcendent and temporal-cultural) in a manner that is not shared by Olivier. I believe that it would be appropriate to state that their differing as to the appropriate response is a difference in *Sorge*.   The quarrel between Roland and Olivier (both of whom are members of the same class and society, both of whom are equally educated in a warrior code), essentially revolves around a consideration of the right course of action when faced with the potential onslaught from the Saracens. Both men disagree as to how best to care for the continuity of their respective subjectivities. That a divergence could arise between these two very similar men clearly highlights the openness of their lives and context.

Roland and Olivier *are* different by appropriating different motivations, inclinations, and subjective projects. This also suggests, once more, that the concept with which we must deal with when reading these characters, is that of "subjectivity". For it would seem, at least to some degree, that, regardless of the communal *ethos* with which these characters may have been inculcated, regardless of the importance of glory as an external determinant of individual value, there is in fact a process, however ambiguous or confused, of "subjectivization" going on here. Foucault has indicated just how this process was deployed in ancient civilizations:

> *The few great common laws – of the city, religion, nature –remained present, but it was as if they traced a very wide circle in the distance, inside of which practical thought had to define what could rightfully be done. … Therefore, in this form of morality, the individual did not make himself into an ethical subject by universalizing the principles*

that informed his action; on the contrary, he did so by means of an attitude and a quest

that individualized his action, modulated it, and perhaps even gave him a special

brilliance by virtue of the rational and deliberate structure his action manifested.[171]

These "attitudes" Foucault mentions, these different modes of "questing" and definitions of what is rightfully to be done, are indeed some of the strongest narrative elements of the poem. Over and over again, individual characteristic traits pop up and conflict with those of other characters. Over and over again, different subjectivizing processes conflict with one another within the same Truth horizon. All the Christian characters agree as to their faithfulness to Lord and God, yet they vary in their responses and actualizations of that faithfulness.

The differing interpretations, given for instance by Ganelon (when he counsels accepting the Saracen offer[172]), by the duke of Naimes (when he suggests that the Franks should extend mercy to the Saracens[173]), by Turpin (both in his counsel to the king[174], as well as throughout the poem), by Roland, and by Olivier about the course of action that should be pursued undermines any assumption that one could have that the "Chanson de Roland" contains a singular meaning as to its characters view of what is involved in pursuing faithfulness to a Truth. The quarrels, which are interpretations competing as to the meaning of the actions to be undertaken, show something necessarily true about the world these subjects live in: that any world where there are multiple subjectivities can always be doubled, and what is interpreted and acted upon from a multiplicity of perspectives undermines the notion that there is an absolute facticity, a communally determined code that furnishes the one and original meaning as to how subjects act, to their moral fibre, or the manner in which they continue to be.

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[171] Foucault, <u>The Use of Pleasure.</u> Translated by R. Hurley, Pantheon, New York, 1985, p. 62.
[172] See verses 220-229.
[173] See verses 230-243.
[174] See verses 264-274.

As a subject acting/reacting to the situation that is his society, capable of choice and action, he transforms the elements of his facticity into meanings and possibilities, into projects, projections, and a worldview which can be rightly said to symbolize or represent *his* situation. For the world of his actions, and his death as a possibility of his acting determinedly in the world, is now a form of organization. It is a world not merely inherited from the community, not merely abstractly signified by the rigidity of social mores, roles, and societal statuses, but rather, a world that has *become* a meaningful totality from the viewpoint of the subject's undertaking this procedural transformation. Roland, for instance, lives in the situation that he has structured, the situation of ultimate conflict and ultimate death at Roncevaux, all of which is a world of his own making, a world highlighted and highlighting his own subjectivity, for this is a world which exists as it is for him, by the meaning he has chosen to give to the facts of his life and by the projects he has chosen for his future.

10. COMPLEX THEOLOGY IN THE *CHANSON DE ROLAND*

We must recall that Roland's plea to his fellow Franks involves two dimensions. On the one hand, there is a call to heroic action. Warriors must not turn away from combat and the risk of death that it entails. On the other hand, Roland's statement implies that there is a very marked moral division of the world into Christian and Saracens, into moral goodness and moral evil. There *is* right, and there *is* wrong. Christians *are* right, and pagans *are* wrong. This brutal dichotomy is undoubtedly what most impresses itself in the minds of modern readers, unaccustomed to such neat and politically incorrect divisions.

That right and wrong may be said to exist, that the world may be said to be neatly divided into two different spheres of being, or moral orders, supposes that Roland's statement, for all its apparent simplicity, actually presents the reader with an elaborate network of beliefs. Roland's statement presents the reader with a worldview wherein fundamental questions of essence (what *is* right or what *is* wrong) are interrelated to modes of subjectivizing. The subjectivizing aspect of Roland's comment is made manifest when we remember that the text is asserting that *the* Christians *are* right, and that *the* Saracens *are* wrong. If we give ourselves the trouble to sketch out the poem's mode of philosophical thinking, we quickly realize that the concept of intersubjectivity, of a fusion of horizons, necessarily involves violence in connection to the "other". Roland's view of just how the world is organized, with its well-established cultural/moral boundaries and borders, clearly tells us that his is a world in which dialogue with

any "other", if it is to be even conceived, must be conceived as eristic. The "Chanson de Roland" is not interested in characterizing its protagonists as helping each other to see their partiality, or the blindness of their own insights. The narrative thrust of the poem is antithetical to the very idea that antagonists might have something to offer one another[175], nor is there any idea that the two sides might arrive at some mutually satisfactory common understanding. The "Chanson de Roland" is a poem of conquest, and the point of any cultural/moral dialogue is obviously to hold a position against another, and more importantly, to have that position triumph against another. Intersubjective encounters are therefore characterized by authoritative speech, as opposed to listening. One subject comes to dominate, or annihilate another character.

It is from within this antagonistic framework that we must analyze Roland. Roland's simplistic ideas, his already matured opinions and beliefs, which do not evolve or change from the beginning of the text to his end, never open themselves to partnerships whose horizons might differ from his own. Whereas our own understanding of dialogue as a form of hermeneutics involving our subjectivity would imply change, progress, or transformation since the very act of dialoguing serves to open the partners to mutual understanding and recognition[176], the view of the world that Roland seems to be defending is counter-intuitive to our own modern understanding.

For Roland, any dialogue does not evolve or *become* in the space between the opposing sides. Space is something to be colonized, inhabited, and freed from any unwelcome subjectivities. The space separating two positions, two cultures or subjectivizing processes is

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[175] If anything, offers, especially those made by Saracens, are to be distrusted. This is suggested by Roland when recounting the previous Saracen offers made to Charlemagne (see verses 201-209), as well as by the poem itself, since it essentially presents a tragedy that is brought about by having, foolishly, accepted a Saracen offer.

[176] As Gadamer has suggested, in situations where there is an authentic degree of dialogue and recognition between the people engaging in an encounter, "something different comes to be". Gadamer, Philosophical Hermeneutics. Translated and edited by David E. Linge, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1976, p. 58.

reserved for conflict and violent clashes. The horizon for an intersubjective encounter is quickly transformed into a battlefield[177]. Consequently, space does not give rise to exchange or any cultural ebb and flow, rather it is reserved for the formulaic insults that heroes hurl at one another before and after battle. Insults repudiate the notion of dialogue. The insults demonize the "other". The insults, ultimately, repeat and reinforce what is already believed, what is already seen to be crucial about one's own worldview. The space, or battlefield, where opposing armies collide merely serves to repeat and reinforce the very prejudices that the heroes have fashioned into personal mantras and credos[178]. The space where the two sides encounter one another becomes the site for a hardening of beliefs.

We have already seen that, for Roland at least, the very idea that any dialogue or *entente* should be entertained with the Saracens is anathema. Charlemagne, if he were to listen to Roland's counsel, should simply reject any and all Saracen proposals. In other words, Charlemagne should not **listen** to the Saracens. It would be hard to imagine a stronger rejection of dialogue. Roland's refusal to dialogue is further hardened when he is initially confronted by the Saracen army. He never once conceives of the possibility of negotiating with the enemy. Throughout the battle, he retains and repeats his hostility to any notion of compromise or dialogue with those who, as Saracens, embody *tort*. And this pattern of the hardening of his beliefs, of his refusal to dialogue while reinforcing his one-sided beliefs is repeated throughout the text. For instance, when Samson is killed and the Frankish position is shown to have been

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[177] Some commentators have seen the spatial element as predominant in their interpretation of the text, since the entire poem can be viewed as a struggle about spaces, about occupying spaces, about equating one's personal valour in terms of conquered spaces. Space is the scene for one's being/becoming to be inscribed. "*Roland*, in many ways, is about space –how to defend it; how to conquer it- and surely no one would read the poem without realizing that France, Spain, Saragossa, and Roncevaux are important to its interpretation". Molly Robinson Kelly, The Hero's Place. Medieval Literary Traditions of Space and Belonging. The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C., 2009, p. 118.

[178] If Roland begins the battle by stating that Christians are right, and Saracens are wrong, this primary statement gets reinforced/repeated during the battle when he also says : "Après il dist: Culvert, mar I moüstes!/ De Mahumet ja n'I avrez aiüde/ Par tel glutun n'ert bataille oi vencue". Verses 1335-1337.

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weakened, Roland reacts to this death, not by rethinking the very modalities or necessities of war and the suffering that it engenders, but by hardening his dichotomous pre-understanding of the world, and of the actions that this pre-understanding motivate.

> *Li quens Rollant, quant il veit Sansun mort,*
>
> *Podez saveir que mult grant doel en out :*
>
> *Sun ceval brochet, si li curt ad esforz,*
>
> *Tient Durendal qui plus valt que fin or ;*
>
> *Vait le ferir li bers quanquë il pout*
>
> *Desur sun elme ki gemmét fut ad or :*
>
> *Trenchet la teste e la bronie e le cors,*
>
> *La bone sele ki est gemme ad or,*
>
> *E al cheval parfundement le dos;*
>
> *Ambure ocit, ki que l'blasme ne qui l' lot.*
>
> *Dïent paien : 'Cist colp nus est mult fort!'*
>
> *Respont Rollant :* **'Ne pois amer les voz;**
>
> ***Devers vos est li orguilz e li torz* '**[179]**.**

What we see in Roland's response is a patterning of his prior belief that Christians are right (and therefore virtuous), whereas Saracens are wrong, and thereby *orguilz* and *torz*. We also see that his repeated encounters with the Saracens continuously up the ante in terms of the violence that must be handed out. For Roland, any encounter with the "other" serves to create a greater degree of animosity or hate, as his very words suggest. His brand of incendiary dialogue emanates in his hardened beliefs, and nothing new is generated in the exchange with an "other", since encounters only serve to reinforce a one-sided pre-understanding. We must remember that

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[179] Verses 1537-1549. The emphasis is mine.

a hardening of beliefs cannot merely be a passive enterprise. For those beliefs that are handed down to us, must be inherited, cherished, refined, and continuously reaffirmed, thereby giving them, through ourselves, renewed focus and existence. The hardening of beliefs is, indeed, a work or personalization. Despite the repulsion we may have for such a narrow vision of dialogue, it certainly does have philosophical characteristics. Roland, for instance, is motivated by the dynamics of hostility. In his view of the world, exchange means that others must lose themselves in the Franks' politics of exchange, dying or converting, their subjectivity disappearing into the collective body of the Christian self.

Such a view is dependent upon a world that is divided neatly between good and bad, precisely because it is an ordered world. It is a world of violent passions and domination. Philosophically, this implies that where authentic dialogue is absent, there is a concomitant desire to dominate and annihilate others. This is why Roland does not care or bemoan the Saracens their fallen dead. Likewise, given that others naturally resist this will to dominate, resist the subjection to the Christian idea of a Truth and the *telos* that it implies, they are inevitably categorized as bad, as having *tort*. *Tort* would seem to lie in the real barriers that one side erects against the desires of an antagonist. Not only have the Saracens turned away from God (and the kind of godly culture incarnated by the Franks), but they persist in their diabolical turn. It is for this reason that Roland desires to wipe out the Saracens by waging a continuous war against them. The other Christians, regardless of their subjective opinions about how best to achieve peace, are all in agreement when it comes to conquering Spain[180]. They stand in "opposition" to Roland in that they believe that such a conquest can be achieved diplomatically,

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[180] Even the duke of Naimes' reasoned approach to Marsile's offer implies that Spain will fall under the rule of Charlemagne, and the Saracens will convert under the banner of Christianity.

with Marsile installed as Charlemagne's newest vassal. Roland and his peers, as well as Charlemagne, all desire the conquest of Spain. This is a s*ine qua none.*

Consequently, the social relations between the Christians and the Saracens are based on conflict and conquest, on mastery and submission. This dynamic of conquest and submission means that there is an absence of authentic dialogue between the two camps, and furthermore, that the patterned mirroring, the rituals and beliefs that **may appear** to be identical among Christians and Saracens[181], are not truly so since the two antagonists are distinguished between themselves because they will not have the same chance of gratification[182], and this ability/inability to project a desire and satisfy it is an element of differentiation that will act as the source of constant challenges and conflicts. Even if we were to admit for the sake of argument that the two sides were the same, the absence of any substantive dialogue between them transforms their situation into an unstable one, creating the differences between vanquished and victor, replacing similarity (or its semblance) with a different, even opposite situation. In the case of our poem, the apparent similarities between the Christians and the Saracens are significantly distinguished in their mutual desire, and elaborative projection for Spanish conquest.

Furthermore, I would argue that the absence of dialogue, the repeated use of insults and death, reinforces horizons, prejudices, and pre-understandings that the subjects then enact and make their own. Roland's conception of *dreit*, his insistence on the legitimacy of heroic behavior, his hatred and disgust for Saracens all lead to his encountering events/situations in such a manner that these are already-always answering his anticipations of what is best. Roland wills himself into such an understanding, and chooses to further his subjective development and

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[181] As we shall see later in this chapter 12, it is a well-worn trope that the Saracens and the Christians mirror one another. It is my belief that this view obscures the philosophical impetus of the poem.
[182] One shall conquer, one shall be conquered. One must conquer, one must be conquered.

becoming in faithful adherence to this understanding of the situation. Closed to dialogue, hostile to "otherness", the events that unfold before him, as disastrous as they are, nevertheless prove to be adequate to his interpretation of action and the means by which Transcendent and cultural immortality can be gained. Roland's worldview is not merely intolerant or hostile, it is also methodical inasmuch as he knows how to proceed, and what to do to assure that his conclusions can be replicated.

In consequence, Roland's theological-philosophical worldview is one in which the Saracen existence/subjectivity is indifferent, inasmuch as he feels no obligation to respect and honour it. "It" does not participate in the logic of subjectivizing that Roland recognizes as legitimate. The Saracen is simply to be "gotten rid of". In other words, subjectivity, as it is conceived and lived out by Roland, creates a dynamic in which to be whole, to be at peace, is also to be hostile to any and all "other" subjectivity, since to be in such a way necessarily involves an absence of dialogue. It is to proceed on the path of subjectivity in an isolated way. It is to remove any threat or danger to one's particular mode of subjectivizing.

Roland, the poem's hero, is motivated by such logic, and this is why Roland pushes Charlemagne to continue his war in Spain. Peace offerings, negotiated settlements, cannot be trusted, because the other, *otherwise desiring*, recognizing an "other" truth[183], faithful, in his turn, to the subjectivizing process that an "other" truth implies, cannot be trusted in his very being. Saracens and Christians do not worship in the same manner in the "Chanson de Roland". Christians pray to a "sky" God, whereas Saracens worship material idols. One instance of faith

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[183] The "other" religious belief. Not God, but something else, something diabolical, idolatrous, and profane. This is precisely what we find in the very first laisse of the poem when Marsile, the Saracen king, is first described: "Li reis Marsilie la tient, ki Deu nen aimet/ Mahumet serte Appolin recleimet/ Ne s'poet guarder que mals ne l'I ateignet". Verses 7-9.

seems to be unmediated, whereas the other is "fabricated". Clearly, the poem is trying to demonstrate the extent of Christian moral or religious superiority by contrasting these two views.

The "other" is a site of resistance, an opposing desire. What the other has already threatened or destroyed must be avenged, and destruction must be heaped upon him tenfold.

Il dist al rei: "Ja mar crerez Marsilie! …

Faites la guerre cum vos l'avez enprise,

En Sarraguce menez vostre ost banie,

Metez le sege a tute vostre vie,

Si vengez cels que li fels fist ocire![184]

Peace, and the continued becoming of the subject will be achieved when the very last trace of alterity has been wiped away. The logical extension of dialogic absence in an understanding of radical subjectivity is, of course, the absence of alterity.

I would suggest that this subject-other (the "other" as difference, as "desubject") dynamic structures the "Chanson de Roland", and that the text proposes that its own worldview, its own ethical stance, cannot be defined other than by having recourse to violence against this "other". This necessitates and requires a willed hostility vis-à-vis the "other". We could not be further removed from the happy world of dialogic, reciprocal, mutual understanding. The basic dynamics put forth in the "Chanson de Roland" deny the potential for any notion of a subject with responsibilities, or obligations of moral understanding, towards an "other". The face of the other is the face of subservience. The subjective process to which a character like Roland remains faithful, suggests that there is no ethic of compassion or engagement to some "other".

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[184] Verses 196; 210-213.

We are naturally at a point that is completely antithetical to the kind of ethics suggested by a thinker like Lévinas. And this is precisely what must be remembered and reiterated when we read the "Chanson de Roland". In Lévinas's model, I am subservient to the Other through my coming to understand the Transcendence inherent in his "face"[185], and likewise, I come to understand my ethical association to such a revelation as a type of moral subservience to such a revelation of Transcendence.

> *Pour le Désir, cette altérité, inadéquate à l'idée, a un sens. Elle est entendue comme altérité d'Autrui et comme celle du Très-Haut .*[186]

We have to understand the "Chanson de Roland's" philosophical impetus as denying any kind of religious co-existence or intersubjectivity. The modern efforts to extricate religious thought from a dichotomous, xenophobic, or intolerant model must be turned on their head. If we truly desire to get at the worldview the poem is defending, we have to re-familiarize ourselves with war, hatred, death, and disgust for the "other".

In the "Chanson de Roland", there can be no relation with the "other" that does not include violence, submission, or death, since the text insists that alterity be changed or transformed. The narrative changes, conversions, or poetic annihilations with which the poem is replete, are the expression of a force applied against another, and is always concomitant with the existence of a form of violence. If there is any ethical position to be taken from the "Chanson de Roland", it is that such an ethic desires subjectivity-purity, without striving to be moral, ethical, or pure in the modern sense of these words. It assumes that the worldview put forth by the "other", as a subjectivizing process emanating from having recognized and been faithful to an

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[185] "Et l'épiphanie qui se produit comme visage ne se constitue pas comme tous les autres êtres, précisément parce qu'elle "révèle" l'infini. La signification c'est l'infini, c'est-à-dire Autrui". Lévinas, Totalité et infini. Essai sur l'extériorité. Collection "biblio essais", Le livre de Poche (édition originale Martinus Nijhoff), Paris, 1971, p. 227.
[186] Lévinas, Totalité et infini. Essai sur l'extériorité. p. 23.

"other" truth, is morally condemnable and detested by Providence. Not only does God assist the Christians in their fight against His enemies, He also condemns them to Hell. The essence of Roland's dichotomous view of Christians and Saracens contributes to the idea that the "good" is made real through violence against an "other". By opposing the forces of evil, the instances of negativity, violence is both made real, and sanctioned from above. As Richard Kaueper has keenly observed in his study on the subject of violence during the middle Ages:

> *Knights who do their hard duty with loyalty and honesty can be assured of divine favour. God will receive them into an eternity of blissful reward. There can be no question whether or not a man can save his soul by the profession of arms; there can be no danger to the soul in fighting for the right causes –in just wars, to protect one's kin and their estates, to protect helpless maidens, widows, and orphans, to protect one's own land and inheritance, to defend Holy Church.*[187]

Consequently, we must understand that violence, violence done against the "other", is a manifestation of a potential mode of glorification that is accepted as the very fabric of religious purity or chivalrous goodness/glory.

To this theological sanctioning, we must add that the "other" in the "Chanson de Roland" exists as a threat, a danger looming on the horizon of the Christian world[188]. The "other" represents a negativity or negation that endangers the existence of the subject; a danger that is a very real danger to my own beliefs and modes of being. The looming presence of the "other" is

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[187] Kaueper, <u>Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe</u>. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, p. 288.
[188] A good example of this "demonic threat" can be ascertained by reading some of the early anti-Islamic apologetics. A good case in point is the writing of John Damascene who, in one of his texts, a "dialogue" between a Christian and a heretical Muslim, associates Christ's victory over the demons in the river Jordan with his own victory over the Muslim in their debate: "Le Chrétien répond: "Je rends grâce à Dieu! Sache de même que, pour moi, Jean était aussi un esclave et un serviteur du Christ dans le Jourdain, où mon Sauveur a été baptisé et a fracassé la tête des mauvais démons qui y avaient leur gîte". Le Musulman, fort surpris et déconcerté, n'ayant plus rien à répliquer au Chrétien, se retira à court d'objections". Jean Damascène, <u>Écrits sur l'islam.</u> Présentation, commentaires et traduction par Raymond Le Coz, Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 1992, p. 249-251.

presented in both subtle and not so subtle ways in the "Chanson de Roland". Obviously, the presence of a massive Saracen army attacking the Christian rear-guard speaks for itself. To this must be added the narrative "colouring" of the text itself. Saracen alterity is coloured differently. The Saracens are often draped in darkness. This darkness is sometimes biological[189]. At other times, the poem expresses it in terms that are environmental[190]. They are described as either having darkened skin, or by being surrounded in shadows, lurking in ambush in the darkened valleys. These narrative tricks all suggest that we are dealing with beings that have turned away from the light (God) in order to develop their hellish features in a manner that distinguishes them form their Christians antagonists. The coloring used in the poem is meant to be reflective of moral, social, and cultural degeneracy. That there is something degenerate about the Saracens is suggested in the opening laisses of the poem, where, the first time we meet Marsile, he is couched under the shadow of a tree[191], and, likewise, his gods also inhabit dark places[192].

The "Chanson de Roland" continues its narrative assault against Saracen subjectivity by presenting their theological otherness, which appears in the form of a pronounced negation or rejection of the Christian tradition. When describing some of the Saracen warriors (including Marsile), the author does not fail to mention that they are unbelievers, and that, furthermore, they have rejected and denied the One and True God, as evidenced in the following excerpts:

Li reis Marsilie la tient, ki Deu nen aimet.[193]

Or,

*Deva*nt chevalchet un Sarrazin Abis*me*

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[189] See for instance, verses 1915-1919.
[190] The environmental darkness is provided by descriptions of the shadows, the play of light and darkness, the crepuscular atmosphere that surrounds and conceals the Saracen army. See for instance verses 848-859.
[191] See verses 11-12.
[192] The Saracen gods are kept in a crypt. See verse 2580.
[193] Verse 7.

Plus fel de lui n'out en sa cumpagnie :

Teches ad males e mult granz felonies,

Ne creit en Deu, le filz seinte Marie;[194]

I would suggest that in these passages, felonious conduct or character is clearly associated with a lack of belief, or to be more precise, with an engagement in a negative belief system that stands in opposition to what is considered true and correct belief. From the recognition of an "other" truth stems the perverted subjectivizing process wherein characters degenerate. This lack of belief in God (i.e., not the Saracen "gods") is important, for it was often from this starting point that Christian medieval philosophy began.   Much of the scholastic tradition was rooted in the twin pillars of belief in God, and belief in the existence of a singular God. As Étienne Gilson has noted:

> *Now this Credo in unum Deum of the Christians, this first article of their faith, appeared at the same time as an irrefragable truth. That if there is a God, there is only one God. … what the Fathers had never ceased to affirm as fundamental belief because God himself had said it, is also one of those rational truths, and most important of all, one which did not enter philosophy by way of reason[195].*

If we remember that it is only the fool who says in his heart that there is no God[196] (or who affirms the existence of an "other" God), then the passages from the "Chanson de Roland" relating Saracen beliefs border on theological blasphemy. By confronting an enemy host, the Christian subject, as a cognizant being, is opposed to a negative "other". The type of *dreit* and *tort* that Roland mentions in his statement therefore imply that on the one hand, there is the

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[194] Verses 1631-1634.
[195] Étienne Gilson, <u>The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy.</u> Translated by A.H.C. Downes, Shed & Ward, London, 1950, p. 46-47.
[196] Ps. 14, 1. Folly which, we must remember, serves as Saint Anselm's starting point in the 'Proslogion'.

ethical spirit of subject-assuredness and certainty, the kind found and promulgated in Anselm's ontological proof, and on the other hand, there is to be found the negating influence of the "other". The threat of Saracen belief lies in the fact that, negative thinking, as it stands incarnated in the "other", presents "otherness" to belief itself, in such a way that what is thought to be eternal and everlasting, is suddenly confronted with an alternative narrative. It might still be considered folly and madness, but such perversions might also be contagious. It is better to stamp out such madness. The "other" embodies a subjectivizing process of truth recognition and fidelity that, being "other" is also in turn, the opposite of one's own subjectivizing process.

I believe that the poem grounds its hostility towards the Saracens in a peculiar form of reasoning. The presence of "otherness", as a questioning[197] and relativizing subject, questions the community's self-assuredness in its stead. Because his faithfulness to a truth stands as a negation of "our" faith, because he does not "love" (*nen aimet*) our God, the other denies our subject-assuredness, contradicts this certainty, and ironically (for the pagan gods are nothing) asserts nothingness in its place. From an epistemological standpoint, this affects the consciousness of subject-assuredness. For a belief that grounds a subjectivizing process (or, minimally, the idea of God) is a state of consciousness, always something in the believer's consciousness. Anselm's epistemological account allows us to understand the importance of belief ideas as constituent elements in consciousness:

> *Hence, even the fool is convinced that something exists in the understanding, at least, than which nothing greater can be conceived. For, when he hears of this, he understands it. And whatever is understood, exists in the understanding. And assuredly that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone. For,*

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[197] The « other » questions inasmuch as he does not ask the same theological question (Who is God, or does God exists, since he asks that question in such a way as to involve a multiplicity), and his refusal to convert or submit suggests a questioning of Christian legitimacy.

suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality;

which is greater[198].

There are two important aspects to Anselm's argument with respect to the "Chanson de Roland". Firstly, that belief, or talk about God involves existence in the understanding, and that the denial of such a belief (which Anselm considers absurd), either as outright negation, or as theological alterity, would in turn imply the denial/negation of both the idea of God existing in the understanding, as well as his existence. With respect to its deleterious effect on the consciousness of belief, and of that which exists in the understanding, the negation of, or opposition to, a particular Christian belief is a denial of the contents of its state of consciousness. This negative turn, this questioning and diabolical turning away[199] from subject-assuredness (since only the fool would deny it), comes to be when consciousness is itself upended to some degree. Otherness, in its horror, reveals to consciousness the possibility of its own demise, or wiping-away. This is one of the important reasons why the other, as an "other" incarnating negative beliefs, comes to represent a threat that must be eliminated. The "other" forces consciousness to become aware of the possible negation of that which is so central to itself. This, in turn, evokes the ultimate possibility of one's subjectivity also being negated by the "other".

Yet epistemological subject-assuredness does not entirely suffice. The subjectivizing process also means appropriating some definite mode-of-being. For a *chanson de geste* preoccupied with the themes of action and fighting, to *be* right is to be right in the mode of

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[198] Anselm, Basic Writings. Translated by S.N. Deane, Open Court Publishing, Lasalle Illinois, 1962, p. 8.

[199] Diabolic in the possibly Deleuzian sense: "There is something demoniacal or demonic in a line of flight. Demons are different from gods, because gods have fixed attributes, properties and functions, territories and codes: they have to do with rails, boundaries and surveys. What demons do is jump across intervals, and from one interval to another". Deleuze, Dialogues II. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, Columbia University Press, New York, 2002, p. 40.

having-it-to-be.   Consequently, *dreit* and *tort* are to be understood as statements of facts (at least as far as Roland perceives them), as well as an epistemological consideration.   To say what is, is of course to *know* what is.   It is to know that this thing is[200].   But this doesn't get us very far in our attempt to understand why men would go on murdered and murdering to honour such a statement.   For it seems to me that what Roland is really saying, is that *dreit* does in fact exist (along with its antagonistic counterpart) and that it can be known in its existence[201].   *Dreit* is *dreit*, but what is the difference between *dreit* as an abstract form of knowledge (as an ostensive definition), and *dreit* as an elemental structure of belief in the subjectivizing process?

It would appear that Roland is answering this very question when he states that there is, or rather, there are two processes at work in the world.   Furthermore, he also seems to be stating that these orders can be ascertained, can be defined and that these possibilities are dependent upon the understanding or knowledge of such orders.   With respect to the "Chanson de Roland", I would suggest that the work and understanding inherent to the defining is completely absorbed in the existential quantifiers that describe "dreit" and "tort": namely the quantifiers "Christian" and "Saracen".   These are existential quantifiers that bring to mind worldviews, societal structures, modes of participation and omission, as well as understandings of what is right or good, and how such right or good can be entertained or attained, and of what it is to be right or good.   These latter elements indicate that we have already moved past the simplicity of an ostensive definition of the world, towards an epistemologico-existential understanding of our embeddedness/interrelation to what is right or good as fundamental aspects of our world.   For it is one thing to know that *dreit* is, it is quite another to know *how* it is, or why such a consideration matters at all.   Knowledge of what *is,* in-itself, remains undeveloped, whereas

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[200] What Heidegger might call it's "that-being" or Daßsein.
[201] This would suggest that essence also has another dimension, namely its "what-being" or Sosein.

knowledge of *how* or *why* what *is* is as it is represents a more developed understanding of essence, and more importantly, of the interaction of essence with our own sense of being, with our burgeoning notion of subjectivity.

Consequently, we must assume that within Roland's statement, there is an actuality of knowledge highlighting precisely those areas of concern we have been mentioning: a process of subjectivizing indicating knowledge of particularity of essence, mode of existence, usefulness or purpose, and teleological end[202].   From the knowledge of an essence's being, to the knowledge of the existence of a particular type of essence, a hermeneutics of the "Chanson de Roland" must come to the conclusion that, notwithstanding the appearance of theological simplicity, a certain broadened theology is being presented here.   A theology in which an entire worldview is structured by a primary question: the question of God and of our relationship to Him.   For Christians to *be* right is for them to bear or be in the right.   This possession of *dreit*[203] has a particular dimension, since it serves to authenticate a certain conception of alterity which, rightly or wrongly, assumes that the other must be equally defined in relationship to the good as the subject is, or is to be.   From a notion of the subject, as it pertains to its roles in a society, and its interrelatedness to other roles (and the "other" warrior, does he not bear the same role as I?) within that society, one can come to see how this understanding can be projected into a broader horizon, which inevitably assumes, or subsumes, the other within familiar moral or virtuous constraints.   As MacIntyre states:

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[202] As Wittgenstein indicated, the possibility of an ostensive definition's being understood requires the prior understanding of its role in a language game, that is to say, a way of life: ""So one might say : the ostensive definition explains the use- the meaning- of the word when the overall role of the word in language is clear. Thus if I know that someone means to explain a colour-word to me the ostensive definition "That is called sepia" will help me to understand the word. –And you can say this, so long as you do not forget that all sorts of problems attach to the words "to know" or "to be clear".

One has already to know (or be able to do) something in order to be capable of asking a thing's name". Wittgenstein, <u>Philosophical Investigations</u>. ¶ 30, p. 14e-15e.

[203] It is to be remembered that the text states that "chrestïens **unt** dreit".

For I am never able to seek for the good or exercise the virtues only qua individual. This is partly because what it is to live the good life concretely varies from circumstance to circumstance even when it is one and the same conception of the good life and one and the same set of virtues which are being embodied in a human life. .. (w)e all approach our own circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity. I am someone's son or daughter, someone else's cousin or uncle; I am a citizen of this or that city, a member of this or that guild or profession; I belong to this clan, that tribe, this nation. Hence what is good for me has to be good for one who inhabits these roles. As such, I inherit from the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations. These constitute the given of my life, my moral starting point. This is in part what gives my life its own moral particularity[204].

Consequently, if I am right, it is either because I am right in-itself, or I am doing something right, or an admixture of both. It suggests a pattern of spiritual and metaphysical needs that are deemed to be essential. The possession of *dreit* as a function or manifestation of Christianity discloses that in its relationship to God, there is also an equal degree of subjectivization going on.

Through Roland's Christianity, as the recognition of a Truth to which one is continually faithful, the understanding of *dreit* is objectified and becomes actual. It is objectified in the degree to which the Christian mode of understanding and subjectivizing is temporally and spatially located and distributed. It is objectified precisely through the very deeds, as well as the living memory of those deeds (the songs of glory) with which Roland is encouraging his men to action. It is objectified in the form of battle and conquest.

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[204] MacIntyre, <u>After Virtue.</u> p.220.

It is a curious fact that much of the scholarship surrounding the "Chanson de Roland" has failed to notice, or to mention, that the very first laisse presents the reader with an important phenomenological interpretation of the relationship between a subjectivizing process and/or space to a moral order. This laisse gives us a divided world: a world divided along religious lines, but equally as important, a world divided along spatio-temporal lines. There is the world and kingdom (the physical domain) dominated by Charlemagne, and the world (the *last* point of resistance) dominated by Marsile. The upward thrust, the almost irresistible urge to conquer that the first laisse suggests is indicative of a form of thinking that relates the grandeur of a subjectivizing process (the greatness of a man, the manifestation of his subjectivity) to an always-becoming movement forward (consequently, the very last laisse forms a parallel to the first in that it, too, has Charlemagne on the move, looking outward towards new lands to conquer), whereby subjectivity continually needs to repeat itself, assert itself, becoming more than mere appearance through actual objectification and conquest.

Now although the two spheres (Christian and Saracen) seem to share similarities, their differences, however slight, indicate substantive disparities in their modes of subjectivizing, occupying, and possessing space physically and morally. A brief example will suffice to illustrate this point. Whereas Charlemagne, for instance, sits on a throne (verse 116), thereby indicating his regal majesty, his dominion over the lands he has conquered, as well as the lands that are destined to be conquered by him, Marsile is presented in a sunken position (verse 12). The physical positioning of his body is indicative not only of his moral despair (verses 15-19), but of the lack of physicality, the absence of either moral or physical *dreit* on the part of a king at wit's end to defend his flailing kingdom. Simply put, Marsile's physical occupation of space

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signifies the degenerate manner in which he proceeds to subjectivize, as well as the degeneracy to which such a subjectivizing process leads.

All of this leads us to believe that some degree of cultural subjectivity is embodied in a relationship to the external world. The difference between the Christian worldview, as compared to the Saracen, lies in the fact that, possessing *dreit*[205], motivated by a will-to-glory, that which differentiates Christianity is displayed in divergent spheres (such as, precisely, the type of behaviour one demonstrates in battle, one's physical positioning, one's manner of worshiping as well as the "object" of that worship etc…) that highlight a distinctiveness as an evident difference.

This radical distinction between two moral orders is brought into being because, in Roland's mind[206], the Christian worldview which he defends, and for which he is willing to give his life in the attainment of personal glory, is invested with perfection (the *dreit*) or righteousness, of which no greater possibility can be conceived to exist. Certainly, it is not the case that the Saracen conception of the "good" can be compared favorably, in Roland's mind, to what he imagine to be the "good". I would suggest that Roland's dichotomous view of *dreit* and *tort* are in fact a manner of paraphrasing Anselm's view of knowledge and foolishness. Such a possible "reference" to Anselm should not be dismissed out of hand. We should remember that his *Proslogion* helped to shape much of the theological argumentation and thinking during the middle ages. We should also remember that Anselm's work is contemporaneous to that of the "Chanson de Roland". It is certainly the case that the clear-cut argumentation put forward by Anselm finds its echo in the "Chanson de Roland" and its knightly bravado. Richard Kaeuper, in his recent book *Holy Warriors*, has brilliantly demonstrated the extent to which the logic of

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[205] As recognition and fidelity to a Truth.
[206] As well as in that of the author as well.

belief in Anselm's *Proslogion* influenced chivalric ideology in its religious orientation. Such an influence is most likely a consequence of the persuasiveness and universality of Anselm's argument, given that it forms a "logic" of argumentation and rational construction, from first belief to furthering beliefs. One can see how such a *modus operandi* could have influenced much Christian thinking. As Kaueper states:

> *That Anselm's ideas, abstract and difficult though they were, could eventually reach at least elite layman directly or indirectly is shown wonderfully in Jean de Joinville's casual account of a conversation he had with his king, Louis IX. ... Not only is it evident that Louis possessed a copy of one of Anselm's books –in this case the Proslogion, the treatise in which he establishes this definition (of God being so good that there cannot be anything better)- but that in his youth Joinville had been taught and now still retains this definition.* [207]

In many ways, Anselm's project sanctions the association and the orientation of knowledge from a primary epistemological acquaintance with God, to an understanding of procedural subjectivizing. Given an acquaintance with the proof of divine existence, it stands as a consequence that there is a relation to the chain of beings and their manner of being.

> *I began to ask myself whether there might be found a single argument which would require no other proof than itself alone; and alone would suffice to demonstrate that God truly exists, and that there is a supreme good requiring nothing else, which all other*

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[207]Kaeuper, <u>Holy Warriors. The Religious Ideology of Chivalry</u>. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2009, p. 118.

things require for their existence and well-being; and whatever we believe regarding the divine Being[208].

We should not neglect that Anselm's most lasting impact on the chivalrous way of thinking lies not merely in the content of his thoughts, but in the manner of his thinking, in the structured order of his thoughts. It is interesting to note that Anselm is looking for a monological argument, that is to say, an argument that stands alone and does not require any proof or corollary other than itself. There is an order of monological thinking of this kind that is at work in the "Chanson de Roland". The "aseity" of Anselm's argument, its ability to stand by itself, much like the aseity of God (and the "right" religion that follows from an adherence to such a deity) is not only a demonstration of its sovereignty, but a statement about the fruitlessness of dialogue: regarding this question, and all other questions that follow or derive from it, no *other* is needed. Any "other" solution or possibility is simply folly.

And since it is also the case that Anselm strongly essentializes man[209] , a further consequence deriving from the knowledge of the deity to the application of this knowledge to the process of subjectivizing, is that there are definitive modes of conduct that are more in line, or in keeping with the divinity than others. If the world was created by God, if it has received the totality of its being from Him, then participation in God's perfection can be said to represent an intrinsic necessity. A proper response thereby implies that one move from a mode where it is impossible to imagine a greater degree of being, to a consideration of faithfulness to that God as logically rigorous, and of course, as ethically rigorous.

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[208] Anselm, 'Proslogion', in <u>Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Anslem of Canterbury</u>. Translated by Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson, The Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, 2000, p. 88.
[209] Anselm argues that man was created to see God. This view of man's creations, in and of itself, is enough of a statement about God, the heavens, and man's place or role in the world. See Anselm, 'Proslogion', in <u>Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Anslem of Canterbury</u>.

For when a will was first given to the rational nature, it was –in the moment of giving-turned by the Giver towards that which it was supposed to will; or better, it was not first given and then turned upright, but it was originally made upright. As long as the will stood firm in this uprightness in which it was made (and which we call truth or justice), it was just. But when it turned itself away from that which it was supposed to will towards that which it was not supposed to will, it no longer stood fast in the original uprightness in which it was made[210].

I would contend that Anselm's thinking lends itself to the demonization of an "other". For his vision of a religious life, as a mode of faithfulness to God, implies that the real evil does not come from matter itself, rather, it enters the world through the reprehensible act of a "spiritual" subjectivizing. Taken in this fashion, if we now turn our attention to the "Chanson de Roland", we can see that the textual Saracens found in the poem are evil because they choose, and have chosen to worship other deities. The poem goes to great lengths to make this point abundantly clear. Not only are they said to *Deu nen aimet,* they are adorned with an evil triumvirate of pagan idols[211].

Obedience to the certainty of Anselm's argument denotes a moral choice. It means that, as a rational creature, man is called to communion with his Creator, a summons that is addressed to the human mind with its freedom of choice. The choice implies election or damnation, for the wrong choice abandons the subject to perdition whereby a lesser good has been chosen over and against God. This "damnable choice" is precisely that of the Saracens in the "Chanson de Roland". Given the choice, Saracens continually choose the wrong option. Given the choice,

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[210] Anselm, 'The Fall of Satan', in <u>Anselm of Canterbury. Truth, Freedom, and Evil. Three Philosophical Dialogues.</u> Edited and translated by Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1967, p. 162.
[211] See verse 8.

Saracens continue in their desubjectivizing ways.   The Saracen warriors are morally

unrighteous[212].   The result of this choice is a breach in the original order of things.   The

Saracens are to be demonized by the likes of Turpin because their evil is not merely a matter of

their failing nature, of erroneous or defective actions, but ultimately of their personal revolt and

rebellion, as free creatures, against the Creator.   The contrast between Christian faithfulness and

Saracen Satanism is best exemplified when Turpin dispatches a pagan magician:

> *E l'arcevesque lor ocist Siglorel,*
>
> *L'encanteür ki ja fut en enfer :*
>
> *Par artimal l'i cundoist Jupiter.*
>
> *Ço dist Turpin : 'Icist nos ert forsfait'.*[213]

This passage clearly indicates that two very distinct theological worlds are confronting

one another.   It also demonstrates that the recognition of a Truth, and of its antithesis, sets up a

potential conflict with an "other".   If we assume, as Turpin's theological chauvinism would

suggest, that no proper subjectivizing process can be imagined outside of a union with the

Christian God, it follows that the modes and means of worshipping and acknowledging that God

must involve a degree of rigor and absolutism.   In other words, rigor and moral absolutism stem

from the recognition of the existence of the perfection itself.   Since the logic is absolute and

rigorous, then the subject's adherence to this logic becomes the locus of any potential ethics:

those who refuse the logic, and all other potential actions (their modes and means of being-

towards-God) as a consequence of their initial epistemological rejection, *are* inevitably wrong, or

false, whereas those who do accept it, *are* situated in *dreit* or righteousness.   If Christians are

right, it is because they are faithful to their teleological essence in a manner unlike the Saracens.

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[212] See verses 940-943,
[213] Verses 1390-1393.

They have previously been right about the question of God's existence, and have rightly positioned themselves in accordance to their understanding of that question. They have understood that they are created to see God, have understood that God is the good, and that their goal is to orient themselves towards Him.

I believe that the characteristic "charm" of the "Chanson de Roland" resides partly in this type of hermeneutics. In the world of the "Chanson de Roland", the primordial question moves forward blindly towards its answer, and having gotten hold of that answer, the entire chain of being falls neatly into place. Having answered the essential question, that of God's existence, everything else is put into the clearing, everything else is situated or placed in relation to the question and its answer.

I think we are now sufficiently capable of understanding that Roland's philosophical outlook is, in fact, a form of adherence to this view. His distinction between *dreit* and *tort*, between Christian and Saracen is tantamount to a kind of a *priori* argument, because in his mind, there is a moral absolutism to Christian *dreit* as being necessarily better than anything Saracen culture, a *posteriori,* can propose.

11. COWARDICE AND MATERIALITY: A PERVERSE MIRROR FOR SARACEN PRINCES

A good way to understand how the "Chanson de Roland" portrays the development of Christian subjectivity, is to come to grips with the way in which it deals with alterity as its opposite. Consequently, any analysis of alterity must assume that the Saracens do not mirror the Franks. The fact that some commentators have asserted the contrary position demonstrates, I believe, the extent to which they have focused on the appearance of similarities to the detriment of a deeper understanding of the philosophy of subjectivity and violence made manifest by the poem. As we shall see in this chapter, the Saracens are not to be considered as the Christians' indistinguishable "other".

We will also argue that the Saracens are fully aware of this difference, and that this awareness of a fundamental difference is emphasized in the very first laisse of the "Chanson de Roland". In other words, it is my contention that the poem stresses difference by "desubjectivizing[214]" it. The "Chanson de Roland" initially sets up a portrayal of subjectivity, as it is expressed and lived by the Christian heroes, and then, against this portrayal, it characterizes the Saracens as "desubjects", as beings living and expressing themselves in a manner that puts

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[214] I will use the term "desubject" throughout, despite it being grammatically unaesthetic. The Saracens are "desubjects" in the same manner that one might be said to be *déraisonnable*, a term denoting not a lack of subjectivity or rationality (they, of course have their own manner of being, acting, and expressing themselves), but the act of having, against a "greater rationality and anthropology" (the turning away from God), chosen to instantiate a mode of subjectivity that is opposite to the only cherished paradigm.

them in opposition to the positive Christian model. This process of desubjectivization is evidenced especially by Saracen beliefs, mores and modes of being. The poem goes to great lengths in order to emphasize the fact the even the Saracens continually recognize, and express, their own negative difference with respect to the Christians. In fact, if there is any play on similarity between the two sides, it does not tend to blur the distinction between Saracens and Christians, rather, the mimicry to be found in the text is best understood as some type of falsifying repetition of that which looks the same, but *is not quite*[215], as is evidenced in the following passage:

Uns amurafles I ad de Balaguez :

Cors ad mult gent e le vis fier e cler;

Puis quë il est sur sun cheval muntét,

Mult se fait fiers de ses armes porter.

De vasselage est il ben alosez :

Fust chrestïens, asez oüst barnét.[216]

What we have in the above quoted passage is a case of something being almost similar, but not quite. This *not quite* suggests that the two sides are somehow divided. This division is of course made apparent to the reader, but its importance lays elsewhere. In order for the argument of Christian superiority to be made, it is a difference of which the Saracens must be cognizant. The Saracens must know that they are inferior, that they are not the same subjects as the Christian Franks. They must realize that they are either not the same in martial terms, in cultural terms, or in existential/subjective terms (their being or manner of being). This assertion

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[215] "Mimicry repeats rather than re-presents". I think that one can significantly use the work of Bhabha in thinking about the "Chanson de Roland", while recognizing that some of his philosophical consequences are best discarded, or turned on their head in order to make sense of the goings-on in the text. Bhabha, The Location of Culture. Routledge Classics, New York, 1994, p. 125.

[216] Verses 894-899. We shall explore this dimension of semblance in greater detail further in this chapter 12.

of a difference in how members of different groups become is important, for the poem articulates one of its crucial arguments around it: namely, its claim that it is a difference of which the Saracens seem to be fully cognizant. In a certain sense, one could argue that the entire poetic edifice of the "Chanson de Roland" would be diminished if the Saracens did not recognize their fundamental difference. In order to have a divided world, in order to have a world-at-war, and to have this war be motivated by different theologies and modes of subjectivizing, it is necessary for there to be a difference. In order for there to be hate, distrust, and disdain from one side to the other, there must be, reciprocally, notions of difference from one side to the next. One side must see its own manner of being, its subjectivity, as differing from that of the other as "desubject". This oppositional view, extending as it does to the very negation of the different subject itself, is expressed by the political and cultural leaders on both sides.

> *Carles li magnes, cum il vit l'amiraill*
>
> *E le dragon, l'enseigne e l'estandart,*
>
> *De cels d'Arabe si grant force i par ad,*
>
> *De la contree unt purprises les parz*
>
> *Ne mes que tant cum l'emperere en ad-*
>
> *Li reis de France s'en escrïet mult halt :*
>
> *'Barons franceis, vos estes bons vassals,*
>
> *Tantes batailles avez faites en camps;*
>
> *Vëez paien : felun sunt e cuart!*
>
> *Tute lor leis un dener ne lur valt'*[217]
>
> Or,
>
> *Le cheval brochet, li*[218] *sancs en ist tuz clers,*

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[217] Verses 3329-3338.

Fait sun eslais, si tressalt un fossét;

Cinquante pez i poet hom mesurer.

Paien escrïent : 'Cist deit marches tenser!

N'i ad Franceis, së a lui vieny juster,

Voeillet o nun, n'i perdet sun edét.

Carles est fols, que ne s'en est alét'.[219]

These passages indicate that both sides are aware of a difference running from one to the other. Furthermore, both sides are aware that between the two of them there is an open hostility that culminates in wholesale slaughter. This hatred towards the enemy, this will to kill and destroy him, dispels the notion that the Saracens are the "indistinguishable other". If the Saracens thought that they were, in fact, the "indistinguishable other" of the Christians, they would certainly see no objection to Christian rule over their lands.

In fact, the awareness that they are dealing with subjects different from themselves serves as an instigating factor in the story that will unfold. The very first laisse of the poem opposes Christian and Saracen, Charlemagne and Marsile. The Saracens plot against Charlemagne and the Franks *because* they see them as an enemy and a threat, that is to say, an "other". Their plotting is a way of undermining the Christian other, of defeating him or negating him. When Marsile, in bad faith, proposes to accept Christian rule and conversion, he is playing on and exploiting the very elements of difference (and the mechanism allowing for the elimination of that difference) between Christian subjectivity and Saracen "desubjectivity". He will pretend to become a Christian subject, and subject to Charlemagne, in order to better avoid doing so. That is to say, he will play the part in order to better stay a "desubject". That Marsile would even

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[218] The "li" in question is Baligant, the leader of the Saracens.
[219] Verses 3165-3171.

hatch such a plot can be explained by the very nature of the differential logic existing between the Christians and the Saracens. When we are first introduced into the Saracen camp, we are made aware of their anguished recognition of their difference with respect to the Franks. The Saracens are massed around their king Marsile, who, ignominiously, is lying prostrate on the ground in a position that already suggests his already/inevitable defeat. To the ignominy of his physical/spatial positioning, the king adds these words of despair:

> *Il en apelet e ses dux e ses cuntes:*
>
> *' Oëz, seignurs, quel pecchét nus encumbret :*
>
> *Li empereres Carles de France dulce*
>
> *En cest païs nos est venuz cunfundre.*
>
> *Jo nen ai ost qui bataille li dunne*
>
> *Nen ai tel gent ki la süe derumpet.*
>
> *Cunseilez mei cume mi saivë hume*
>
> *Si m'guarisez e de mort e de hunte'.*[220]

I would suggest that these opening words are meant to symbolize an entire worldview, and a conception of the Saracen subject that distinguishes him from the Frank. Clearly, these are not the words of a happy or contented man. These are not the words of a man who thinks himself as the indistinguishable other of the Frankish king. These are not the words of a man fulfilling his teleological drive, happy and contented in his subjectivity. Marsile senses and fears that something is amiss, that something is not quite right with him and his fellow subjects. In this passage, we find a Marsile who fears for his future. He fears the loss of his empire. He fears the loss of his life. Now this, as we have already seen, is an important distinction. The Christian knights do not, on their part, fear the loss of life, since their actions are embedded within the

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[220] Verses, 14-21.

continuity of a Truth that transcends the immanent. Marsile, on the other hand, does fear for his life. Fear is always a fear of something that is definite, something "other", in Marsile's case, fear of a definite object/subject: Charlemagne and his formidable army. In the case of Marsile, his fear is clearly defined, and helps to reveal his own state of mind and being.

In fact, Marsile's opening salvo allows us to access a literary typology that reveals how the Saracens go from an awareness of spatial separation to an awareness of a difference in subjectivity. It is noteworthy that the Franks remain oblivious, in their part of the world, to the kind of physical/spatial ignominy and despair expressed by Marsile. As Molly Robinson Kelly has demonstrated in her study of the spatiality of the "Chanson de Roland", its poetic world is divided, with divisions inscribed with absolute oppositions and fundamental differences. The world of the *Chanson de Roland* is torn asunder with differences that are cutual, cultural, and subjective-existential in nature. These differences further reinforce and augment the hostility between the differing views, uses, and orientations of subjects and "desubjects" in space. The poem presents us with a world marked by heterogeneity. A heterogeneity that is destined to disappear. What is beyond one subject's/"desubject's" space does not resemble him. Hence it is that the appearance of this "other" is seen as a threat to a way of life, and to that way of life's presence in space[221].

Marsile's anguished pleas for help are to be understood in just these terms. Charlemagne's army is a threat. It is an army of difference wanting to impose its own brand of subjectivity on those it has (or those who will be) conquered. Surely Marsile, as the last holdout against the Frankish tide, would have been aware of Charlemagne's simplistic, yet effective

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[221] "The worldview sketched through the spatiality of the *Song of Roland* is hardly one of a homogeneous, dominant, and secure Christian empire. On the contrary, constant vigilance seems necessary, a fact that accentuates once more the wisdom inherent in Roland's heroism as well as the foolhardiness inherent in the Franks' sense of security at the beginning of the poem". Molly Robinson Kelly, The Hero's Place. Medieval Literary Traditions of Space and Belonging. 2009, p. 131.

foreign policy: convert or die[222]. In other words, become the same, or be reduced to nothingness. His pleas allow us to see that he is cognizant of a menacing difference, looming just over the horizon. A difference fully capable of negating his being and way of life.

A brief examination of the way in which the characters of the opposite religious groups are treated fictionally, makes us even more aware that the relationship between Frank and Saracen is that of dominator/dominated. The social geography implied by the division of the world into Saracen and Christian empires (the first imploding, the second expanding) tells us that the topography –mountains, rivers, valleys- which might possibly allow passage from one place to the next, holding out the hope for a fusion of horizons or wholeness, actually isolates and separates the inhabitants into two divergent groups. We discover that there are cultural and existential implications to this state when we look at the differing analysis that can be made of the Christian and Saracen occupation of geography. On the one hand, the Franks are characterized by advancing motion[223] and *telos*. Anachronisms aside, the Franks share in the same manifest destiny that was evidenced in Virgil's Aeneid, or the American conquest of the West. Theirs is a movement forward. The very first laisse of the poem makes it evident that Charlemagne, the Frankish king, has already successfully conquered Spain, with the exception of Saragossa[224]. In fact the first 8 laisses of the poem serve to structure the spatial and ontological differences for the rest of the work. The first laisse indicates the past conquest and eventual

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[222] This mode of "either\or" thinking is a common leitmotif in *chanson de geste* literature. See Isabelle Ladonet, 'Conversion de Païens et refus d'apostasie de Chrétiens dans le *Premier Cycle de la Croisade* : mourir en croisade', <u>Mourir pour des idées</u>, textes réunis et présentés par Caroline Cazanave et France Marchal-Ninosque, Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, Besançon, 2008, pp. 325-340.

[223] William Ray has noted the extent to which the characters in the *Chanson de Roland* are almost tragically thrown forward into the future, thereby depriving them (in his view) of any meaningful past: "Not only do none of the characters have any real past (even Charles is sketched in very vague terms), but their actions throughout the poem indicate a total preoccupation with the imminent: they are dominated by anticipation, as is the narration". William E. Ray, 'Pairing and Temporal Perspective in the *Chanson de Roland*', <u>The French Review</u>, Vol. 50, No. 2, December 1976, p. 248.

[224] "Carles li reis, nostre emperere magnes/ Set anz tuz pleins ad estét en Espaigne/ Tresqu'en la mer cunquist la tere alteigne/ N'i ad castel ki devant lui remaigne/ Mur ne citét n'i est remés a fraindre/ Fors Sarraguce, k'est en une muntaigne". Verses, 1-6.

success of the Frankish king. The second laisse presents us with Saracen despair and ignominy. Laisses 3 through 7 represent the extreme ends (a false pact of peace, the willingness to sacrifice their sons in order to retain their power) to which the Saracens are willing to go in order to avoid a complete loss of life and territory. Laisse 8 presents us with the Frankish victory over the city of Cordres, which is meant to indicate both the fruitlessness of the Saracen plot, as well as their eventual conquest. All of which is meant to suggest that the resistance at Saragossa is eventually to be overcome.

That this point of resistance is temporary and destined to be overcome is made obvious by the fact that its leader (Marsile) is himself destined to be overcome and doomed/damned. The forward progress of the Franks cannot be stopped, or at least, it is not to be stopped by Marsile. The poem makes this clear right from the start. Likewise, the ending of the poem also indicates that the territorial, cultural and subjectivizing expansion of the Frankish way of life is to be continued and to move on. Christendom has new enemies, elsewhere, implying the same mechanics of conquest and conversion of Christian subjectivizing into this always elsewhere. If we bother to analyze the very last verse of the first laisse, which foretells of the misfortunes that will befall the Saracen king Marsile, we can see that this omniscient assertion, on the part of the narrator, implies that this state of exception, this Saracen resistance to Frankish/Christian culture and subjectivity will not last or endure[225]. This reference to destiny, this cosmological conception of Marsile's eventual downfall conceives of Charlemagne's spatial motion and conquest as being internally directed to some end, which we can also assume to be cosmological.

In contradistinction, the Saracens seem to be bereft of motion. When we first meet them, they are at a standstill, holed up in their last remaining strong place, awaiting the arrival of Charlemagne's army. The Saracens are motionless, as opposed to the Franks who are in motion.

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[225] "Ne s'poet guarder que mals ne l'i ateignet", verse 9.

When we consider that this standing, this waiting is a waiting for eventual conversion or death (the very terms of Charlemagne's foreign policy), it becomes rather apparent that there is, within the poem's narrative, a characterization of the Saracens as teleologically lacking: lacking in their teleological drive towards God, and teleologically lacking in their cultural and/or subjectivizing drive to expand their culture and mode of life. Once more, the reader is confronted with the existence of a fundamental difference separating the Saracens from the Christian heroes. For, unlike the Christians, the Saracen *telos* is characterized as an unenviable becoming towards death or conversion[226]. Conversion is certainly enviable from the perspective of the Christian heroes, it is, however, less appealing for the Saracens. The damnable manner in which Saracen warriors die, are converted en masse, or are dispatched into Hell are all evidence of this negative *telos.* It is the recognition of this unappealing choice that motivates Marsile's despair. There is a note of hopelessness in Marsile's plea for counsel and help from his barons. His words represent a form of despair that arises when his very existence, as well as the extended spatial subjectivizing of his kingdom, in other words, the cultural and cultual apparatus of his existence, are threatened by the presence of some other out there in the world. Marsile's desperate plea implies the recognition of a fundamental difference: we –the Saracens- are not like the Christians. We, the Saracens, are unable, unwilling, or simply incapable of fighting against the Christians. We -the Saracens- cannot move forward, expanding our cultural, cultual, and subjectivizing dimensions in the same manner as the Christian "other". After all, Marsile admits as much. Marsile's words denote a recognition of cultural, or existential inferiority.

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[226] This is implied not only in Marsile's own words ("Si m'guarisez e de mort e de hunte"-verse 21), but also in the "foreign policy" of the Franks who offer their defeated adversaries either conversion to Christianity or death: "En la citét nen ad remés paien/ Ne seit ocis u deviant chrestïen/". Verses 101-102 (No pagans remain within the city walls, since they have all been converted or killed).

This passage also seems to suggest a number of other things, all of which point to the recognition of difference. Firstly, the Saracen king is clearly aware that his foe, the Christian "other", stands in a position of superiority to himself. If we can believe the tenor of Marsile's assertion that *pecchét nus encumbret*[227] , then we must assume that the Saracen king is keenly aware of the fact that the "other" is better than he, at least in the sense that the "other" is a victor, while he will likely become a vanquished foe. Perhaps most importantly, the "other" stands in a position of theological grace, whereas Marsile and his knights stand in a position of theological disgrace. The destined doom weighing against Marsile that is manifested in the first laisse clearly finds its echo here in Marsile's own words. Something bad and ominous has happened, and will happen to the Saracens. A foreboding destiny weighs on them.

The Saracen way of life is opposed on two fronts: the cosmological destiny that has already condemned Marsile and his men, and the immanent presence of a hostile army. Misfortune or ill fate has befallen the Saracens. Marsile's opening words represent a heretical, *prière du plus grand péril*[228]*,* addressed not to God[229], but to a harassed Saracen host perplexed, anguished, and desperately confused about the ill fortunes that have visited them. Now such despair, of course, naturally evokes its opposite state: the "beatific" conquests and glories of the Christian army. Once again, we find a manifestation of just such thinking in the very first laisse. Nowhere, on the Christian side, does one find the same expression of despair, and Christian prayers (Roland's is a prime example) are ritualized mea culpas bathed in penance and hope since they lead to Paradise. The important thing to note is that Marsile, in his desperate plea, is giving voice to the notion that there is, in fact, a process at work that is differentiating and

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[227] Verse 15.
[228] The prayer of peril is a motif in medieval literature where a hero faced with a moment of great peril, or when facing death, will recite biblical passages referencing the sufferings of saints and prophets.
[229] This is obvious given the fact that we have been informed in the first laisse that Marsile neither believes in, nor loves God.

distinguishing the Saracens and the Christians. This difference, as expressed by Marsile, is the metaphysical *incipit* that will structure the rest of the poem.

The metaphysical superiority of the Christian "other" is also related to a military superiority[230]. Given that the Christians are largely fighting for God, or in the name of their religion, their military superiority is embedded within a theological framework. Marsile is aware of this strange theologico-martial conjuncture, as his words, the tenor of his plea marshal the presence of both dimensions as elements of that which is plaguing him. Marsile acknowledges that some foul "thing" has befallen him, and he adds that his troubles are further aggravated by his inability to reverse the misfortunes that are plaguing him. The military misfortunes are, in themselves, sufficient enough cause to make Marsile aware of the radical difference separating him, and his army, from Charlemagne and his army.   Consequently, not only will he be conquered, but his conquest is made inevitable by means of his own weakness. His weakness will lead to his being conquered, and therefore, to his dishonour and his death. I believe that we can accurately view the threat of dishonour and death, expressed by Marsile as *mort* and *hunte* at the hands of his enemy, as marks of a certain degree of consciousness about his own difference. Marsile is conscious of the fact that he will be dishonored, whereas the Christian will be honoured. He and his army will be slaughtered, whereas the Christians will be victorious. This either/or way of viewing the world makes manifest the dichotomous world in which Marsile lives, and thinks. For it is a world of differences.

I would suggest that, in his despair, in his recognition of his weakness and his anguish, Marsile is brought to recognize and think about his own difference, his particular subjectivity, and the manner in which he has lived it and wishes to go on living it.   In recognizing the

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[230] The metaphysical and military superiority of the Christians is also emphasized by Bramimonde, the Saracen queen, when she laments to the emir's heralds that the empire lost, and no force on earth is capable of stopping Charlemagne's advance. See verses 2714-2723.

possibility of the loss of his empire, Marsile's consciousness ascertains a degree of identity

between himself, the "now" of his possession of empire, and the opposition of that "now" to the

"future" as the loss of empire and subjectivity. Marsile is aware of the fact that in death, he will

no longer be the subject that he is, and, through conversion, he will also cease to be the subject

that he is presently. In other words, Marsile's plea makes manifest that his awareness that his

possession of the empire, as well as the manner in which this becomes the possible expression of

his subjectivity, function against the backdrop that is the agency of another. Marsile, pleading

for help, king and subject, is aware that he will likely become the determined object of another:

Charlemagne.

In the "Chanson de Roland", this recognition is granted and made effective through the

confrontation with the Christian "other". What despair (or the fear of dishonour and death)

achieves is the experience of an "outside" that is unlike me, and whose crucial differentiation

(Charlemagne, by Marsile's own account, is both blessed and martially superior) from me

engenders a recognition of the difference that I am. It is in light of this phenomenon that we

must understand Marsile's desperate pleas to his assembled army. The Saracen king does not

ignore the fact that his armies, and thereby his own command of those armies, is incapable of

stopping the Christian advance. Charlemagne is likely to conquer all of Spain. Marsile will

either be forced to convert, negating himself by becoming the "same-as-the-other", or he will be

killed. In either case, he is condemned to become something other than the subject that he is

currently: *Si m'guarisez e de mort e de hunte.*

That Marsile would fear death is also an important feature distinguishing him from the

Christian king. In phenomenological terms, it signals a difference as to a warlike mode of being.

One of the great themes running throughout the poem is the continuous justification and

legitimization of martial prowess as an honourable means of subjectivizing. Being willing to risk it all is a potent indicator of subjective presencing and becoming. Fighting, risking one's life, confronting another in a field of combat, struggling against opposing forces (especially forces that are religious in nature, mobilizing divergent views as to the essence of what it means to be a living subject) all find applause and validation in the poem's narrative. Clearly, war is a proper mode of becoming for those seeking to become God-fearing (subject to God) Christian subjects.

Fear, in turn, is neither knightly, foregoing the glory of prowess, nor is it concomitant with any form of mastery. The fear of death and dishonour moves away from the conquest of things and beings in the world. Fear does not move forward, it does not drive or strive. Fear is entrenched, like the Saracens who hole up in their remaining bastion. Fear moves backward. Fear compels a subject to be mastered in the face of another's desire to negate, to cancel, to convert, or destroy. Fear is actually the abnegation of subjectivizing as it is understood in the "Chanson de Roland", since it retreats in the face of the other's chivalric attitude to seek, destroy, or kill the enemy. Fear, of the type represented by Marsile, manifesting itself in the form of wiles and ruses in order to evade contact and confrontation, does not seek to assert its own subjectivity. Fear, in existential terms, is a conditioning of being, inasmuch as the fearful subject ceases to advance ahead of himself, because other factors (notably the presence of an aggressive other) condition his acting and unfolding, his stretching out a dimension of possibilities. Fear comes to dominate and determine the manner in which a subject views himself and the manner in which he is to lead his life. I believe that Marsile's pleas for help, his fear of death and conquest, his desperate actions, and his eventually resorting to a treacherous plot that can only backfire against him, can be viewed as symptomatic of a fear conditioning his subjectivizing process.

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All of these desperate actions, motivated by a fear of the Christian other, are characteristic of a forgetfulness of being and subjectivity.

> *The man who fears does not stop with any of these; his "environment" does not disappear, but it is encountered without his knowing his way about in it any longer. This bewildered making-present of the first thing that comes into one's head, is something that belongs with forgetting oneself in fear[231].*

Fearful conduct, therefore, foregoes military confrontation, and replaces it with backdoor "politicking", artifice, and "bewilderment". This is precisely what occurs in the "Chanson de Roland". Marsile, under the influence of his barons, proposes a peace pact with Charlemagne. He will convert to Christianity if Charlemagne agrees to leave Spain[232]. Once Charlemagne is gone, Marsile will simply disregard the oath and pact he has just sworn. It is a pact that he has no intention of keeping. Its purpose is to allow him to avoid confrontation, since he knows his armies are inferior, and thereby fears dishonour and death. His sole immediate goal is to see the Frankish army leave Spain. This short-term interest is not weighed against the longer-term possibility of future Frankish retaliation against the Saracens for not having been faithful to the terms of the pact they had themselves proposed. I would suggest that this short-sightedness, itself a manifestation of intermittent subjectivizing (that subjectivizing which is without goal or telos other than its own immediacy), of a subjectivizing that does not view continuity, but rather, is obsessed with the here and now, is characteristic of a mode of a way of life, a mode of experiencing one's subjectivity and thinking that is overwhelmed by fear. It is doubtful whether Marsile and his barons ever really thought that their plot for peace would not be discovered, and more importantly, avenged by Charlemagne. Fearful conduct, in this case, does not take into

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[231] Heidegger, Being and Time, p. 392.
[232] See verses 27-50.

consideration the long-term possibilities and repercussions that might effect the development of a mode of subjectivity. It's only focus is on the immediate, the here and now. This inability to think things through, over and beyond the immediate constraints of those things confronting the subject is characteristic of a mode of behaviour that is motivated by fear. What truly interests the Saracen host is avoiding, at all costs[233], having to risk their lives in combat against the Christian other.

I believe that we can come to a phenomenological understanding of this evasion. In his reading of primitive societies that are driven and determined by martial prowess and the urge to dominate, Hegel had suggested that the ability, or rather the willingness, to risk one's life is the defining human characteristic.

However, the exhibition of itself as the pure abstraction of self-consciousness consists in showing itself to be the pure negation of its objective mode, that is, in showing that it is fettered to no determinate existence, that it is not at all bound to the universal individuality of existence, that it is not shackled to life[234].

I would suggest that this Hegelian dynamic, contextualized by religious constructs, is precisely what motivates chivalric thought and becoming[235]. In the "Chanson de Roland", a warrior is nothing other than the sum of his conquests and battles. Charlemagne, for instance, is described, by friend and foe alike, as a great conqueror, having levelled many cities and vanquished many peoples. Roland, when confessing his sins in his mea culpa, also enumerates the cities and peoples he has conquered and defeated. And of course, the very oppositional logic

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[233] Including the sacrifice of their own sons: "Enveiuns I les filz de noz muillers/ Par num d'ocire i enveierai le men/ Asez est melz qu'il i perdent lé chefs/ Que nus perduns l'onur ne la deintét". Verses 42-45.

[234] Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, Translated by A.V. Miller with an analysis of the text and a foreword by J.N. Findlay., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977, p. 113.

[235] Richard Kaueper stresses this very point, in non-philosophic terms, when he writes: "Yet competition and its results are usually accepted or even highly regarded. A **real man of prowess** will bear the marks of other men's weapons on his body". Kaueper, Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe. p. 151. The emphasis is mine.

that confronts the two sides, Christian versus Saracen, coupled with the very brutal foreign policy employed by the Christians (convert, or die), easily lends itself to a reading that is in conformity with the thrust of Hegel's argument. Strife, willed strife, the embracing of strife and the risk for life and limb that it implies are fundamental elements in the warrior, knightly code. In contrast with fear, prowess revels in risk inasmuch as the agent of prowess achieves a conception of himself by confronting another and submitting (converting) or killing him. Risk, coupled with the religious drive, allow for a subject to express and determine himself, to develop himself, and hopefully, if and when death comes, to die in such a manner as to achieve immortality, that is to say, the transcendent continuation of the subjectivity started in the immanent. And so it is that the martial subject endures by multiplying itself, renewing combat by always challenging others[236], with the result that the transient nature of this other becomes dependent upon my victory. Victory as life-risking, itself transient and impermanent in nature (even Roland is "defeated" and perishes in combat), when it is exercised in a theological framework, allows for the continued, albeit transformed and transmuted, continuity of the subject since he is lifted into the hereafter. Prowess seeks, and achieves, the preservation and extension of the subject.

Ruse, on the other hand, is utilized and deployed because, in the Saracen, the chivalric love of danger, the insatiable quest for combat is lacking, such that the only viable option left are stratagems, ploys for peace, and underhanded backstabbing. Strength of arms is replaced by cunning, and martial initiative is supplanted by false appearances. One subject does not so much conquer or submit another, as he carefully avoids conflict with him. When such trickery is coupled with the "irrational" impulse, the turning away from God, the anthropologically perverse

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[236] "Obviously, if war is the highest expression of prowess, the best opportunity for prowess, knights need war. When in romance a knight brings peace to some castle, region, or kingdom, that martial achievement usually spells the end of prowess there and thus the end of interest". Kaueper, <u>Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe</u>. p. 166.

subject not only persists in his perversion and desubjectivizing, he accentuates such a mode of existence by foregoing the kind of activity that would allow him to make a mark for himself. Not only does the Saracen turn away from the correct subjectivizing mode by way of his theological choice, he furthers this distance by another turning away that is phenomenological in nature.

By contrast, Roland, the very hero of the poem that bears his name, disdains appearances, ruses, and stratagems. His military initiatives are limited to a kind of blunt, straightforward frontal assault. What characterizes a valiant warrior like Roland is his refusal to conceal his prowess and desire for combat. This open display of prowess is precisely what Ganelon deems his "*orgoilz*" –pride- (verse 389), and what some commentators have categorized as his *démesure* -hubris-. Likewise it is Roland's staunch belief in the "justice" of arms that incites him to harass Charlemagne with pleas for the continuation of the war, and the need to avenge those Franks that Marsile had treacherously killed[237]. This desire for combat is articulated and defended in theological terms. Consequently, this need to fight, this impetus towards combat[238], forms and founds the knight *qua* knight, such that present social status, worthiness in the eyes of men and of God, as well as future recognition, are all dependent upon the valorization and actualization of this quality. The "Chanson de Roland" stresses that an important difference between the Christian knights and the Saracens in the "Chanson de Roland" lies in the peculiar association, common to European chivalry, of existential violence and existential theology.

> *For in one of its essential dimensions chivalry rested on the very fusion of prowess and*
> *piety; it functioned as the male, aristocratic form of lay piety; it was itself, in other*
> *words, an embodiment of the religious force that worked so powerfully to shape society,*

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[237]See verses 194-213.

[238] What Richard Kaueper has described, in terms reminiscent of the notion of a *conatus*, as *"never tir(ing) of doing battle"*. Kaueper, Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe. p. 162.

at least from the twelfth century. The worship of the demigod prowess- with all the ideas

and practises of the quasi-religion of honour- was merged with medieval Christianity[239].

I believe that Richard Kaueper has identified an important conjunction of elements here, and I take his comment, more specifically his categorization of prowess as a demigod, to mean that anything and everything related to chivalric becoming, specifically prowess as a continuous call-to-arms, inasmuch as it is, and strives to remain the agency of the subject, must endeavour to persist as it is, and, in so doing, reveals itself as an essential aspect of the warrior spirit and the *chevalier*.

In contrast, not only could Marsile (from the Christian perspective) be said to act like, and to be a coward, he would appear to be less of a subject in martial or kingly terms. For the knight, and the warrior king who embodies the cultural and cultual dimensions of his society, is largely defined by his adherence to, and excellence in displays of martial prowess[240]. The "Chanson de Roland" furnishes an excellent example of just such a phenomenon in its portrayal of the Christian king.   Charlemagne is widely recognized as a great warrior by friend and foe alike. Thus it is that, however begrudgingly, even the Saracens recognize the greatness of an enemy king in chivalric terms. When Ganelon first meets Blancandrin, the Saracen envoy, the latter remarks that Charlemagne is truly a great king, aged in years, and covered in military glory.

Dist Blancandrins: "Merveilus hom est Charles,

Ki cunquist Puille e trestute Calabre.

Vers Engletere passat il la mer salse

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[239] Kaueper, <u>Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe</u>. p. 47.
[240] As Richard Kaueper has noted: "Only after reading scores of works of chivalric literature can we fully appreciate the utterly tireless, almost obsessional emphasis placed on personal prowess as the key chivalric trait. Not simply one quality among others in a list of virtues, prowess often stands as a one-word definition of chivalry in these texts". Kaueper, <u>Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe</u>. p. 135.

Ad oés seint Perre en cunquist le chevage »[241].

If the Christian warriors become subjects by displaying and participating in acts of fearlessness[242], then the Saracens fear of loss, death, and dishonour by way of ill-fated combat, all define their antipodal desubjectivizing, for in them there is a lack, an absence of that "human" trait beloved of a warrior elite.   This absence defines them in their difference to the warlike Christians.

The fear of death that provokes desperation, and which sustains desperate measures, suggests that the fearful person is too attached to his life, and with respect to the characterization of the Saracens in the "Chanson de Roland", such a preoccupation is defined largely in material terms. With the notable exception of Roland's desperate efforts to dash his sword against a rock in order to preserve it from falling into enemy hands, the "Chanson de Roland" would have us believe that the Christian world is quite averse to the kind of materialist thinking so common among the Saracens. The Franks, simply put, do not think about worldly goods and possessions. They do not fear their loss (other than for theological reasons, their swords bearing an unseemly amount of holy relics), they merely attempt to prevent their falling into enemy hands. This distinction is undoubtedly specious for the modern reader likely to see "commodity fetishism" in both Christians and Saracens; it remains, nonetheless, an important distinction in the poem's logic. For it indicates that the Saracens, once again, are turned away from God, by having turned towards the material world, whereas the Christians are turned towards God (and the protection of his "theophanies" by way of the holy relics) by having turned away from any consideration of worldly/material interests. One looks above, the other looks below.

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[241] Verses 370-373.
[242] As is evidenced in the following verses: "Li duze per sunt remés en Espaigne/ Vint milie Francs unt en la lur cumpaigne;/ Nen unt pour ne de murir dutance". Verses 826-828. Also see verses 1046-1047.

In fact, the Saracens continuously associate subjectivity and materiality in their thinking. Not only do they fear death at the hands of Charlemagne, but they also seem to fear, to the very same degree, losing their possessions and material wealth. This preoccupation with materiality motivates the ill-fated plot to dupe the Franks into leaving Spain. The Saracens mistakenly believe that the Franks are like themselves, motivated by the same drives (i.e., not the drive towards God), and can be made to see reason: not religious reason as the discovery and adherence to a Truth, but material reasoning since it is thought that they can be bought off, exchanging one mass of goods (the tribute given to Charlemagne) for another (Spain itself). This fear of loss, this fear of death and impoverishment is so dominant in Saracen thinking, that the Saracens, unlike their Christian counterparts (who wish to avenge the death of family members[243]), are willing to sacrifice their sons in order to better secure their hold on their material possessions and their own lives. Hence Blancandrin, one of Marsile's barons, advises him:

> *Enveiuns I les filz de noz muillers:*
>
> *Par num d'ocire i enveierai le men.*
>
> *Asez est melz qu'il i perdent lé chefs*
>
> *Que nus perduns l'onur ne la deintét,*
>
> *Ne nus seiuns cunduiz a mendeier.*[244]

That such a proposal could be made, or even entertained, suggests that the poem represents the acts and thoughts of the Saracen elite as extreme. It points to the fact that, from a Christian perspective, the Saracen chooses and acts improperly, that is to say, he conceives of his

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[243] See verses 205-213.

[244] Verses 42-46. This willingness to sacrifice one's sons gets repeated in another section of the poem. See also verses 56-61.

actions and thoughts differently. No Christian would sacrifice his family. In fact, the contrary is true inasmuch as someone like Roland is willing to die rather than have any degree of shame fall on his family. Duty to God, honour, loyalty to family, these are not important factors guiding Saracen behaviour. Given the importance of such elements in determining Christian subjectivity, one can only surmise that the poem's insistence that the Saracens would be willing to trade the lives of their sons against material possessions is but another proof of their difference, their "desubjectivity". Whereas Franks have some definite attitudes and modes of behaviour, that are meant to signify that there is a collective sense of a sphere of human experience that figures more or less in any subject of that community[245], the option put forth by the Saracens falls off the map of moral considerations. It is not a question merely of their disagreeing as to what might constitute appropriate or inappropriate actions (is it appropriate to truly convert, is it appropriate to surrender, and under what conditions?), rather Saracen difference seems to be situated in the sphere of disputing that there *are* appropriate ways of acting and reacting. The narrative thrust wills us to believe that, siding with the poem's Christian heroes, we come to realize that there is no situation in which such a plot could seriously be entertained, nor could there be circumstances in which fathers would willingly sacrifice their sons in order to hold on to worldly possessions.

We can judge the extent to which the poem demonizes the Saracens by focusing on Blancandrin's advice to Marsile. His "political considerations" are contextualized in such a way as to evidence the fact that nothing is held more sacred than the possessions he and Marsile enjoy. Consequently, anything and everything must be sacrificed in order to secure these possessions. And this would seem to include "human sacrifice". Not only are the Saracens willing to "play" on their faith by faking adherence to another religion (which in itself

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[245] Even the treasonous Ganelon falls under such a category, as does his trial, which is both determined and determining of the various cultural/ethical possibilities that Frankish society has developed.

distinguishes them from the Franks, who are moral purists in this regard), thereby indicating a certain degree of superficiality in their religious beliefs, they are also willing to sacrifice their sons in order to maintain their wealth and status. If "faith" and "family" are two fundamental grounding experiences, then the ease with which the Saracens are willing to do away with them tends to denote them, easily, as moral "monsters". Their plot, in focus and in detail, substantiates their own consciousness of themselves as being different.

This materiality, this focus on possessions is also present in Saracen religiosity. Muslims, as we know, do not worship idols. The "Chanson de Roland", however, insists on portraying the Saracens as wicked idolaters. Unlike the Christians who, regardless of their fetish for relics, nonetheless worship a transcendent God divorced from base materiality, the Saracens pray to and invoke their material idols when preparing, or repairing from battle. These invocations, meant to demonize practises that are wholly "other", that is to say unchristian, inevitably fall on deaf ears, and Saracen religiosity is, in the eyes of the reader, revealed for the empty practise that it is. Since Saracen prayers go unanswered, Saracen religiosity regresses from its material phase into a form of despondent despair. Unlike traditional narratives in which things evolve from a bad situation to a bettered state, the "Chanson de Roland" insists on portraying Saracen religiosity as moving from the accursed or damned (idol worship having been forbidden by ecclesiastical authorities), to a worsened situation (theological despair is antithetical to a doctrine insisting on hope and salvation) that can only be corrected, not by itself, but through the muscular intervention of a foreign host that imposes its will on the collective Saracen body. Christianity offers its foes a simple choice: death or conversion through force. It is only then that one could say that the state of Saracen religiosity improves. But before the Saracens can be saved from themselves by the Christians, they have to lose everything. This involves recognition of the

fruitlessness of their former religious practises. Consequently, it is also through the consciousness of this difference, of their differing worship and practise with regard to the Christians, that Saracen culture is inevitably undone "from within".

The "Chanson de Roland" strives to impart upon the reader the idea that, ultimately, it is the consciousness of the inferiority of their religious beliefs that will lead the Saracens to their ultimate despair. A despair that will reveal the materiality, and thereby, the emptiness of their religious beliefs. Idols, fashioned in the image of fallen men, made by men, cannot oppose the striving of a true faith. Idols, when confronted by an authentic religious belief or practise, inevitably reveal their "theophanic" emptiness, their soteriological worthlessness. Idols, when confronted by the authentic religious presence, exercised and lived by another faith community (a community that actualizes that belief by bearing it upon itself, that is to say, by subjectivizing that belief) suffer what we might call a "fall from grace", a shattering that precipitates them to shards as they fall to the ground. Michael Camille has given a thorough history of the use of idols during the medieval period. He has also enumerated the numerous ways in which pagan idols are destroyed or "fallen". It is often the case that idols fall because their fall implicitly recognizes the grandeur of the religious presence that has confronted it. An idol, when "faced" with a relic, or a Christian statue, will drop from its stand, moving downward, shatter into many pieces, leaving only the authentic religious presence to reign in its elevated place. The importance of such encounters resides in the manner in which one religious instrument (the Saracen idol) falters, or bows in acquiescence before another. Its shattering, caused by its "fall from grace", reinforces its lack of Transecndence: it falls downward, rather than move upwards, and its brokenness better demonstrates that it was drawn from the material world, and returns, part and parcel, back to that world, in a manner echoing the Biblical from dust to dust. No

spirit, or soul, escapes from it. As an instrument, this idol clearly shows that it was human all too human all along. That such a reversal of fortunes can occur through direct confrontation with a "holy idol", establishes a theomachic paradigm (not unlike that found in the "Chanson de Roland's" war of Christian versus Saracen) in which the power present in the true religious instrument causes the other, false idol, to fall to the ground, to ritualistically bow and mutilate or destroy itself, by divesting itself of its elevated place. The fall of the idols in the "Chanson de Roland" can be interpreted according to this theological framework, wherein the medieval period persistently expressed a Christian abhorrence for the falsehood of pagan idols. The falsity of the idols is always revealed by the presence of an article of the true faith. Truth, by its very presence, can cause falsity to wither away. For instance, Camille begins the Gothic Idol with an elaborate analysis of a leaf from 13th century psalter, and in many ways this "incipit" can be understood to signify much of what is explicated in the other parts of his work.   The leaf portrays the Holy Family crossing in front of a pagan idol that promptly bows, or is driven down before the new God Christ. This confrontation has obvious theological consequences, and it proposes a philosophical understanding of the apocalypse awaiting all pagan idols. Two worlds, one of positive being, one of negation, cannot both "stand" in the presence of one another, such that "the destruction of the old gods in their plurality by the new in His singularity has been simplified into a clash of two images, that of God in the image of man –the Christ Child held in his mother's arms- and the image of the idol" [246]. It is this opposition between the false idol and the True Christ that represents the dichotomous worldview that is evidenced by the "Chanson de

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[246] Camille, The Gothic Idol. Ideology and Image-making in Medieval Art. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, p. 1. It should be noted that there did exist a tradition of Christian abuse towards idols. See Akbari, Idols in the East. European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2009, p. 207.

Roland". The pagan idols are ultimately useless, whereas Christianity (in all its guises) offers

succor and salvation.

Christianity has had a long standing, and paradoxical, injunction against idols. Idols have

traditionally been understood to be vacuous representations of non-existent deities, or have been

considered as images of demons and devils. Much of the theological disputations on the subject

have argued that idols are to be rejected since idols represent *nothing*[247]. Consequently, a

religion, a culture built around the worship of idols, is also a representational worshipping of this

very *nothingness*. There is a passage in the "Chanson de Roland" which is meant to demonstrate

the extent to which Saracen culture and religiosity are built on just such a shaky ground. We are

once again in a situation of distress and fear. The Saracens, harassed by their Christian foes, turn

to their triumvirate of gods. These pleas for help, paralleling those of Marsile to his counsellors,

are fruitless. After having invoked their gods, to no avail, and having been defeated in battle[248],

the Saracens retreat to Saragossa.   Once again, we are dealing with a retreat, a backward move.

Safe, for the time being, behind the walls of Saragossa, the Saracens begin to bemoan their fate,

and turn on their gods.[249]   Worse still, the former idols are allowed to be defiled by an unclean

animal, pigs, while also sullied by dogs. I would contend that these passages are meant to

convey both the fickleness of the Saracens, as well as the fictitiousness of their gods. It also

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[247] Let us remember that the "Chanson de Roland" sets up a very fundamental dichotomy between good, on the one hand (*chrestïens unt dreit),* and evil (*paien unt tort)* on the other. Consequently, perfidious idols, idols of false gods and demons, as well any other agents or instruments of falsehood and evil have traditionally, and paradoxically, been conceived of as incarnations of nothingness. "(E)vil is nothing, then, since they are only capable of evil, they are capable of nothing". Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Grand Rapids Michigan, 1902, p. 57.
[248] We can summarize much of the action in the "Chanson de Roland" by stating that it contains two battles. The first involving the assault on the rear guard, the second the revenge battle between Charlemagne and Baligant. The first battle is a technical defeat for the Christians inasmuch as the rear guard is killed to the last man, yet in this defeat the Saracen army has been bled dry, its king has been amputated, and his forces have been thrown into chaos. I do not think there is any reason to doubt the fact that its representation was meant to convey that this had somehow been a "victorious defeat". The second battle is unequivocally a Christian victory: Charlemagne slaughters the whole of the Saracen army, forces those remaining in the city of Saragossa to convert or be killed.
[249] See verses 2576-2591; 2600-2604.

serves to prepare for the eventual "healing" of Saracen irrationality and perversion that will be effected, in part by the Christian conquest, and in part, by way of the main female protagonist, Bramimonde, the crown in the Frankish/Christian conquest, since it is she who will eventually *"par amur cunvertisset"*[250]. Regardless of the poem's narrative strategy, I would tend to view her conversion, not as a great theological victory, but in terms of the continuity of the domination of sameness. Some of the literature that has focused on Bramimonde's conversion has viewed her destruction of the idols as a necessary textual step on the way to her conversion. In other words, it is a form of *étapisme* whereby you first divest yourself of the material measures of your religion, and finally get rid of the spiritual measures of your religion by adopting a new faith. Sharon Kinoshita, among others subscribes, at least partially, to this textual *étapiste* vision of Bramimonde. Apart from its textual setting, I would tend to view the two passages as being radically different. The destruction of the idols would symbolize a phenomenological break from ANY religion when Bramimonde comes to understand that the idols are no more than man-made objects. I would view her later conversion as being itself a fall of idols, in the sense that the free woman that she was, is now once again enslaved to a phenomenology of Transecndence.

I believe that a philosophical analysis of these passages might more fully convey the extent to which the poem strives to portray the negativity of the Saracens as a religious community. By throwing the idols to the ground and allowing them to be spat upon, to be ritualistically defiled by pigs and dogs, the Bramimonde led Saracens are indicating that these idols no longer serve. Any pretense of their former glory has been abandoned. They are now fallen idols. That is to say, their magic or metaphysical power has been shown to be *nothing*. It was never the case that a theophanic presencing occurred in and through them. They were always already physical objects made of wood and metal. Consequently, they will no longer be

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[250] Verse 3674.

serviced religiously or adored. In other words, whereas idols are usually the physical instances of the subjective communal experience of Transcendence, fallen idols are experienced as being nothing more than the moving process of cognition faced with a physical instance. Created by the hand of man, idols are nothing more than instances of matter artistically and humanly transformed. Given that these particular objects have been fashioned by perverted humans merely adds to their condemnation. Their fall to the ground repeats and reflects the ground, the mere earth from which they came[251]. This is another form of inscription. For the actual shape of religiosity is marked, inscribed by human violence, by human action (the throwing down, the allowed defilement by pigs and dogs).   In a certain sense, the vacuousness of Saracen religion is revealed when the Saracens themselves are reduced to sadness, despair and unhappiness[252]. The idols have been stripped of their mask of divinity, they have fallen to the ground, and thereby reveal the nothingness of Saracen culture/belief, and such a fall anticipates that these defiled gods will be replaced with the True God and the man capable of mastering them all: Charlemagne. In many ways these passages are a type prolepsis.

Once again, if we believe the narrative thrust of the "Chanson de Roland", the materiality of Saracen religion and culture condemns it to its own demise. For all of this falling to the ground implies a very real phenomenological death of the gods insofar as the idols no longer have a spiritual presence (the pretence of which has been destroyed), because, unlike Christian relics, they are an unhappy medium between the sacred and the profane[253]. Whereas the

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[251] See sections ¶¶ 748-784 in Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit. .

[252] As Meredith Jones has stated, the gamut of Saracen emotions is but another indication of their instability. See Jones, "The Conventional Saracen of the Songs of Geste", p. 213.

[253] Unlike Christian relics which spiritualize the profane through holiness.

Christian world, relics included, is directly linked to the upper world of Transcendence[254], the Saracen idols have no Transcendence. In their world, any notion of Transcendence always falters and falls to the ground since, having no real Transcendence to begin with[255], Transcendence, not as true Substance but as pure abstraction, can only dwell in the vacuous nature of material idols. If Frankish religiosity opposes Saracen religiosity, it is not only because the Saracens have a false idea of God, but also because they only have an idea/idol of God. They are mere idols, mere concepts, and mere symbols devoid of substance. They are devoid of the Subject to whom one should be subject, thereby becoming a subject oneself. One can imagine that when Bramimonde converts, out of love, it is a conversion to the very Frankish, Christian concept of the divine, that of a substantific incarnation allowing for the process of continual subjectivizing. She converts not to some empty, material idol, but to the type of deity so ardently defended by the Franks. The Christian articles of worship point to some other "thing" outside of, and beyond themselves. This is the very possibility that is not afforded or made possible by a Saracen idol. This is the reason why, when the Saracens project their religious beliefs into articles and instruments that are devoid of spiritual force, that projection will necessarily fall back down to earth. When you are dealing with (and in) a false religion, facticity becomes a law of nature. Matter cannot be any other thing than matter. Philosophically, the passages in which we are presented with a Saracen religious "revolt" signify that the gods that have been thrown to the ground have been so defiled because, ultimately, there was nothing there, nothing more than mere materiality and empty worship. True faith, as Bramimonde suggests in her denunciation of the Saracen deities, must be found elsewhere, more precisely, in the Christian other:

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[254] This is one of the main ideas in Augustine's City of God. See Augustine, The City of God. This theme is also evidenced by the deaths of the Christian knights whose souls are carried off to Paradise, suggesting that actions in this world correspond to states of grace in another.

[255] Let us remember that the soul of Saracen warriors is carried down into Hell – yet another phenomenological movement towards the "bottom", a downward movement.

Dist Bramimunde: 'Or oi mult grant folie!

Cist nostre due sunt en recreantise

En Rencevals malvaises vertuz firent

Noz chevalers i unt lesset ocire.[256]

All of these different elements are combined in the "Chanson de Roland" in such a way as to suggest to the reader that the Saracens, incarnated by Marsile and his counselors, have actions and thoughts that are conditioned by desires, motivations, instincts, that enslave them to their natural or material existence. This *is* their *difference*. Consequently, as far as Marsile and his political scheming are concerned, it is the case that the possibility for an awareness of difference is related to an awareness of the impossibility of such a difference. Marsile is made aware of his difference by being confronted with its potential destruction. Marsile's anguish and his desperation stem from his recognition that his subjectivity, different in nature from that of his Christian enemies, is potentially transient, since its potential for being is determined by another's subject's negating activity. In other words, Marsile is made all the more aware of how the world is divided up into vanquished and victor, blessed and disgraced, by the fact that his own subjectivity/difference within that world waxes and wanes through the emergence of the other, different, mode of subjectivizing. We can argue that from the point of view of the author of the "Chanson de Roland", military superiority is aligned with a subjective/cultural superiority.

This is all the more true if we return to the theme of Saracen anxiety. What we discover is that such anxiety (expressed by Marsile, and practised by his knights in combat) must be measured against the degree of martial certainty (the unwavering devotion to combat in the name of lord and God) evidenced by the Christian hero of the poem: Roland. Roland and his fellow

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[256] Verses 2714-2717.

knights (most notably Turpin: the admixture of theology and a warrior ethic) frequently invoke

the importance of bravery. A few examples are sufficient to drive home this point:

Roland:

Sempres ferrai de Durendal granz colps;

Sanglant en ert li branz entresqu'a l'or.

 Felun paien mar i vindrent as porz :

 Jo vos plevis, tuz sunt jugez a mort.[257]

Or this following passage recounting Turpin's mad dash of prowess:

Par le camp vait Turpin li arcevesque;

Tel coronét ne chantat unches messe

Ki de sun cors feïst tantes proëcces.[258]

I believe that these two passages give a sufficient idea of the overwhelming importance

of bravery/prowess the Christian protagonists value in defining a warrior's existence and social

standing. The warrior must fight bravely, and furthermore, he must be prepared to die if need be.

This self-sacrifice is not only determined by feudal heritage, as may be suggested by some of

Roland's comments[259], it is also one of the theological assumptions upon which knighthood is

conceived. This is related to the fact that since *"Christ dies for them; they must be willing to die*

for him"[260]. A pagan, such as Marsile, would not be so inclined. To fail to do otherwise would

be to be unfaithful to one's knightly creed. Wilfrid Besnardeau has studied the relationship

between bravery and cowardice as existential standards and indicators of difference in other

medieval *chansons de geste*. The dynamic he employs for the *Aliscans* and the *Chanson de*

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[257] Verses 1055-1058.
[258] Verses 1562-1564.
[259] Roland laments the loss of the rear guard as a waste of Charlemagne's efforts in having "kept" such an army.
Charles had nourished/kept his army, and they owe him devout allegiance. See verses 1857-1860.
[260] Kaueper, Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe. p. 233.

Guillaume can equally be used in our analysis. He defines bravery as the essential value which constitutes the means of knightly becoming, defining the knight's role and duties as a social warrior, and thereby helps to situates him within the larger social framework:

> *Ces recommandations mettent bien l'accent sur la mission extrêmement importante qui incombe aux guerriers. Aussi dans la littérature, les chevaliers correspondent-ils globalement à un modèle idéal de comportement, tant ils sont vantés pour leur hardiesse. C'est pourquoi, à certains endroits, La Chanson de Guillaume et Aliscans dénoncent la lâcheté comme défaut majeur pour stigmatiser le mauvais chef ou le mauvais roi. Or ces deux oeuvres présentent aussi des guerriers dont la lâcheté les écarte résolument du reste de la communauté en allant jusqu'à redéfinir leur identité.*[261]

Given the importance placed on martial prowess, the absence of bravery leads to a knight's demotion in rank and social standing. Such a downfall in social standing is very much at the heart of Roland's reputed hubris. He would rather perish than be seen, or remembered, as having lacked courage or fighting spirit. Cowardice could lead to songs of disrepute being sung about a knight's shortcomings. Both Roland and Turpin evoke the possibility that a warrior, unequal to his role and task, could suffer the ill-repute of such songs[262]. The Saracens, by contrast, do not appear to be motivated by any future glory, or any soteriology. They do not, in combat, appeal to the idea that they, in turn, might be lionized or vilified by future songs of glory. Their primary concern is wealth and materiality. As a consequence, and in keeping with the dichotomous nature of the poem, a worthy Christian knight, being different, is compelled to risk his life and being in combat.

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[261] Besnardeau, 'Le personnage de Guichard et les couards dans *La Chanson de Guillaume* et dans l'*Aliscan*'*s*' in <u>Mourir pour des idées</u>. Textes réunis et présentés par Caroline Cazanave et France Marchal-Ninosque, Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, Besançon, 2008, p.318.

[262] Roland does so in verses 1014; 1466. Turpin does the same a few verses later in 1474. In chapters 11-14, we will explicate the philosophy of dishonour that motivates such comments.

The manner in which one acts and practises the martial dimension of life, leads into and reflects one's dependence upon or faithfulness to the theological dimension of existence. As we have seen in chapters 1-7 when discussing the notion of faithfulness to a truth process, the Christian hero is willing and able to risk all, to risk the disappearance and negation of his subjectivity because, in the risking, there is involved a continuity of that subjectivity within a universal process. Something of that which is negated continues and persists within the universal truth, and it persists all the more for having been lost, or sacrificed, in the name of the Truth. The martial and the spiritual are conjoined inasmuch as, in both cases, there is an obligation to fight for, to struggle in the name of a Truth for which all manner of suffering and humiliations are willingly endured. To be a Christian, if we refer back to the Pauline accounts of what just such a behaviour would involve, means enduring hardships and humiliations (up to, and including death) for God. To be a Christian knight, therefore, involves the admixture of these two notions of faithfulness. Of a faithfulness willing to forego the existence of its subjectivity in the situation in order to stand in union with the Truth. Consequently, to be a Christian knight is to be at risk. This is the crucial ideal that is so important in the "Chanson de Roland's" poetic militancy, and which it asserts as being so very absent in the Saracen world. According to this model, it is judged to be far better to be used up in battle, where a knight can have the pleasure of dying gloriously[263], than to be used up in a dreary material existence. Battle and combat give men a death with military honours, they give him future (immanent) immortality in that he becomes the subject of great songs and epic poems, and they afford him the opportunity of extending his subjectivity beyond its immediacy, into the hereafter, achieving complete subjectivity before God. It is no wonder that such a poetic paradigm would compel

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[263] What could be more glorious than the promise of Paradise that Turpin hints at when he whips his fellow knights into a murderous frenzy: "Se voz murez, esterz seinz martirs:/ Sieges avrez el greignor pareïs". Verses 1134-1135.

knights to flock to this bloody standard. War is admirable since it protects from growing weak and comfortable, it facilitates both immanent and otherworldly immortality, while it also excites virtues that would be susceptible of rotting away in a facile material existence[264]. The cosmological incidents in the text undoubtedly serve to lessen the importance of the immanent immortality afforded by epic song. They remind the reader/listener that, although these might be important, the true focus is (or should be) always on the hereafter. Perhaps the very presence of such cosmological incidents highlights a potential tension within the Christian camp itself.

Unsurprisingly, given the prevalence of this paradigm among the Christian heroes of the poem, the "Chanson de Roland" suggests that it is precisely from the perspective of this material existence that the Saracen difference in action and thought manifests itself. In fact, the "material narrative" of the text is wholly one-sided. The poem is silent about any potential Christian materialism. There are very few descriptions of Christian possessions, aside from an enumeration of the relics held within the warrior's sword. In keeping with the poem's orthodoxy, the presence of such relics is not pecuniary in nature (although the market for such things was a highly profitable one), but rather religious. The relics make present the divine in the immanent, and therefore relate its possessor to this sacred sphere. The "Chanson de Roland" is arguing that when Christians are involved with, or trade in material possessions, these are not really material possessions, or, at least, they should be viewed with a degree of circumspection. After all, Christian knights, Ganelon aside, would not be so base.

There is, on the other hand, a wealth of descriptions of Saracen possessions. These are descriptions of objects which are both physical and economic. There is a spiritual dimension to such a preoccupation with materiality. The spirit matters little where matter matters most.

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[264] It should be remembered that, in historical terms, the Crusaders judged that the men of the East (Saracen and Orthodox Christians) were effeminate and weak, precisely because they had grown weak through a facile material existence.

Ethical concerns, moral qualms, religious beliefs, existence itself, are expendable given that they can be traded against, or for, matter. If Blancandrin's advice is to be taken seriously, there is interchangeability between the lives of the sons of the Saracen leaders, and the wealth of Spain. Material objects are, of course, the products of men, such that the emphasis placed on such objects involves a self-interpretation of those men by themselves as lording over a world where the lives and beliefs of others (the sons to be sacrificed, the Frankish king to be duped) has only economic value. The "Chanson de Roland" wants us to believe this materialist narrative and characterization of the Saracens, and to this end, the "gifts" given to Ganelon best exemplify this focus on materiality within Saracen culture and thinking. When Ganelon betrays his fellow Franks, he enters into a pact with the Saracens. What is striking in this pact is the extent to which the net material benefit of the betrayal is emphasized. The Saracens continually highlight and dramatize the importance of the gifts they give to Ganelon by stressing their great cost. A few examples will suffice:

> *Atant I vint uns paiens Valdabruns,*
>
> *Icil levat le rei Marsilïum*
>
> *Cler en riant l'ad dit a Guenelun :*
>
> *'Tenez m'espee! Meillur n'en at nuls hom:*
>
> *Entre les helz ad plus de mil manguns'[265]*

Or again,

> *Atant i vint reïne Bramimunde :*
>
> *'Jo vos aim mult, sire' dist ele al cunte,*
>
> *'car mult vos priset mi sire e tuit si hume.*
>
> *A vostre femme en veierai dous nusches :*

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[265] Verses 617-621.

Ben i ad or, matices e jacunces,

E valent mielz que tut l'aveir de Rume.

Vostre emperere si bones n'en out unches' [266]

Such passages lend themselves rather easily to an interpretation that is reminiscent of Thorstein Veblen's economic model, which is to say as manifestations of *largesse qua* conspicuous waste[267]. But I do not believe that such an interpretation is the only one intended by the "Chanson de Roland". I think these passages are meant to bring the reader into considering the sway and fascination that the material world (in contradistinction to the Christian fascination for the transcendental) holds on the Saracens. Such passages are meant to suggest that wealth, and not warlike virtues as religious devotion, material concerns, and not spiritual warfare, are at the heart of the Saracen Empire. Saracens fear war for its material consequences (death and financial loss), and attempt to circumvent war, to avoid having to confront a powerful enemy by lavishing material means on a useful traitor. If you can't fight them, bribe them off. The thrust of these passages indicates that Saracen acting and thinking are materially inspired and driven.

Such materiality, and the "pacts" it leads to, indicate that the Saracens suffer from a form of cowardice best described as a dialectical refusal to participate in the conditions grounding the continuity of subjectivity (both the immanent conditions allowing subjectivity to exercise itself in the world, as well as the soteriological conditions wherein subjectivity attains paradisiacal immortality). They neither believe, nor act upon that belief, nor do they engage in the kind of chivalric prowess that allows for the appearance of great subjects or knights. Their best

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[266] Verses 634-640.

[267] "Apart from their serviceability in other respects, these objects are beautiful and have a utility as such; they are valuable on this account if they can be appropriated or monopolized; they are, therefore, coveted as valuable possessions, and their exclusive enjoyment gratifies the possessor's sense of pecuniary superiority at the same time that their contemplation gratifies his sense of beauty". Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class. Introduction by Robert Lekachman, Penguin Books, New York, 1967, p.129.

exemplars (as we shall see in a later section) are always of an inferior kind when compared to their Christian counterparts, always lacking some "existential stuff" that would make them not only appear to be great warriors and knights, but to actually be such. This "lack", this falsity of appearances, is evidenced throughout the "Chanson de Roland", since the Saracens are always represented as trying to find a "way out", a means of not having to risk their lives. In other words, they are always sidestepping the means contributing to the formation and continuity of subjectivity. The Saracens continually choose the "desubjectivizing" over, and against, the subjectivizing model championed by Christian theology and culture.

One of the narrative plots of the poem involves this very process of "desubjectivization". The successful seduction of Ganelon by the Saracens requires a twofold process of desubjectivization. On the one hand, Ganelon must himself cease to be a Christian subject (loyal to God and king in combat) when he participates in the plot to have the rearguard massacred. The plot to betray his fellow Franks does not seek to continue the hostilities with the Saracens until they have been corrected, converted, or killed. For the battle that will ensue is a momentary battle, one that attempts to put an end to the hostilities, to exhaust Christian morale, to incite despair for the losses at Roncevaux, and thereby, to end the hostilities by allowing the Saracens to persist in their difference. Ganelon's efforts, were they to be successful, would allow for the continuity and persistence of Saracen practise and belief, that is to say, those very practises and beliefs that are symptomatic of a mode of "desubjectivization". We must surmise that if Ganelon's efforts are welcomed, and encouraged by a Saracen assembly, it is precisely because such a body is seeking precisely to persist in its own process of "desubjectivization". The pact puts forth a dual subjectivizing process, where one partner (Ganelon) is corrupted and converted,

while the other stays the same by bringing the other into the fold of the same. Through this pact they would continue to exist, and to falsely believe their theological constructs.

Like the tempting serpent, the Saracens sense the possibility for such a conversion to unmartial conduct, to irrational desubjectivizing when they assume that they can "pay" for peace through gifts and treason[268]. The possibility for such an interpretation has been argued by Brewster Fitz, who states that with the exception of Roland, it is the Christians who are "converted" through their false belief in the possibility of a peaceful pact with the Saracens. That the gifts offered by the Saracens are accepted might suggest that, to some degree, the Christian camp has been tempted or seduced by the very mode of being which characterizes the Saracens. The Christian camp has been deluded into believing a false offer of peace from the masters of *cupiditas:*

> *After seven years of war the Saracens know they are defeated. Blancandrin proposes to pretend to request mercy, caritas, while sending to Charlemagne treasures that use cupiditas to turn the Christian army around. In other words, Blancandrin proposes a gift whereby the Christian army will be unwittingly "converted" by the pagans' alleged "faith.[269]*

In such a situation, not only would the bribe pervert the "other", it might keep any confrontation at arm's length. Most importantly, it would eliminate the need to engage in that very process of subjectivizing championed by the Franks. If the poem insists on Saracen treachery, perhaps this aversion to conflict can be understood as one of its great manifestations. This dialectical refusal to construct a martial subject occurs when the Saracens recognize that they stand no chance of winning a direct war, face to face against their enemy, and thereby

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[268] See verses 27-34.
[269] Fitz, 'Cain as Convict and Convert? Cross-Cultural Logic in the Song of Roland', p. 813-814.

choose a backwards stab at Charlemagne's army. Hitting at the rear guard might be considered the equivalent of a stab in the back.

At other times, their unwillingness to fight is made manifest in their very manner and mode of fighting. Saracens go about the martial-subjectivizing process in a manner that is all wrong. Not only are they theoretically off the mark (having turned away from God and its subjectivizing consequences), they also screw up the praxis of the process itself. They do not rush in or fight face to face, rather, they elude, they evade, and they fight from afar, or worse still, they simply run away. This cowardly behaviour, this fighting without fighting, is highlighted by many passages in the *"Chanson de Roland"*, of which the following is perhaps the most highly indicative.

> *Mil Sarrazins i descendent a piét*
>
> *E a cheval sunt quarante millers*
>
> *Men escëntre, ne's osent aproismer*
>
> *Si lor lancerent e laces e espiez*[270]

Clearly, there is fear and cowardice in this instance of military hesitancy. Rather than attack the Christians directly, the Saracens use a coward's stratagem: they attack from afar with spears and lances. These have traditionally been the weapons of lesser warriors. The remaining Christian knights are indirectly assaulted: attacked, not in singular combat, subject against subject, but by means of treacherous long distance arms. The Saracens bombard them with spears and javelins and arrows. The reasoning given by the Saracens is that they fear further loss of men, further risk of losing one's life[271]. Anyone familiar with the implicitly valour promulgated by epic literature, *chanson de geste,* or medieval romances will immediately

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[270] Verses 2071-2074.
[271] See verse 2073.

respond negatively to such a passage. The poem carefully exploits this medieval prejudice against forms of martial cowardice.   For it evokes the very opposite of the kind of bravery and prowess upheld in the poetic tradition. No longer is it the case that men confront one another directly, lances held high, followed by swords wielded with honour. Traditionally, javelins, lances and arrows have been the weapons of cowards and lesser warriors.

But this passage is significant not only in its immediate presentation of Saracen difference as a mode of cowardice, but also in its relationship to the narrative systematicity of the "Chanson de Roland". For in itself, this passage repeats a pattern meant to signify that the enemy always "desubjectivizes" in this way: the Saracens are always unwilling to fight, they are always fearful; they always try to minimize the risk of fighting and/or dying.   This might seem natural to us readers who are culturally removed from the immediate concerns motivating the poem.   It is not, however, poetically heroic, and it does indicate that the two sides are diametrically opposed in terms of secular and religious values. Perhaps this difference between the Christians and the Saracens is best exemplified by a rather curious passage in the "Chanson de Roland" when one of the Saracen warriors chooses to evade combat by "playing dead".

> *Sur l'erbe verte li quens Rollant se pasmet.*
>
> *Unz Sarrazins tute veie l'esguardet,*
>
> *Si se feint mort, si gist entre les altres,*
>
> *Del sanc lüat sun cors e sun visage;*
>
> *Met sei en piez e de curre se hastet.*
>
> *Bels fut e forz e de grant vasselage*
>
> *Par sun orgoill cumencet mortel rage.*[272]

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[272] Verses 2273-2279.

What we have here is a moral mise en abyme, highlighting all of the themes of courage and cowardice, life and death, materiality and Transcendence that underscore the narrative framework of the poem. This Saracen warrior thinks that he shall win glory and repute by pretending to be dead, and then robbing a dead man.

I don't believe that the text could be any more ironic than it is here. For the extreme act of cowardice is paired, undoubtedly in jest, to *Bels fut e forz e de grant vasselage.* What would appear to be noble is in fact, not the case. In this passage, we reach the zenith of cowardice. Martial becoming and the valorization of prowess have been thoroughly abandoned. A warrior abandons the subjectivizing process and its spatial extending by immobilizing himself in a feigned rigor mortis, by pretending to be dead, that is to say, by pretending to be a negated subject. The "Chanson de Roland" could not more strongly characterize Saracen difference than it does in this passage. The poem can construct such a perverse model, a man is playing at death, given that, ethically, it has already been determined that, as a Saracen, an unbeliever and a coward, he is already dead. Instead of the virtues of severity, violence, danger, and the lust/need for war, this man evokes different qualities fit for different functions. He has adopted the mask of defeat, caked himself in the semblance of death, bathed in the blood of others in order to best avoid any further confrontation. Clearly, masked in blood, having chosen, undoubtedly driven by fear, to lie among the slaughtered dead, this man does not believe that the best thing in a man is his strength, his will, his power, and the permanent passion for war/prowess that allow for the continuity of subjectivity in the immanent and the transcendent.

Philosophically, this passage implies a denial of dialectical mastery and self-consciousness[273]. In phenomenological terms, to play dead in order to avoid a life-or-death

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[273] See sections ¶¶ 178-197 in Hegel, <u>Phenomenology of Spirit</u>.

struggle is to desubjectivize, to decide to become nobody, a nothing[274]. The "deathly coward" is not truly a subject, he is not truly an existent being, in a way any of the Christian knights fighting at Ronceveaux might be said to be, because this "deathly coward" does not have the same subjectivizing values. He does not confront other men or warriors, he is content to rob and despoil the dead (or, in the case of Roland, a warrior whose state of unconsciousness resembles death). This "playing at death" is a complete perversion of the notion of prowess. For the particular idealism held in esteem by the Franks can only discover itself through bravery as an act, as an objective goal to be accomplished through a struggle with an "other". Consequently, the kind of martial difference evidenced by the Saracen who feigns death, does not serve to constitute a subject, and does not put that subject at risk and in a state of potential reward. It matches itself, not against another living being, but what it supposes to be the actuality of its own play, that is to say death itself as a fallen warrior (Roland) lying on the field of battle. Consequently, the Saracen move towards Roland, as a movement towards what is thought of as a dead agent, is in fact a movement towards the very impossibility of one's own development as a subject exhibiting martial valour, since the act of going towards the other which one believes to be dead, as that which is outside of oneself, can only be understood as a vehement refusal to participate in the martial/epic logic of subject-becoming[275]. This process of desubjectivization, as a mode of action with/against a dead other, is non-action. It marks subjectivity's very impossibility, since it stands as an engagement with what I already assume to be a permanent nothing.

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[274] This "nothingness" has two sources: a) the worldhood of the world in which the warrior is situated, developing the consequent possibilities that are those of his society. In the case of the Saracens, this possibility is an impossibility, so the entire culture is condemned to nothingness b) the martial disengagement of the warrior who does not risk his life, and thereby does not become a self through combat.

[275] If all epic poetry focuses on the accomplishment of deeds, it is because these are worlds in which actions, exteriority, and empirical verification are of singular value. To be a great hero, to be a man, is of course to be inscribed through actions.

Nothing could be more different from the Frankish mad dash into action. Wanting to despoil Roland, whom he thinks to be dead, the Saracen intends to act towards a nothing that can give him no real chance or event through which an incarnation of subjectivity could occur. Perhaps this does not stand as a problem for him, the particular Saracen, since it might well be the case that what really interests him is not any martial becoming, that is to say a sense of subjectivity attained through feat of arms, but rather the spoils and riches of a dead man. Perhaps he only wants to avoid dying, and perhaps he merely wants to pick up a few riches or booty along the way. But this would once again suggest a predilection for materiality in opposition to the anthropological presuppositions inherent in the Christian worldview. In other words, and once again, the "Chanson de Roland" is suggesting that there is a preoccupation with materiality as one of the prime elements of Saracen difference.

What we can see from the above examples is that the "Chanson de Roland" structures its portrayal of the differing modes of subjectivizing in such a way as to continually emphasize the recognition of fundamental differences between Saracens and Franks. Furthermore, the poem wills this recognition into the fabric of Saracen thought, as is evidenced in the very first laisse. Marsile's words of despair and hopelessness are meant to portray an entire worldview. A worldview at odds with the Christian worldview. They are pleas of despair, hopelessness, and the recognition of a profound difference separating his world from that of Charlemagne's world. And through his pleas, the poem attempts to state that if any Saracen in the poem bothers to reflect on the apparent similarities between his world and that of the Christian world, he will come to see that these similarities are merely illusions. He will quickly recognize (as does Marsile in his opening statements, and as will be the case in Bramimonde's conversion at the end of the poem) that between himself and the Christian world, there is a difference, a gap, which,

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although possibly ever so subtle and infinitesimal[276], nonetheless signals that there can be no real communion between the two groups, and that one can never really be the other, nor can one ever hope to enjoy the same kind of socio-cultural status enjoyed by the other while remaining oneself. What we are dealing with in this poem are subjects and their others, differences between modes of existence that, although playing on similarities, are radically distinct. Differences which are different.

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[276] I believe that this is what Bhabha is hinting at when he suggests that the spatial and political structures between two peoples might make them appear to be *almost the same, but not quite*. The not quite must mean that the difference, although small and almost imperceptible, is still nonetheless a fundamental difference of/in ontology or epistemology. See Bhabha The Location of Culture.

12. *EN GUIZE DE:* **THE DANGER OF APPEARANCES AND THE THREAT OF**

SARACEN SAMENESS AND NOBILITY

As we have already seen, commentators on the "Chanson de Roland" such as Sarah Kay and Sharon Kinoshita have often suggested that the Franks are mirrored by the Saracens. Furthermore, this mirroring extends to the actual narrative presentation of the Saracens, since many of the Saracen warriors are apparently described in a favorable light[277]. I believe that such criticism is fundamentally wrong about the tenor of such passages.

For these passages where Saracen warriors are apparently commended are, in fact, evoking a "lack", that is to say, the manifestation of an appearance as a lack of something else. The primary concern of these passages is to demonstrate that the Saracens are *not* like the Christians. Despite appearances, regardless of how things might "look", there is, beyond and behind the appearance of semblance, a difference pointing to dissimilarity, to disjunction between Christian and Saracen. The importance of these passages is in their ability to relay the message that the Saracen warriors who are, apparently, described as admirable, are in fact *not* great because they are *not* Christian. This being-Christian that is lacking in these Saracen warriors makes of them something other. That the poem concludes its "positive" descriptions of

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[277] Of the "comparative passages" where Saracens are apparently described in a favorable light (verses 894-899), Kinoshita, downplaying the importance of the existential differences suggested by the very terms being used, suggest that in such passages "the demarcation between Christian and pagan begins to seem less intransigent, more insecure". Kinoshita, 'Pagans are wrong and Christians are right: Alterity, Gender, and Nation in the Chanson de Roland', p. 84.

Saracen warriors on such a note, highlighting the "lack" or gap separating them from their Christian counterparts, suggests to the reader that there are crucial differentiations at play in such comparisons. Differentiations that are theological in nature given that Christians and Saracens recognize different truths, and such recognitions leads to the creation of cultural differentiations given that the two sides will lead their lives differently in accordance with the truths that ground their worldview. The differentiations separating Christian from Saracen imply that the one is definitely different from the other. Differentiations made manifest, as is the case in these narrative descriptions, when characters and subjectivities are subjectivized in and through their mutual interconnectedness/interaction. What the "Chanson de Roland" is proposing, in these passages that undermine Saracen character by indicating the presence of a gap/absence, is a type of theologico-subjective complex of different connected/interacting subjectivities, differentiated between themselves, where the "lack" of which the Saracens suffer must be spoken of as a reduction or absorption of the one to the other.

Now whether or not this "not" can be breached is another question. The "Chanson de Roland" would suggest that it can, if only destructively: by killing the other, forcibly converting him, or having them convert "out of love" as is the case with Bramimonde. This question aside, we must keep in mind that, in these passages where Saracen warriors seem to be celebrated, we are in fact dealing with crucial philosophical terms such as "semblance", "if only he were", and "having the appearance of valour or greatness". The possibility that the Platonic tradition was inherited by medieval Christianity marks such terms out for disapproval, since they are characteristic of the shifting, wavering, and untrustworthy phenomenal world. And it is precisely these problematic terms that are mobilized in the poem, and with which "noble" Saracen warriors are described. I would contend that both the philosophical context of medieval

philosophy, as well as the narrative context in which these passages are to be found, clearly indicate that they are not meant to be considered as positive judgements.

Although many experts view them this in this way[278], the comparative nature of these passages tends to highlight a defect in Saracen subjectivity, an existential *défaut d'être*, rather than any positive quality that might be held by the Saracen warrior. This pejorative stance is in keeping with the overall tenor of the poem. In keeping with its warlike ideology, Saracens are necessarily demeaned throughout. Unlike other epic poems where it is not uncommon for a warrior to admire his adversary, in the "Chanson de Roland" such terms of admiration are unheard of. The quasi-chivalrous descriptions of Saracen warriors might appear to give a favourable, although limited, opinion of the Saracen adversary. They could suggest that there is at least a modicum, a small amount of decency of valour to be found in the foe. I believe that such a view is misguided.

A reading more in tune with the narrative thrust of the poem will demonstrate the extent to which, like all the other depictions of the Saracens, these terms further serve to negate and denigrate the "other". It is important to note that these "favourable" descriptions[279] are all comparative. Saracen warriors are never appreciated in and for themselves. Their valor is always judged by way of the dominant paradigm: subjective Christian militancy. The passages compare the Saracen soldier to the Christian. And having compared the two, the passages go on to affirm that the Saracen could be a great knight "if only he were Christian". Such a comparison establishes an inscribed distinction between the world of reality and authentic subjectivizing (the Christian world), and a world of appearance. I think that one must

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[278] I once again feel the need to return to Kinoshita, for her assessment of these "if only he were Christian" passages influences her entire conception of the *Roland* as a work teetering on the brink of nondifferentiation, and it is also on the basis of these passages that she reads the *Roland* as a work consisting primarily of cultural exchanges, rather than subjective differences.

[279] See verses 894-899 for an example.

emphasize that this distinction is a philosophical one, and to be more precise, an Augustinian-Platonic one. We are dealing with the difference between the real world of Being which potentially elevates to the world of pure Ideality (Christian knights ascend to Heaven), and the flawed world of appearances and immanence. Much of medieval theology was Augustinian, and it does not seem like an exaggeration to suggest that the influence of Plato on Augustine saturates the "Us" vs. "Them", the "heaven" vs. "Hell", the "Up" vs. "Down" debate that structure much of the "Chanson de Roland".

We must remember that the world that begets the "Chanson de Roland" is a dichotomous world, and that the dominant theological strain present during the writing of the text was undoubtedly an Augustinian one. Augustine often described Truth and falsity in terms that were reminiscent of Plato's cave analogy. Truth was light, falsity was darkness. In the "Chanson de Roland", Christians are participants of the divine light, whereas Saracens are often couched in darkness. In the Augustinian-Platonic worldview, there is right, and there is wrong. There is the "real", and there is the "appearance" or semblance of the "real", that is to say, the false. In other words, there is Truth, and there is falsity. Once again, we find just such division in the "Chanson de Roland". Roland's famous declaration can be said to summarize this view. Now it is not very hard to see how this world divided between the true and the false might also divide appropriate subjectivizing along the same lines. In fact, as we have seen, Christian anthropology, grounded in an admixture of Augustinian-Platonic reasoning, posited just such a world. Consequently, we have a world where there is the sphere of the Ideas/Truth (of those dedicated to them/God, and striving for them), and there is the world of sensible appearances, materiality and falsehoods.

The manner in which the Platonic and Augustinian philosophical traditions use light and darkness (with the requisite moral and philosophical connotations attached to such terms) can

also be used as a template when interpreting the "Chanson de Roland's" characterization of the Saracens. I believe that we can say that the Christian eschatology or theologomachia evidenced in the "Chanson de Roland" was facilitated by just such a philosophical edifice, since the struggle against the Saracens can be viewed as a struggle against the material world, and the subjectivizing process that leads the Christian to God can be thought of as a manner of exiting the phenomenal cave (where men are fascinated by the forms of materiality) by entering the light of Truth. The originality of the poem's use of light and darkness resides in its effort to demonstrate that these two principles, these two elements are continuously at war. As such, the poem is making a philosophical argument when Christian manhood is encouraged to leave the realm of the senses and materiality, in order to join the realm of the Ideas[280] (God in the Christian paradigm), since such a journeying suggests that, in the philosophical world as well as in its Christian inheritor, there can be no dialectical conciliation between these two standpoints. These "downward" (to remain in the cave of the phenomenal) and "upward" movements/oppositions are crucial distinctions in the "Chanson de Roland" where Christian heroes exit the phenomenal world and enter the noumenal paradise, whereas Saracen warriors remain mired in the shifting world of the senses.

The Christian world presented in the poem, shirking any dialectical conciliation with the world of darkness, does not allow for any admixture between good and evil as correlates of Truth and falsity. Participation in Truth allows for a continuity of the subjective, for integration into the eternal/universal.   Once again, the poem can be said to have Augustinian-Platonic echoes. When Plato strove to furnish a degree of proof for the immortality of the soul, he did not hesitate

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[280] "And the soul is like the eye: when resting upon that which truth and being shine, the soul perceives and understands, and is radiant with intelligence; but when turned towards the twilight of becoming and perishing, then she has opinion only, and goes blinking about, and is first of one opinion and then of another". Plato, 'The Republic' in Plato: Apology, Crito,Phaedo, Symposium, Republic. Translated by B. Jowett, edited with an introduction by Louise Ropes Loomis, The Classics Club, Roslyn New York, 1942, p. 396.

to remind the reader that decisions taken in the here-and-now will have eternal consequences. What will happen to the soul, after death, is bound up with those decisions, beliefs, and actions that have been made during the course of a lifetime. In the Platonic world, the Agent (God) of the cosmos, much like his Christian counterpart, is fully cognizant of the works and deeds of each individual soul. It is therefore incumbent upon every soul to contribute most to the defeat of evil and the triumph of goodness/truth. Each soul must strive towards goodness in order to avoid the pitfalls of eternal damnation (or damned reincarnation). As Plato remarked:

> *O youth or young man, who fancy that you are neglected by the Gods, know that if you become worse you shall go to the worse souls or if better to the better, and in every succession of life and death you will do and suffer what like may fitly suffer at the hands of like. This is the justice of heaven, which neither you nor any unfortunate will ever glory in escaping, and which the ordaining powers have specially ordained; take good heed thereof, for it will be sure to take heed of you. … this is also the explanation of the fate of those whom you saw, who had done unholy and evil deeds, and from small beginnings had grown great; and you fancied that from being miserable they had become happy.*[281]

Borrowing Plato's dualism as a template to the worldview presented in the "Chanson de Roland" would also suggest that, in the medieval context of combat against a theological other, this other being bereft of any reference to the One True God, and consequently, to any relationship with Transcendence, the world of the Saracen is one where subjects are in bondage to materiality, superficialities, rather than liberated towards Transcendence. The Saracens are bound by their senses, which is why they live in fear and fetishize material possessions. Given their ignorance and their willful rejection of Transcendence, the Saracens are bound to live in a

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[281] Plato, <u>Selections</u>. Edited by R. Demos, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1955, p. 445.

world of illusions, superficial knowledge, artificial deities/idols, and vacuous ideals.   Therefore, no matter how great a Saracen count might seem, he is still, and always, "not" living, believing, and acting in accordance within a rational paradigm that strictly and faithfully adheres to the Truth. He is still a "not", a desubject. He is not of the light, but of the shadows. This emphasis on the phenomenal, the untruthful is undoubtedly why the poem emphasizes the fact that Saracen lives are dominated by the shadows, by valleys, and by darkness. All of these characteristics are present in the poem and characterize the manner in which Saracens occupy space. Marsile is seated in the shade of a tree, the religious idols are kept in a darkened crypt, and the Saracen army moves, not out in the open, but through shadowy valleys. Saracen warriors are born in, and lord over, lands of eternal darkness, and some of them bear physical witness to this propensity for darkness, being black of skin. All of these narrative elements are meant to convey that the Saracens inhabit the spatial, cultural, subjective, and moral domains characterized by darkness and shadows. They move, physically and morally, through valleys. They wait, hidden deep in the forests.

But a further point must be made about this Saracen propensity for darkness as opposed to light. The most important passage in Plato, or at least, that passage which has come to be the best known passage in all of the Platonic dialogues, is of course, the "Allegory of the Cave"[282]. This passage can be useful in our study of the "Chanson de Roland". I would suggest that the Platonic cave's modal passage from darkness to light can serve as a useful template to help us understand the "Chanson de Roland's" association between elements of darkness and the Saracens that typify such darkness, but more importantly the Saracen's theological affiliations. The Saracens, living their lives in a world of shadows, are bound to their prejudices and passions. The Saracens, having chosen to reject the True God, and having therefore bowed

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[282] See book 7 of Plato's Republic.

before the false idols (who, significantly, are kept and worshipped in a darkened crypt) have thereby chosen the darkness. They have chosen to remain in the cave. They have chosen to persist in their moral, cultural, and subjective darkness. Simply put, Bramimonde aside, Saracens are simply incapable of leaving the cave. They persist in dwelling there.

The (im)moral gravity of such a choice is made even graver if we analyze it using Augustine's theology. The Augustinian view assumes that moral choice cannot be wholly individual, given the fallen nature of man. In consequence, moral choice either moves towards Transcendence, or turns away from it in a movement that is facilitated and made possible by divine election. More precisely, the bestowing of God's grace is that which makes it possible to make moral choices and live a just and righteous life after the Fall. Since the primordial event that was the Fall, evil is rooted in us, and the actions that we undertake are strongly colored by this evil. Only Grace can correct this falsity. And grace is not determined, nor can it be willed, since it is a divine gift.

> *Unless, therefore, the will itself is set free by the grace of God from that slavery by which it has been made a servant of sin, and unless it is given help to overcome its vices, mortal men cannot live upright and devout lives. If this gift of God, by which the will is set free, did not precede the act of the will, it would be given in accordance with the will's merits, and would not be grace which is certainly given as a free gift[283].*

The ultimate consequence of this view as to the possibility of a moral (in)existence is that of predestination. Applied to the reading of the "Chanson de Roland" we can surmise that the Saracens are incapable of leaving the cave because God does not desire for them to do so. God wants or wills their damnation. If the Franks are capable of living morally, of having a moral

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[283] Augustine 'Retractions' in <u>Philosophy in the Middle Ages.</u> Edited by Arthur Hyman and James J. Walsh, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 1973, p. 66.

existence (and the consequent subjectivizing continuity in the hereafter) made manifest by their ability to communicate with the Heavens or having their souls carried off to Paradise[284], the Saracens, on the other hand, are condemnable because they communicate with the forces of evil[285], and upon their death, their souls are dispatched into Hell[286]. The consequence of temporal action, conceived as an eternal judgement of election or damnation, would suggest that the "Chanson de Roland" certainly shares this Augustinian view that God saves some people, while letting others be abandoned to evil and eternal punishment. The dichotomous world of the "Chanson de Roland", where some are righteous while others are not, is divided in a manner that fits rather squarely with an Augustinian worldview. For, in both cases, the world is divided into two differing sides. There are those, such as the Saracens, who, living enslaved by their fears and desires (materiality, possessions), live in the ephemeral world of appearances, only seemingly sharing in the world of reality with their Christian foes. Yet this semblance, this *en guize de* betrays the fact that, eventually, their true nature as agents of evil, and therefore as agents of nothingness[287] having rejected Transcendence, shall be revealed, and they will rejoin the kingdom of perdition of which they are the faithful adherents, and to which God has damned them.

> *E Gerins fiert Malprimis de Brigal:*
>
> *Sis bons escuz un dener ne li valt;*
>
> *Tute li freint la bucle de cristal,*
>
> *L'une meitiét li turnet cuntreval;*

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[284] See verses 2373-2374; 2393-2397.
[285] See verses 1390-1392.
[286] See verses 1505-1510.
[287] "For you evil does not exist, and not only for you but for the whole of your creation as well, because there is nothing outside it which could invade it and break down the order which you have imposed on it. Yet in the separate parts of your creation there are some things which we think of as evil because they are at variance with other things". Augustine, Confessions. 1961, p. 148.

L'osberc li rumpt entresquë a la charn,

Sun bon espiét enz el cors li enbat

Li paiens chet cuntreval a un quat;

L'anme de lui en portet Sathanas[288].

Furthermore, the comparative nature of the passages of Saracen warriors in the "Chanson de Roland" indicates that this world of appearances is never signified in and of itself.   This is an important philosophical point that much of the criticism has failed to consider. Being negative, being "other", Saracen existence can only be without value. The "nothingness" of the Saracens, as they are presented in the poem, should lead us to consider that the passages which appear to strike a positive tone are written in such a way that the appearance of Saracen worth is always being deferred elsewhere: to the world of Christian Transcendence and subjectivity. Saracen existence is subject to an almost perverse form of one-sided *différance.* The primary values that are held to be present in a Saracen warrior, notably his being a great warrior, are shifted away to another who becomes its *present* priority. I would suggest that such a move is not indicative of any kind of charity or narrative temperance. Rather, such a move empties Saracen subjectivity of any substance. What occurs when a Saracen warrior is ultimately judged in terms of his lacking a Christian standard is that he is not seen to be the subject of a determinate judgement, since the judgement arises analogously from another subject's experience.   In other words, what could be said about him, as a subject, is not said, it is left unsaid, since what is being said is that his subject is lacking because it is experienced, expressed, or analysed by way of an "other". The Saracen is not the subject of a determinate judgement because, in each and every case, he is either demonized, killed, insulted, or in those rare instances when it *looks like* there might be a favorable Christian outlook, he is judged and demeaned by means of the determinate subjectivity

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[288] Verses 1261-1268. The emphasis is mine.

of another. The true meaning of what would be a great Saracen warrior is to be found in another term: the Christian knight.

Consequently, given that Saracens are devoid of authentic subjectivity, as agents of nothingness bereft of any hope for salvation[289], these comparisons, situated within the context of the "Chanson de Roland's" larger philosophical/theological meta-narrative, clearly imply that to move from Saracen to Christian subjectivizing, is to move from desubjectivity, or lack, to a subject capable of salvation.   These modes of comparison do not imply a favorable judgement. They present a perverted chain of being, moving from a lack, to a potentially faulty subject (who is nonetheless susceptible of salvation), to the ultimate Being itself (God).   It is precisely this "lack", this absence that is suggested and expressed in the poem's use of words such as *resemblet*, *fust chrestïen*, *s'oust chrestïentét*, or *en guize de*.   All of these terms imply that something is wrong, that something is not quite right, that something which seems *to be*, is, in fact, *not* at all.   Where there would appear to be a valiant subject, there is in fact the absence of a valiant subject. What such passages indicate is that Saracens are secondary characters in the poem.   Secondary in the sense of serving as the foil for Christian adventures. It is also secondary in the sense that it is the evil counterpart to goodness. It is philosophically or theologically secondary inasmuch as the poem is clearly highlighting the differences and distinctions between two modes of existence. The elements of Saracen subjectivity are treated as being merely secondary, and any real value they might have, as opposed to its semblance of value, could only be derived by an external mediation. In consequence, any potentially noble Saracen, is not noble in and of himself, but would become noble if he were Christian. As we have seen previously, this would necessitate a destruction of one order in order to assimilate into another.

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[289] See verses 1601-1609, especially verse 1607.

In other words, the Saracen's potential signification is removed from him and spirited away to some other term that is more foundational. This deferral of Saracen subjectivity is effected through a process of removal, and an emptying out whereby the Saracen, who would be noble, could achieve just such a status if he stopped being a Saracen, negated himself as such, and became something else, namely a Christian. The Saracen would be noble if his Saracen subjectivity was negated at once, in this moment, and another subjectivizing process were adopted in its stead, namely the process of becoming a Christian[290]. This movement institutes the real difference between appearance and reality, while at the same time holding it in reserve, deferring its presentation. The "apparent world" of Saracen arms, culture, and prowess looks like the real world, but is bereft of any grounding in reality. And it is precisely in its appearance that Saracen culture and subjectivity are so dangerous.

I believe that through the use of such passages, the "Chanson de Roland" is suggesting, once again, that Saracen valour actually amounts to nothing. The ultimate justification for such a judgement is to be found in the *telos* of the poem itself: the Saracens lose, and in ideological terms, losing is often the best manifestation of a system's weakness. The Saracen warrior appears great, but he is actually lacking greatness. This is proven in that he is defeated. The Saracen warrior seems noble, but he would only truly be noble if he were grounded in Christian subjectivizing, and would henceforth be crowned in victory. A victory allowing for, and facilitating, the continuity of the subjectivizing process that is faithfulness to a Truth. Compared to this, what shows forth in the Saracen's countenance, his appearance of grandeur, is mere artifice. It is nothing more than an illusion. I am of the opinion that this emphasis on the appearance of the Saracens might correspond to a deeper fear running through the medieval

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[290] This is precisely the type of negative hermeneutics that one finds in the "Chanson de Roland", but in the "Jeu de Saint Nicolas" as well.

era[291]: the Saracens successes might bring some uninformed Christians to believe that what appears to be the same, actually is the same. The true trap posed by appearance is that one can potentially be seduced by the appearance, and thereby will oneself into becoming an appearance in turn. The danger posed by such seductive appearances is that one is likely to abandon an authentic mode of subjectivizing, with the promised continuity that ensues when one is faithful to the Truth, for a mode of subjectivizing that leads to perdition and deformity. It is the possible seduction leading us astray, away from solid ground into the world of appearances. Appearances stand, and appearances fall, but a subjectivity that adhere and subjects itself to the Truth stands in relation to that which is without beginning, is now, and ever shall be, because it is without end. Whereas Saracen "valour" is a deceptive appearance given by the senses, the subjectivizing process inferred by the Christian knight is guaranteed by thought and logic. When the poem seems to validate a Saracen warrior, it is actually appealing to some greater principle, invoking something other than what is perceived by the senses, since it ultimately evaluates him in the light of the laws of God and the rightful faithfulness that the recognition of God implies. Appearances are treacherous, and what appears to be the same cannot necessarily be trusted, and it is this awareness of the falsity of appearances that motivates Roland's intransigence towards the Saracen envoys when they propose a peace offering[292].

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[291] Alain Demurger suggests that the Christian world was taken aback by the impressive nature of Muslim society and culture, and further threatened, in its very being, by the military successes of Islam. Consequently, there arose a very real risk of "ideological defeat", i.e. of Christians abnegating their faith after being seduced by the grandeur of Islamic society. After all, Islam might be said to be quite similar to Christianity, venerating the same God as do the Christians. Consequently, it was necessary to develop a sophisticated network of arguments to counter and explain the successes of the Islamic world while continuously emphasizing the differences between the two groups. I think that this strategy is probably at work in the "Chanson de Roland" as well. The Saracens are shown as having similar social networks and structures as the Christians. Muslim wealth is amply described, whereas Christian possessions are not. This might reflect a Christian emphasis on the need for poverty and the necessity for spiritual rather than material elevation, but it might also be an indication of impoverished resentment. See Demurger, chapter VI, section 3 'Que faire des infidèles? Croisade et mission' in, Croisades et croisés au moyen âge., collections "champs", Flammarion, Paris, 2006, pp. 247-259.

[292] Roland makes Charlemagne aware of the fact that the Saracens have already on one occasion appeared to want peace, but finally revealed their treachery by killing two Christian emissaries. See verses 201-213.

13. LOST IN THE CROWD: THE PAGAN ARMY

'Sul les escheles ne poet il acunter :

Tant en i ad que mesure n'en set' [293].

The "Chanson de Roland" goes to great lengths in presenting to the reader the idea that the Saracen camp is characterized by its "massiveness". Moreover, as we will see in this section, this massiveness, this emphasis on size and "collectivism" also suggests a form of "group-thought".

We must ask ourselves why the narrator has Olivier, wise in matters of military exercise, and also a man not given to any kind of excitement or overreaction, marvel at the sheer number of soldiers assaulting the Franks. The answer, I would contend, lies in the fact that the narrative is pointing to some cultural "fact" about the Saracens that is more than just medieval hyperbole. Granted, it is a common leitmotif of epic literature to exaggerate the number of warriors in an army[294]. And certainly, this narrative "over-representation" of Saracen arms serves the purpose of demonstrating the martial valour of the Franks. As Ganelon suggests in his treacherous pact with the Saracen leaders, the Christians, in its righteous might, are so vastly superior to the Saracen army, that any attempt on their part to massacre the rearguard will require an overwhelming display of force and arms. Under such a scenario, the numerical abundance of the Saracens highlights their physical, moral, cultural, and intellectual defectiveness. They need

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[293] Verses 1034-1035.

[294] Homer and Virgil, as well as the authors of the Bible are guilty of this same exaggeration.

400 000 soldiers to dispatch a mere 20 000 Franks.   Ganelon, traitor though he may be, nonetheless retains some of his military acumen, and he still recognizes that, regardless of his pact and alliance with the Saracens, these people remain inferior to the Christians that he is betraying. This is why he counsels them to attack with overwhelming numbers, because their military and cultural inferiority will mean that countless numbers of them will be needed to slaughter the Franks, and countless numbers of them will be slaughtered by the Franks[295]. What we have here is a situation in which the narrative element, the numerical superiority of the Saracens, reveals the text's underlying assumption, namely that the Saracens are characterized by physical (psychological, intellectual etc...) inferiority.

Yet I would suggest that the emphasis on the size of the pagan army in the above quotation also has another philosophical dimension.   Not only is the Saracen army a large one, thereby representing a formidable military force that must be reckoned with, it seems to exist as a mass. In other words, its "being" is lived and expressed, not as particular subjectivities, but collectively. For the "Chanson de Roland" presents the Saracens as acting as a mass, and responding as a mass[296], and it is precisely from the perspective of their being *en masse* that they are viewed[297], defeated[298], and killed by the Christians.

Moerent paien a millers e a cent :

Ki ne s'en fuit, de mort n'i ad guarent

Voillet o nun, tut i laisset sun tens.[299]

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[295] See verses 582-595.
[296] The Saracens rarely respond as individuals (unlike the Christians), but always in a collective mode, as evidenced in verses 61; 77; 450; 467.
[297] See verse 1034-1035.
[298] See verses 101-102; 3664-3672.
[299] Verses 1416-1419.

The Christian world, with its assorted lot of characters, and its varied subjects, is here placed in opposition to the Saracen world, where there is no focus on, say, a subjective experience of death and dying (as is the case with Roland and Turpin). Roland and Turpin, at diverse moments in the battle, both reflect on the meaning of their life, on its purpose, and how this purposed life will continue given its faithfulness to God. Both characters are conscious of the ramifications of the subjectivizing process in which they are engaged, and of how death factors into the paradoxical process of that process' immanent end and transcendent continuity. Both characters, when faced with death, are aware that God exists, that they have recognized his sovereignty, that their own subjective becoming and martial expertise have been put in subjecthood to this Truth, and furthermore, that this service has fashioned them as subjects, and ultimately allows them to gain immortality. There is no Saracen equivalent of a character experiencing death, and reflecting on the relationship between his life, his subjectivizing, and the consequences of such a life in terms of subjectivizing continuity (attaining immortality). The subjective confrontation with death and dying, and therefore, the subjectivizing experience of having a life that is harmonized with a universal process of truth, is something that the "Chanson de Roland", by its very silence on the matter, suggests as being absent from the Saracen world. Saracen warriors are killed. Their death is not undertaken in the name of a singular, or subjectivizing truth (the experience of living a life turned towards God), and the death that is brought about does not compel recognition, or faithfulness of the warrior with respect to that truth. Someone like Marsile may experience angst or anguish, but this experience, as we have seen, is related to the loss of some "thing", be it cultural (honor), or material (land and possessions). It is not, however, an experience of the same kind as that of Roland's. It is not a

subjective experience of death, and a reflection on the passing and persisting of the subject in and through death.

This is the case because the "Chanson de Roland's" impetus revolves around presenting the pagans as a mass. This explains the poem's "collectivized" vision (as opposed to a subjectivized vision) of the other as acting, responding, dying *en masse, c*onverted or killed *en masse* because they, unlike their Christian enemies, have not partaken of that process suggestive of a subjective experience of life or death. Whereas the Christian knight is a subject, and not just one entity among a multitude or crowd of others, existing as a being that participates in a relation to Transcendence, the Saracen, on the other hand, stands in relation to the universal as a collective or absolute opposite. He is not a subject, but a group or mass. Since he has no subjective qualities, since he has no real value in and of himself (let us remember that he *would* have value if he *were* something else), it is not all-together surprising to see the "Chanson de Roland" categorize and present Saracen death (either as conversion or negation) as a phenomenal antithesis to a subjective experience of death as that which is crucial to its existence.

This collectivized experience is not unique, as the poem stresses its predominance in the Saracen world. Unlike the Christians, the Saracens do not engage in subjective reflections of military matters, nor do they express varying, differing, and therefore subjective visions on the course that a military campaign is to take. Their response to a dilemma, or to a decision taken in response to a dilemma is collective, that of a great anonymous mass agreeing in kind (see verses 61, 77). This "harmonious response" (one need only think of just how such harmony is articulated in certain modern political regimes) creates a situation in which a decision, or a course of action, subordinates and articulates all discourses with uniformity. It is not a deliberative counsel (the likes of which are presented by the court of Charlemagne as evidenced

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in verses 180-318), where differences and subjectivities may lead to antagonisms. In the collective "*dient paien*", all semblance of diversity or subjective differences are resolved and subsumed under a collective stake (the mass of wealth and possessions to be lost by the mass itself), as a kind of law where antagonisms are not so much resolved, as dissolved. Any subject, gifted with speech and judgment, is thereby subordinated in his relationship to others and the world, as well as the exercise of his own faculties of judgment, by dissolving such elements into the collective "speech act". This "*dient paien*" takes on the form of an abstract or generalized will maintaining social cohesion and order, while abolishing any subjective presence. Perhaps this participation in the collective constraint also explains the reason why Saracen warriors are always compared unfavorably to their Christian, subjective, counterparts. For this process does not create subjects that are faithful to a truth, but rather, if we take into consideration just how the "Chanson de Roland" presents this "*dient paien*" (as a formal, almost ritualized response to a speech or decision), it manifests itself as blind obedience to some contingent, and situated revelation. The massed "*dient paien*" enunciates what appears, to itself, as the truth of a situation, but, given its collective forgetfulness of subjectivity, it ignores the process whereby a judgment is anchored in a subjective enunciation of a truth. There is no rancorous/tempestuous Roland in the Saracen camp. There is no moderate Olivier. There is no charitable duke of Naimes. There is only a materially inspired and anguished concern for the loss of possessions expressed by characters who, given the very logic of the poetic narrative, are already desubjectivized. Hence the collective voice and the collective response, the "*dient paien*".

This is the reason why the Saracen, who acts *en masse*, who speaks and responds *en masse*, cannot stand alone, cannot disagree or personalize his existence because he is never in distinction from the anonymous collective represented by his culture or group. The "Chanson

de Roland" goes to some lengths in suggesting that what the different Christian characters are facing is a mass, a force, in other words a collective onslaught of "otherness".   This view is supported, in my view, by the sheer number of Saracens hurled into combat.   The emphasis placed on the sheer size of the Saracen army that is being cut down, the overwhelming number of men slaughtered and sacrificed contributes to create, in the reader's mind, a desubjectivizing effect. We are not dealing with one death, the death of "so-and-so", rather, we are confronted with a "numerical death" wherein the "one subject" is merely a statistical subset of a much larger set. These are not men who are dying, but numbers, masses, thousands against which Christian honor, prowess and subjectivity are to be measured:

> *Franceis I fierent de coer e de vigor;*
>
> *Paien sunt morz a millers e a fuls :*
>
> *De cent millers n'en poënt guarir dous.*
>
> *Dist l'arcevesques: "Nostre hume sunt mult proz;*
>
> *Suz ciel n'ad rei plus en ait de meillors.*
>
> *Il est escrit en la Geste Francor*
>
> *Que bons vassals out nostre empereür ».[300]*

I believe that the "Chanson de Roland" is attempting to convey a philosophical idea in such passages. Namely, that the relationships inherent in the Saracen world stand in opposition and distinction to those expressed in the Christian world. Furthermore, that the relationships of the culture of these "others" become barriers to subjectivization. The possibility for any subjectivity is always already subsumed by the group. It is in this world of the mass that there is generalization. And this mass, this emphasis on numbers and the chaos implied by numbers, contributes to the demonization of the Saracens as a form of desubjectivizing. Likewise, it is in

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[300] Verses 1438-1444.

the mass that there is absence: an absence or lack of value, as we have seen, and an absence or lack of differentiation between elements. A potential consequence of such a view, one that is certainly implied by the "Chanson de Roland", is that there is consequently no subjective responsibility for action.   Any assignment of guilt or responsibility, any sanction against an agency of action, can only be attributed to the collective whole, to the public image of "otherness". That is why I would argue that the Saracens in the "Chanson de Roland" are judged by the Christians as a whole, and it is once again as a collective unit that they are punished, converted, or killed *en masse*. That this logic is predominant in the "Chanson de Roland" is suggested, not only by Roland's warmongering, but also by Charlemagne's "foreign policy". In fact, this representation of Saracen collectivism and desubjectivization is so dominant in the text, that the only instance of its transgression (the conversion of Bramimonde), stands out as a unique and mysterious (i.e. a religiously inspired) occurrence.

> *S'or I ad cel qui Carle cuntredire,*
>
> *Il le fait prendre o ardeir ou ocire.*
>
> *Baptizét sunt asez plus de cent milie,*
>
> *Veir chrestïen, ne mais sul la reïne :*
>
> *En France dulce iert menee caitive,*
>
> *Ço voelt li reis, par amur cunvertisset.*[301]

Bramimonde's conversion *par amur* would imply that, of all of the members of the Saracen culture, this one occurrence of a Saracen transmuting into a subject is truly unique. Bramimonde, alone, foregoes the gods, the customs, the collective speech of her people, and therefore, she alone by responding herself to the teachings of the subjectivizing truth, leaving

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[301] Verses 3669-3674.

behind the Saracen culture from which she heralds, joins the subjectivizing culture of the Christians.

Consequently, if we begin to assemble the varied arguments/elements put forth by the poem, it presents us with an "other" who is not only conscious of his cultural and martial inferiority, but his inferiority is incarnated in a form of generalization. The Saracens are placed in numbers, because, existentially speaking, they exist as a number. In other words, these passages describing the Saracen army serve to indicate the collectivist logic of Saracen modes of existing. Whereas Christian becoming might be said to actualize subjectivity through a logic of subjective sacrifice/salvation in relation to a transcendent truth, the Saracens exist not as a subject, or a community of subjects, but as an "il y a"[302], in anonymity or inhuman monstrosity.

This narrative anonymity allows the narrator to desubjectivize, to dehumanize the presented subject to the greatest degree. For such a presentation philosophically implies that any character is collectivized into the mass, into an existence whereby any and all existent disappears. Modes of being, in this organized mode, serve to further the disappearance of subjectivity. Consequently, this effacement creates a condition in which negation and affirmation, creation and destruction, plenty and emptiness are all treated the same. If such is truly the case, then the presentation of the Saracens as a mass in the "Chanson de Roland" runs counter to some recent critical argumentation that would have us believe that, with the exception

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[302] "C'est de sa subjectivité, de son pouvoir d'existence privée que le sujet est dépouillé dans l'horreur. Il est dépersonnalisé ... L'horreur met à l'envers la subjectivité du sujet, sa particularité d'étant. Elle est la participation de l'il y a". Lévinas, De l'existence à l'existant. Collection " Bibliothèque d'histoire de la philosophie", Vrin, Paris, p. 100. Also see Lévinas, Totalité et infini. Essai sur l'extériorité.

of religion, as a cultural/cultual fetish, the two sides are mostly the same, and that the real

problem in the text is that of the danger of nondifferentiation[303].

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[303] See Sharon Kinoshita's 'Pagans are wrong and Christians are right : Alterity, Gender, and Nation in the *Chanson de Roland*', in <u>Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies</u>. 31:1, Winter 2001; Sharon Kinoshita. <u>Medieval Boundaries. Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature</u>., University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2006.

14. *TERRE GASTE*, THE HELL OF NOTHINGNESS, AND MONSTROSITY

D'altre part est Chernubles de Muneigre:

Josqu'a la tere si chevoel li balaient;

Greignor fais portet, par giu quant il s'enveiset,

Que set mulez ne funt, quant il sumeient.

Icele tere, ço dit, dunt il est seindre,

Soleill n'i luist ne blét n'i poet pas creistre,

Pluie n'i chet, rusee n'i adeiset;

Piere n'i ad que tute ne seit neire.

Dïent alquanz que dïables i meignent.[304]

The first thing that might strike a modern reader when coming across such a passage is the fact that there is a parallel between these descriptions of Saracen wastelands, and medieval descriptions of Hell[305].   Both are devastated and hostile landscapes completely unforgiving towards "normal life". Obviously, this hostile world is opposed to the world that is inhabited by the Christians, and this fact serves to normalize both the landscape and those who dwell in it. This is the "normal" world. Any template deviating from this "normalized" picture is considered extreme, bizarre, monstrous, or exotic. We should perhaps remember that the exotic is itself, in

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[304] Verses 975-984.
[305] See Alice Turner, <u>The History of Hell</u>. Harcourt Brace and Company, New York, 1993.

the medieval mind, laden with theological/moral implications. As John Block Friedman has stated:

> *The medieval taste for the exotic was in some ways comparable to our National Geographic interest in primitive and colourful societies today. However, the very concept of a "primitive" society as one at an earlier stage of cultural evolution was not part of the medieval world view. On the contrary, exotic peoples were often seen as degenerate or fallen from an earlier state of grace in the Judeo-Christian tradition; even their humanity was questioned. Curious customs and appearances suggested to the medieval mind an equally curious spiritual condition*[306].

Consequently, these are extreme worlds, with extreme living conditions hospitable only to the most deformed creatures. Creatures bearing only a semblance to the human, since they tend more towards the monstrous and the bestial, and it is these creatures, as in the case of Chernuble of Muneigre, who bear deformity in their essential and accidental features. Features which are essential, inasmuch as the grotesque or the extreme is embedded in their physical framework[307] and the landscape that gives birth to them. Features which are accidental inasmuch as these primary qualities lead to others instances of wonder, such as extraordinary, oxen-like strength.

The emphasis on the physicality of these deformities or extremes aside, I believe that the poem is striving to make a more important and philosophical point. We have already demonstrated that the "Chanson de Roland" emphasizes the fact that important cultural distinctions distinguish Christian from Saracen. What the quotation given above shows is that

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[306] John Block Friedman, The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 2000, p. 1-2.

[307] Some Saracen warriors, as we shall see in this section, could be described as hybridizations between the human and the bestial in that animal-like features (broad faces, porcine hair) make up the very fabric of their being and appearance.

the "Chanson de Roland" also goes to great lengths in giving a "visual" representation of Saracen difference. In the case of Chernuble of Muneigre, this visual picturing puts great focus on his dwelling in a wasteland, a *terre gaste*, a nightmarish landscape wherein all natural forms of life, all of the normal dimensions of existence and environment are laid waste and put aside. This is certainly not a land of biblical "milk and honey", nor is it likely to be a land where civilization (as understood by the Frankish Christians) is likely to prosper. This *terre gaste* is unlikely to produce a society of prosperous cities, centralizing the land. We have a hard time imagining a land bereft of sun or wheat giving rise to cities wherein the arts and letters flourish. This is the case because a *terre gaste* is not only devoid of natural wealth, but in turn, this sterility will not serve as the site for cultural expansion, given that it is unlikely to give rise to the laws, customs, and beliefs, that is to say the elements that cultivate man and demonstrate his possessing a culture (inasmuch as he can be said to organize material life into some higher meaning). The wastedness of the land, the poverty derived from its harshness, suggests that men who come from just such a place cannot be considered the equals of those (Christians) who do, since they are not civilized or apt to be civilized. There is undoubtedly here a correspondence between the manner in which the Greeks viewed rural life and the medieval conception of the *terre gaste.* John Block Friedman has argued that is not hard to conjecture that life in a wasteland would be considered life outside of the confines of a city, in which case, as with non-urban Greeks, the Saracens living in the wastelands could be considered inhuman barbarians:

> *Another mark of the alien was his existence outside the cultural setting of a city. … For the Greeks, it was difficult to imagine a man independent of his city; slaves and aliens who had no city had no independent existence. The city conferred humanity, for it gave its citizens a shared setting in which to exercise their human faculties in the practice of*

law, social intercourse, worship, philosophy, and art. … Men who lived outside cities, since their lives were guided by no law, were not really human[308].

As is the case in the quotation from the "Chanson de Roland" that we have just encountered, the visual representation of a land bereft of sun, wheat, and rain, signifies that its very inhumanity (it produces monsters and not men), its lack of any capacity to sustain human survival or development, serves as the perfect backdrop for the inhuman, or monstrous desubjectivized figures that evolve and evoke this landscape of misery. That such lands are inhabited by Godless creatures (those having turned away from the True God) further suggests that these are lands that have been abandoned by God. This abandonment also entails an abandonment of the humanity and subjectivizing possibility shared among the other "civilized men".

> *Men who lived in different climates would perforce be different from one another because of unequal climatic influence; indeed, there would be some areas in which conditions would be so extreme that men like those of the center could not exist at all. Such places received the label "uninhabitable", but were not necessarily considered empty of life. They contained no people like those of the center, but were considered to be likely and appropriate habitats for the monstrous races*[309].

I would argue that the poem is attempting to stress a certain philosophical point: it "logically" concludes that there is a degree of causality inherent in what might be called the condition of production of negative, or deformed, beings. Now we must understand this negativity in the following way. The land itself is negatively presented, inasmuch as the land, in opposition to "natural" worlds, does not beget that which is naturally of the world. This world,

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[308]John Block Friedman, <u>The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought</u>. p. 30.
[309] John Block Friedman, <u>The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought</u>. p. 36.

we can imagine, is unlike the Christian world, since it is a world that is inhabited by devils, devoid of sun and rain, a space where wheat fails to grow. Since it is inhabited by non-believers, or worse, devils, the very spirit of Creation, nature as a force begetting and becoming, is demonstrably absent. Similarly, that which originates or comes to be in the *terre gaste*, the material content of such a world, its external form, is also devoid of the kind of existence that is capable of being redeemed. Its inhabitants are destined to end their days in Hell, they are destined to be negated, and if we are to trust the words of Turpin, this mortal death, is in fact a second death[310], their birth having been a birthing of nothingness, and they have lived in a space devoid of any naturalizing or transcending force.

Obviously, such geographical descriptions are ideological in nature. They seek to demonize the "other", a task they perform quite admirably. It is also the case that they betray a certain medieval ignorance about the world at large. That is to say, the world of the other, and the world just beyond our own restrictive boundaries. As Claude Lecouteux has demonstrated, much that was "demonic" in medieval literature was bound up with the "exotic", with the foreigness of other lands:

> *Offrant une grande diversité dans la monstruosité, les peuples exotiques du bout du monde ont pour caractéristique essentielle de ne jouer que des rôles mineurs dans l'économie des textes : ils relèvent avant tout de la couleur locale. Ils vivent aux confins de la terre, ce qui est, somme toute, bien rassurant, et ne font que de brèves incursions en Occident. Ils relèvent d'abord de la littérature savante et ne la quitte que pour prendre*

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[310] "Voz cumpaignuns feruns trestuz restifs; / Nuvele mort vos estruvrat susfrir". Verses 1256-1257. There is, of course, an apocalyptic tone to all of this, since it echoes not only the Pauline doctrine of perdition, but also the predictions of the Book of Revelations.

place dans les récits de voyage ou dans les épopées exaltant l'idée de croisade : là ils incarnent le paganisme[311].

Medieval literature is rife with accounts of monstrous creatures inhabiting foreign lands. These creatures often resembled humans, but were possessed of some feature that rendered them monstrous or freakish. I would suggest that this emphasis on the freakish has a definite philosophical role. Although the Saracen monsters might seem human in all *but* one aspect (having black skin, a large forehead, pig's hair etc…), this partial difference or abnormality actually underscores the inherent difference between them and the Christians. It serves as a physical indicator, a tangible mark of difference. Furthermore, this difference, in its very monstrosity, is not a difference that is to be respected or admired, since it is the difference of that which is perverse or inhuman. It is the mark of a subject gone wrong or awry. It is not a difference that tends towards equilibrium or proportionality, but rather, towards disequilibrium and disproportionality. In other words, as a difference in-itself, it is vicious and monstrous, and this defect in the flesh equally contains the seeds of future actions/deeds, of modes of subjectivizing, that will likely also be monstrous or defective. That this turns out to be case in the poetic narrative might be begging the question, but it also reinforces the poem's main contention about the relationship between place and existence. This difference, physically manifested, in-itself, is, for the reader who is sensitive to the poem's argumentative framework, to be understood as the difference of "otherness", and not to be confused with any semblance of similarity, even if it were *but* one aspect.

However, I would suggest that these monstrous differences also have another function within the "Chanson de Roland". They serve as philosophical and theological representations of

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[311] Lecouteux, <u>Les monstres dans la pensée médiévale européenne.</u> Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, Paris, 1993, p. 62.

an evil that must be conquered[312], of nothingness and the diabolical. More specifically, the absence of a "natural" world in the *terre gaste* serves to naturalize the perverse or mutilated representations of desubjectivity that are begotten there. The Saracens are naturally monstrous because they originate from an unnatural place. This "unnature" serves as the space opening up diabolically perverse desubjectivizing possibilities. For the medieval reader, one must not be surprised to find a destroyed, mutilated, or monstrous character if he originates from a nightmarish place[313]. In other words, inasmuch as the monstrous Saracens are concerned, the Christian preoccupation with free will and the responsibility of action seems to be reversed, and what is put in its stead is a type of naturalistic or mechanistic determinism. From a perverted origin-as-cause, the place that is the *terre gaste*, the consciousness, the modes of being of those creatures originating there are merely passive reflections or effects of this original cause. I would suggest that we should think of this relationship between cause and effect as one of mirroring between that place which is "there" and the manner of "existing there".

I believe that the "Chanson de Roland" is stressing a metaphysical point by highlighting the barrenness of Saracen lands. All living takes place in a space, a "there"[314]. The philosophical impetus behind the "Chanson de Roland's" "placing" of Saracen characters suggests that the action, and the very character of the Saracens is related to the enormity, as well as the diversity, of the landscape where these characters develop, if they develop at all. The *terre gaste* as a wasteland, as the milieu or landscape, in many ways, is essential inasmuch as, in

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[312] Of the monstrous, dog-headed Moslem, John Block Friedman states: "Just as the Jew who refused salvation was seen as a savage animal, so is the Saracen who here does the same thing. To refuse the Word is to deny logic and so to lose humanity. The Dog-Head in these scenes, then, represents at once the Moslem heretic who will, in the propagandist painter's view of things, yield to the Word through Western military might, and the savage races of men at the edges of the world, whom the Word will convert by softening their hearts". John Block Friedman, The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought. p. 69.

[313] " "Place", said Roger Bacon, "is the beginning of our existence, just as a father" ". John Block Friedman, The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought. p. 37.

[314] Roger Bacon's emphasis on the relationship between place and existence is echoed by Heidegger, who would say all Dasein is of course being (sein) there (da). See the Introduction to Heidegger, Being and Time..

the case of many of the Saracen warriors, the darkness of the lands, its dryness, its hellish aspects, all evoke the very profanity of that which stands in opposition to a sacred space[315]. These hellish aspects, the absence of life giving sunshine, the absence of wheat and rain, represent the corruptibility and demonic eternity of a world bereft of the divine, and inhabited by demonic beings: *Dïent alquanz que dïables i meignent.*

It is therefore of no surprise when the "Chanson de Roland" amalgamates these two aspects. The barrenness of the land is mirrored in the moral, spiritual and subjective barrenness[316] of the people inhabiting these lands. Consequently, the *terre gaste* serves as an easy foil to the known Christian universe, and furthers validates any colonial or theological imperialism that might need "empirical" support in order to justify its cause. One need only look over "there", towards the wastelands to see a difference that needs to be negated.

As Claude Lecouteux has remarked, the savagery, the monstrosity of the "pagans" became one the leitmotivs of the medieval *chanson de geste:*

> *Dans les récits français qui narrent la lutte des chrétiens contre les infidèles –Chanson de Roland, geste de Guillaume d'Orange-, les monstres forment certains corps de bataille des armées païennes. Il est clair que ces individus insolites et repoussants représentent ici les suppôts de Satan, et plus d'une fois les portes de l'enfer semblent s'être ouvertes pour livrer passage aux démons[317].*

As Lecouteux suggests, this amalgamation between place and being was a common trope at the time the poem was written. For the medieval world, it was not uncommon to find a

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[315] As Mircea Eliade has made manifest in his many studies of religious phenomenology, the world is often thought to be divided between a sacred space, on the one hand, typified by being and becoming, and a profane space on the other, represented by death, decay and monstrosity as that which is opposite the hierophanic world of being. See Eliade, Le sacré et le profane. Collection "idées", Gallimard, Paris, 1965.

[316] They will, after all, be sent to Hell.

[317] Lecouteux, Les monstres dans la pensée médiévale européenne. p. 65.

correspondence between a manner of being or behaving, and a "geographical mode"[318]. A person of mystery or wonder, for instance, would invariably inhabit a place or space of wonder[319]. A "good" person or a person susceptible of attaining the "good" would live in a land of plenty. Likewise, someone who can only be characterized as a "negative subject" will inhabit a *terre gaste*. It comes as no surprise therefore, that some of the Saracen enemies, who are the very embodiment of "negative subjectivity" are represented as inhabiting places that are a *terre gaste*.

Perhaps more importantly, I believe that the correspondence that the medieval mind sought to establish between a cause-origin in the landscape, and the effect-in-subjectivity on the characters which populate such nightmarish worlds, seeks to establish that both man and landscape are immediate certainties, sensible certainties inasmuch as their physical embodiment is semiologically significant. These monstrous desubjects, these wastelands do not need further analysis, since the values, the ethics, and the beliefs they signify can immediately be seized upon and comprehended in their essence as evil embodiments, or as nightmarish worlds. They are, in other words, a "paysages/paysans moralisés". Both man and nature are presented in terms of their essential inhumanity, their visceral hostility, that is to say, both desubject and landscape are fully-formed with a built-in (a)morality. The (a)moral character of these "desubjects", which the poem describes as *felun, traitor suduiant,* or *mult de males arz*, reflects and reinforces the

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[318] Suzanne Conklin Akbari has sketched out the "geographical" relationship between perversity and facticity in chapter 4 of her book <u>Idols in the East. European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450</u>.. Essentially, medieval thought naturalized the degree of perversity in a human being, to the degree of extreme heat in a homeland.

[319] The romances of Chrétien de Troyes are the best example of this correspondence. In his romances, the purity of religious life (exemplified by the solitary monk) is often found in the wilds of the forest; the abundance of material wealth and *courtoisie* are to be found in those kingdoms populated by generous and wise kings (Arthur being the ultimate incarnation of this theme); castles as wonders of creation (and as potential sources for Masonic wisdom – see P. Naudon <u>Les Loges de saint Jean et la philosophie ésotérique de la connaissance</u>. Dervy, Paris, 1954) are often the scene of mythical/magical interventions of fairies, grails and bleeding lances, of fisher kings.

negative aspects of the landscape from which they originate. They, monstrous subjects/desubjects, are the measure of the inhumanity, or profanity of that landscape. A land devoid of those basic elements considered essential to life (such as water, wheat or sun) necessarily destroys, and mutilates subjectivizing to an extent where, the stunted subjective process ends up serving as the perverse measure of the landscape itself. Instead of generating crops, the land breeds weakness, evil, and monstrosities.

> *E la disme est d'Occïan le Desert:*
>
> *C'est une gent ki Damnedeu ne sert-*
>
> *De plus feluns n'orrez parler jamais-*
>
> *Durs unt les quirs ensement cume fer,*
>
> *Pur ço n'unt soign dë elme ne d'osberc;*
>
> *En la bataille sunt felun e engrés.[320]*

Within the logical framework of the "Chanson de Roland", that this *terre gaste* is called a desert, and that it breeds monsters is rather obvious. We are not in a situation where subjects impose a kind of cultural imperialism or colonialism on the land. Such a motive could only be found in the Christian subjective process, wherein land and "other" are subjected to the will of the Franks. That is the Christian *ethos*, as it is lived and expressed in the conquest of Spain. In the case of the nightmarish lands, it is rather the case that monsters *go along* with the land, conform to its principles and character, and, mirroring the place and "there" from which their existence has sprung, prove that they are worthy of such a place by echoing its nightmarish aspects and (a)morality[321]. Consequently, these monsters emerge from their world, and move out across other lands in pursuit of death and riotous living.

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[320] Verses 3246-3251.

[321] "C'est une gent ki unches ben ne volt". Verse 3231 (They are a people that have always eschewed the good).

The representation of Saracen space also serves to further underscore the important difference between the Christian world and its "other". In contradistinction to the Christian *dulce France*, and the imagined riches and comforts such a name suggest (a world of provisions, with housing, heating, food, laws, customs, beliefs, civilization, and natural "presences" to spare), the Saracen world is marked as a void. Whereas the Christian heroes, all to a man, long to return home and express their longing for this return to the soil[322], there is no such counterbalancing note among the Saracens. As we have previously seen, their longing is material, and not spatial in nature. These dueling oppositions suggest that, in the poem's logical framework, the landscape not only produces the particular beauty or monstrosity of certain given elements, but more importantly (at least inasmuch as the Christians are concerned), it serves as a bonding principle, as that which unites all participants together under the banner of Providence or Nothingness. That the Franks would keep *dulce France* in mind[323] allows us to understand that in spite of all of the military, political, or social catastrophes that may befall them, the Franks are nonetheless bounded in their sense of a shared "space".

I believe that we can conclude by stating that the impetus of these geographical descriptions is to give philosophical credence to the idea that the "other" is inhuman, a desubject, and his inhumanity/desubjectivity stems from his inhabiting a world devoid of nature. In the end, the confrontation between the Christians and the Saracens is also a confrontation between two worlds, two landscapes and worldviews. It is only after the final conflict has been brought about, that the true nature of the characters and of the landscapes can be revealed: the evil and cowardly have been exposed and/or killed, and the good have survived and learned valuable

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[322] The desire, or the longing, to return home seems to be suggested in lay 54, verses 700-702.

[323] When Roland warns his fellow soldiers that they must avoid being mentioned in future song of ill-repute, is this not a subtle reference to *dulce France*? Likewise, when the cosmological incidents surrounding Roland's death occur in France in lay 110, does it not signal the presencing of a union between the particular hero (Roland) and the universal "there" from where he sprang?

insights. This conflict between two cultures is also a conflict between a sacred space and a profane one, wherein good and evil are matched against the enormity, the beauty or ugliness, the superiority or physical defectiveness of subjects and lands. The wastelands are places where nature ceases to naturalize, where nature is stunted and negated. In other words, it is a place of nothingness where there is nothing through which subjects can come to be.

15. CONCLUSION

In these last few pages I should like to sketch out a very brief critique of the philosophical thinking made manifest by the poem. Much has been made of the fact that the heroes of the poem inhabit a space, and their inhabiting that space is made all the more possible by their willful disregard of the presence of others. Yet, before any character can become a dominant subject, a conqueror who asserts himself in the world, he must firstly dwell within that world. This, in turn, implies that he does not nor cannot exist as an isolated individual (or an isolated, culturally chauvinistic culture). He must be seen to belong to a society and a culture, which, in turn, also belongs to an epoch and an assembly of cultures that mutually buttress and define each other. In belonging to a culture, the poetic hero interiorizes the norms of the world in which he finds himself. As such, and regardless of the apparent one-sidedness of the values and beliefs that are cherished, the presence of the other, as that against which one must strive, is nonetheless foundational and determinate. It is not simply a negative exteriority, but a pivotal marker within the thinking of the community and the hero. The manner in which the "Chanson de Roland" presents the pernicious Saracens as hapless-hopeless-witless outsiders always looming at the borders of the empire, rather than having them be present within the empire's thinking, logically organizing categories of thought in simultaneity with "Christian" concepts, is itself a fiction. The fiction of a detached subject, or subject-culture, to be taken as a natural, existential, theological

fact, the starting point for a poetic narrative that continually strives to reinforce the point by narratively pushing the borders of the self-sustained empire ever outwards, thereby always negating non-essential others who are never more than outsiders to be annexed or destroyed. This narrative thrust hides perhaps the poem's greatest fiction: it seeks to mask the very real nature of our existing, of our having to compose essentially with others, and with other groups who do not live "on the borders" or outside the confines of our empire, since these others are always present in our thinking and perception of ourselves and the world, given that, in the phenomenology of martial valour, they help to ground any Christian character's acting upon his will if he is to function as a knight. It is this fiction of the other as outsider which lends weight to the poem's visceral xenophobia and violence. Since it obscures the manner in which, borrowing from Heidegger, one subject evolves in relation with another as being-with-other, it easily lends itself to the kind of moral thinking that rejects and refuses the moral imperatives that would derive from our taking our interrelatedness seriously.

Taking this view seriously, we would see that there are no distant others living in terre gaste outside the comfortable confines of our world. Likewise, that the other's presence is implicit in the formation and understanding of a subject would involve our coming to the realization that there are no "objects" in our coming to deal with the world. There are no objects that need only submit to our will. Objects to be used up, converted into something for our use (and conversion in the poetic model is precisely just such an enterprise), or simply cast aside when we discard it of its presence. The absence of objects within this dynamic might also compel us to change the terms with which we have analyzed the "Chanson de Roland". For it could imply that the very idea of a subject, as one standing over and against an other as object, must be gotten rid of, and a new dynamic put in its place. There would be no subject Roland

slaughtering others and transforming them into objects, rather there are to be participants. In contradistinction to the Rolandian phenomenology that separates the two sides, and only sees them come together in order to better eliminate any potential difference, a recognition of the foundational presence of the other within my understanding of myself would admit of the possibility of divergent ideas, opinions, and personalities. Instead of excluding any import as the prejudice and errors of a demonic other, the concept of participatory recognition would strive to work with, and through, the diverging beliefs, ideas, and opinions. The participants would no longer be so preoccupied with the question of occupying and moving across spatial boundaries, since their "movement" would occur in two directions. Firstly, the move backwards towards the preunderstanding of how we approach the world, since nothing would better prepare for such a movement than to be confronted in participation with an other whose grounding does not merely reinforce those tenets that we hold most dear. Secondly, our participation would involve our moving forward, since the moral requirement that is concomitant with our coming to see the other as being foundational to ourselves, would compel us to attempt to achieve some form of commonality, even if such a mode of thought recognized nothing more than an understanding of the very terms on which we disagree.

I am not sure that such an exercise will necessarily lead to a consensus, nor should we perhaps wish that poetic texts be treated in such a way. After all, there is something to be said for the cathartic effect that the fictionalization violence can have on a reader. However, when dealing with a text such as the "Chanson de Roland", a text that can be said to be a Christian *miroir du prince* or, a *miroir du Chrétien*, the ability to understand a text's weakness, its hermeneutical one-sidedness can lead the reader to a recognition of the important moral dimension which is not contained once and for all in a Truth that stands as the dominant subject

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to others which are subject to It, since our interrelatedness with others involves a very different form of striving. A striving that is not teleologically determined and has as its goal a finalized Truth. Rather, it is a striving that is peculiar to those having come to the realization that participation with an other, along with the mutual back and forth involved in understanding oneself, as well as attempting to understand the other, is itself its own legitimate striving, not needing the legitimization of some exterior Truth. It represents its own struggling, its own "spiritual" warfare, sharing in the joys and anguish of the sharing of a truth which, perfectly immanent, historical and contextual, and regardless of whether any resolution is firmly achieved, remains always tentative and temporary, since its very possibility, as its openness to the presence of the other, must continue to be open to the next opportunity for interrelatedness participation.

This, I would assert, is the space for a conception of narrative and subjective becoming. This process, as a continuity, wherein there is an attempt to understand oneself, and to understand the other as being simultaneous with the attainment of a truth, allows for the conquest of larger horizons than merely our own, it enriches by incorporating the insights of the other, even as the participation of both involves challenges, disputations, and potentially competing assertions. Truth, in this case, would be that which comes out of the participation. This would certainly involve the rejection of a hard Truth, however, it would not imply a situation in which anything goes. Given that participation is itself a somewhat violent process, since the participants are altered, since participants are challenged in their innermost beliefs, such a view of participation permits the flourishing of only those elements that can withstand the encounter. Everything else is left to be discovered, to be subjectivized, because there is no guaranteed method for finding absolute solutions, and there will of course be no assurances that what will be attained is likely to be continually sufficient. Nonetheless, what will have been attained by

having the subject and his other participate, will not be determined to be completely insufficient. Grounding subjectivizing in this process of truth is to recognize that we do not dispose of a panoramic view of the world where everything is known to us, yet it still allows us to see well. It invites us to reflection, and therefore, I choose to leave the "Chanson de Roland" at its last laisse, with Charlemagne serious and ponderous, disquieted by the suffering that is his in his relationship to a Truth that demands evermore slaughter, and evermore antagonism. Perhaps here, Charlemagne, lamenting the fate which is his, has come to distinguish a legitimate truth process from a false one: one that involves his having to risk everything in order to gain everything, one that involves his becoming a subject only by subjecting himself to a Truth that demands that he lose everything first.

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