

Lives sold dear: chivalry and feudalism in the song assignment

[History](#)



The lives of the characters in *The Song of Roland* seem inextricably linked to both feudalism and chivalry. This is hardly surprising as most of the characters in the chanson are knights-?? they are neither at the top Of the pyramid nor at the bottom. Their position depends upon their relationship to the people around them. Five of seven main characters-?? Roland, Olivier, Archbishop Turnip, Ganglion, and Babbling-?? are not just knights but lords as well. Nearly everything they own depends upon their feudal relationship with heir lord.

While feudalism determines a knight's place in their world, chivalry determines how they ought to act based on their position. Many times throughout the chanson, characters state what they believe they should do based on their knightly code. There seem to be several themes around which this code can be grouped. Ganglion's family is a surprising example of the theme of familial loyalty. At the beginning of *The Song of Roland*, several members of Ganglion's household offer to travel with him to meet Martinis. Ganglion refuses, asking hem to bring his love to his wife and son-?? a stark contrast to the disdain with which he had treated his step-son Roland just a few aliases earlier. Ganglion's family again shows him loyalty at the end of the chanson when they offer to be held as a promise that Pinball will fight in Ganglion's stead. 3 This (some might say, blind) loyalty to the bond of blood ultimately requires thirty of Ganglion ' s relatives to pay the highest price as their lives are forfeit when Canella is found guilty following Pinball's failure in the trial by combat.

The author of the chanson includes a warning for any who read this story: " a traitor kills himself as well as others. " 4 Marital and his knights provide the <https://assignbuster.com/lives-sold-dear-chivalry-and-feudalism-in-the-song-assignment/>

counterpoint to this chivalrous ideal when they are willing to sacrifice their own sons to Charlemagne in order to keep their lands and honor. 5

Interestingly enough, when Roland later prepares to sacrifice himself and his men in the name of Rollo's (and, by extension, France's) honor, Turnip praises the French for their impending martyrdom-6 As well as loyalty to family, loyalty to your brothers-in-arms plays a large part in motivating several characters.

From the beginning, Roland urges Charlemagne not to pursue a peaceful settlement with Marital, but to continue fighting in order to take revenge on Marital for the death of two of Charlemagne's vassals: Basal and Basil. 7 Though Charlemagne decides to pursue peace with Marital, he is later convinced by the death of his nephew and many of his lords to wipe out the Muslim army. Loyalty to both your earthly lord and your heavenly lord also play a large role in The Song of Roland. Every battle Roland wins, every city he conquers, he does so in the name of his king. During battle, Roland and Turnip both urge their soldiers on by encouraging them that Charlemagne himself will hear of how well they fought for their lord and avenge their deaths. As Roland comes to his own death, he takes off his right-hand glove, offering to God in recognition that his service to Charlemagne has been a preparation for his eternal service to his heavenly Lord. 9 Both sides hold religion in the highest regard. Indeed, both sides offer the other the opportunity to forsake their religion and adopt the others'. Both the

Christians and the Muslims are given several interesting religious contrasts.

For example, the Christians worship their divine trinity made up of the

Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and the Muslims (inaccurately) worship their divine trinity of Muhammad, Apollo, and Termagant. However, how each side regards a loss when fighting under the 'protection' of these gods is very different. The Christians under Roland regard their deaths as martyrdom; as serving the whole of Christendom. Some, like Roland, even welcome death, knowing they will be safe in heaven, eternally serving their God.

The Muslims, however, regard the loss of Marital; s hand as a failure of their entire religion and destroy their gods' temples and relics. 10 Marsupial's queen sees the triumph of the Christians over her husband's army as a sign of the might of the Christian's God and even goes so far as to convert to Christianity and take a Christian name, Juliann. 1 1 The French also hold honor on the battlefield in high regard. While the pagans run from Roland "just as the stag will run before the hounds," the French would never behave so dishonorable. The pagans note that the French would "rather die than leave the battlefield. " 13 Even as Roland is dying, he staggers across the battlefield and further into Spain. He even attempts to shatter his sword on a rock so that "no man who flees another should possess While Roland is held up as the ideal for many of these knightly virtues, he lacks one which ultimately causes the deaths of him and the men under his command: wisdom. Charlemagne, Olivier, Turnip, Names, and even Ganglion are praised for their wisdom and counsel.