

Song of roland essay



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One of the most famous epic-poems in world history, “ The Song of Roland” recounts events during the first Crusade when Charlemagne reigned (approximately 778 A. D.) and demonstrates the oral tradition in epic poetry.

Though myriad versions of the poem have been uncovered, there is no “ definitive” version, per se, and ‘ The Song of Roland” is best viewed as an aggregate of the evolving traditions that gave rise to its present form. The irregular stanzaic form of the poem is referred to as the “ laisse” stanza and each of the stanzas is composed of a number of lines in pentameter, with the ending stress-syllable of each line in a given laisse keeping the same vowel sound, producing an assonal, rather than end-rhymed stanza.

(Oinas)Because the poem’s events recount a battle between opposing religious faiths, the themes of the poem are those of personal salvation and spiritual truth. “ The most important metaphors in this poem are: the Struggle, the Road, the Ascent, the Two Cities, and Roncevaux.

The desperate fighting which makes up a good part of the narrative may be viewed as a reflection of the battle for man’s soul.” (Oinas 199) The poem contains some of the most famous passages and images in all of world literature, including the scene of Roland’s pyrrhic victory when he blows his horn. “ Roland blows on his horn[..

.] with a sound so strong that it can be heard for thirty leagues[...

] Charlemagne rushed back and smashed the Saracens. Unfortunately,

Roland died from the effort of blowing on the horn-it “ burst his temples.”

(Oinas 201)The enduring qualities of the poem are those rooted in themes of

courage, loyalty, religious conflict, and heroism. Some difficulties exist for modern readers in appreciating the truly epic scope of the poem.

Issues of heroism and villainy are slightly different in “The Song of Roland” than contemporary visions of these narrative aspects. “It is difficult for present-day readers to accept the fact that a character can be all bad and there is a tendency—especially since the Romantic period—to view villains as alienated, misunderstood[...] not entirely to blame for the crimes they perpetrate [..

.] The plain fact is that Turpin and his contemporaries considered Ganelon to be completely evil. Like the Saracens or Satan himself.” (Oinas 201) Despite these difficulties, the complexity and scope of the poem provide modern readers with a wonderful example of traditional oral poetry and storytelling as well as providing incisive descriptions and accounts of ancient life and social and religious beliefs. Works Cited Oinas, Felix J.

, ed. *An Introduction to the World's Great Folk Epics*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978.;;