

Roland: death by ego



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In the Song of Roland, the protagonist, Roland, faces his death as the end consequence of his self-conceited and prideful actions. In the beginning of the poem Oliver indicated the consistent prideful behavior of Roland in the past. Roland then proves Oliver's point by fighting with only his own intentions in mind. In the end, Roland pays for his pride by the defeat of his army and his personal death. Therefore, the actions of Roland throughout the poem that are consistently completed out of pride lead to his imminent death.

Oliver, the close friend of Roland, presents Roland's past behavior as prideful. King Charlemagne asks for a volunteer to deliver the message to Marsile, the Muslim emir, to which " Roland replies: ' I am prepared to go.' / ' You certainly will not,' said Count Oliver, / ' Your temperament is most hostile and fierce, / I am afraid you might pick a quarrel / If the king wishes, I am prepared to go'" (254-258). In this section, Oliver tells Roland of how his temperament would get him in trouble if the king were to send him to Marsile. Roland's temperament is prideful by always finding a way to start a fight. Roland wanting to " pick a quarrel" is the result of him always believing he is right, showing his pride. Oliver warns his best friend about his temperament, saying that it could lead to a squabble which would lead to a battle. If Roland's temperament is described being " hostile" and " fierce", it will not provide the stability that an army needs to win a battle. In a way, Oliver not only is giving a glimpse into the past, saying it is Roland's typical nature to be prideful, but also is foreshadowing Roland dying by result of his prideful temperament. Oliver, a very close friend of Roland, gives a history of Roland's behavior, saying it would not be unlikely for him to stir up trouble

out of his own pride. Also, Roland himself shows this by stirring up trouble in battle by fighting for himself.

The next point is that Roland fights with only his intentions in mind, not focusing on the big picture. Oliver suggests to Roland that he should blow the oliphant to signal Charlemagne to help in battle against the overwhelming Muslim force coming up upon them. But then, “ Roland replies: ‘ That would be an act of folly; / Throughout the fair land of France I should lose my good name / Straightway I shall strike great blows with Durendal; / Right up to its golden hilt the blade will run with blood. / These treacherous pagans will rue the day they came to this pass. / I swear to you, they are all condemned to death’ ” (1053-1058). In this quote, Roland is refusing to blow the horn because it will make his reputation go down in the eyes of all the Franks. He is so focused on his good reputation, he completely misses the magnitude of the Muslim army. Instead of focusing on the outcome of the battle, he focuses on making sure that he looks good to others back home. He does not show even the slightest consideration for his soldiers’ lives, amplifying his own skills in the battle. His narrow-minded frame of the battle puts his men’s lives on the line, which leads to devastating consequences in the end.

Roland’s prideful actions lead him to his imminent downfall in battle. Just as the tide turns on the battlefield and the Franks begin to lose men left and right, Oliver gives his honest opinion of Roland’s decision to not blow the oliphant. “ For a true vassal’s act, in its wisdom, avoids folly; / Caution is better than great zeal. / Franks are dead because of your recklessness / Charles will never again receive our service. / If you had heeded me, my lord

would now be here; / We should have fought this battle and won it. / Roland, we can only rue your prowess” (1724-1731). It was too late for Roland to call for help since Charlemagne could not come to their aid before the battle ends. According to Oliver, Roland putting his army in a weak position by not calling for help was extremely reckless. Roland is responsible for the lives of his men that died as a result of the battle. Roland is not able to sacrifice his pride and ego for the safety of his men, but waits until all hope was lost in order to try to change the battle. The consequence of Roland’s action shows his prideful intent. Roland’s characteristic flaw is his pride, consistent before the poem begins up to his death. Oliver tells of Roland’s pride from a time earlier than a poem and warning him to be on the watch so that his pride will not lead to his death.

Roland’s pride is not a characteristic he recently picks up, but rather part of his personality. By fighting with his own intentions in mind and not blowing the oliphant, he proves Oliver’s point by performing this prideful action. The very same action causes him to lose the battle and his own life. Therefore, Roland displays self pride throughout the poem which affects his decision to not blow the horn, concluding with his defeat in battle and his own demise.