Speaking of Roland

The Middle English *Roland* Fragment
in BL MS Lansdowne 388

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The Song of Roland is the title given to this fragmentary Middle English poem by its modern editor – the incomplete manuscript copy has no title or running head.[1] The implication that what it names is a translation of the Old French epic *La Chanson de Roland*,[2] maintaining the same genre in a different language, has proved, I believe, a longstanding impediment to a proper evaluation of the Middle English poem. In their surveys of the Matter of France in English, H. M. Smyser and W. R. J. Barron both take a poor view of the Middle English fragment, judging it almost entirely in terms of its success or failure in rendering the spirit and ethos of the original French *chanson de geste*, and criticizing the poet for apparently misunderstanding narrative incidents that are included in the English poem but with altered detail or emphasis.[3] It is perverse that criticism of the *Song of Roland* has been thus overshadowed by the illustrious *Chanson*, for it is clear to all that this text is by no means attempting a close or faithful translation.[4] As I hope to show in this essay, the numerous variations and innovations in the Middle English *Roland* fragment that are evident on comparing it with the French source texts point consistently towards a corresponding transformation of genre.

It is worth asking first what characteristic features of *the chanson de geste* form one might expect to find in a late-medieval English reworking of the text. Middle English verse does not, of course, reproduce what Marianne Ailes has identified as the most significant genre-marker for *chanson de geste*, the use of *laisses*.[5] However, Rosalind Field persuasively demonstrates an affinity between the two vernacular epic metres of medieval England, Anglo-Norman *laisses* and English alliterative long line, and argues for 'an awareness on the part of medieval poets of an equivalence between the long-line

unrhymed forms of French and English verse which both retained their associations with heroic poetry';[6] it is thus noteworthy that none of the Middle English poems deriving from epics of Charlemagne is written in the alliterative long-line tradition, so well suited to heroic writing, as seen in *the Alliterative Morte Arthure*. The *Roland* fragment is indeed in a form of alliterative verse, but its four-stress rhyming couplets display unevenly systematic alliteration,[7] functioning more in relation to specific, local literary effects than to any notion of epic genre. It is impossible to say whether the *Roland* poem began with a typical generic prologue, calling for attention and declaring its epic scope, as the fragment is acephalous.[8] The text does include lines that gesture towards oral delivery, at points in the narration where there is a change of subject, such as: 'Of hym [Charlemagne] no mor I tell, but turn to his kniȝtis' (433), or 'Off the hethen houndis herkyn me till, / Hou they wickidly wrought' (438–39).[9] However, these are not quite comparable to the formulaic calls for attention, engaging with an implied audience in direct terms, which punctuate the Middle English versions of later *chansons de geste* such as *Otinel* and *Fierabras*.[10] Like other examples that allude to speaking about a new topic ('Of our cristyn let vs ouer slid, / And spek of the hethyn, as the story sais' (254–55); 'Now of thes lordis rest we a whill, / And spek we of king charlis þens many a mylle' (380–81), these are conventional phrases marking narrative sub-divisions that can be found in a wide range of texts.[11] Finally, Barron believes the poem shows a failure to appreciate the characteristic epic rhetorical feature of 'repetition with variation' (p. 91); as I shall show, it does make use of repetition in ways that may have been suggested by the *chanson de geste*, but if so, they are certainly here adapted to a different narrative purpose. Thus, measured by these generic criteria, the form of the Middle English *Roland* seems to have little in common with that of the *chanson de geste*.

The salient formal features that instead characterize the narration of this poem have to do with establishing the orderliness of its story. The narrative sub-divisions mentioned above are all designed to clarify the interrelationship of the successive episodes as the story moves from one location and set of personae to another. There is marked and frequent use of connecting temporal phrases ('Then …'; 'When …'; 'And whils …'; 'With that …') to introduce each new stage of the action in the correct order as events unfold. A parallel may be seen in the opening words of very many chapters in the *Pseudo-*

Turpin Chronicle, e.g.: 'Tunc', 'Postquam', 'Deinde', which are all preserved in the respective vernacular in the Old French and Middle English translations.[12] It is, of course, a natural feature of chronicle style, to emphasize the chronological accuracy of the narrative of events,[13] and Malory makes extensive use of it in the *Morte Darthur*, a text that Edward Kennedy claims is 'stylistically ... similar to what readers of English prose chronicles would have known'.[14] At these points of transition in the Middle English *Roland*, the couplet rhymes often straddle the adjacent narrative units, with the effect of further stressing the continuity of sequential actions. These features all contribute to the construction of the text as a coherent linear narrative. Detailed analysis of this reworked version of the *Chanson de Roland* will show evidence of substantial rearrangements in the order of events, which produce more transparent operations of cause and effect and further support the linear structure of the revised story – a term that is used in the text itself to refer to the historicity of its material: 'Itt is wretyn in storis to remembre euer' (252).[15]

Joseph Duggan's recent edition of all French texts of the *Chanson de Roland*, with the invaluable concordance of *laisses* by Karen Akiyama,[16] makes it easier to appreciate the complex relation of the Middle English *Roland* to the Anglo-Norman and French texts. The poem is preserved in a unique manuscript copy, incomplete at both beginning and end, and appears to have suffered other textual damage in its scribal history; however, despite its imperfections, the text still allows us to see how the older narrative tradition has been refashioned in this late-medieval version.[17] Line for line, it matches the length of the corresponding section of the *Chanson* fairly accurately, but the content is very much altered: it combines material from the earliest manuscript tradition with details from the later rhymed versions, and also incorporates borrowings from the prose *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*. As some critics have argued, there is no reason to assume with Smyser and Barron that what survives is a poor derivative of a lost French conflated text: it more likely represents a purposeful adaptation by the English poet of the original materials into a new, different work (as, indeed, Duggan claims of all the later versions).[18] Stephen Shepherd has demonstrated ways in which the Middle English poem may be said to show 'a degree of literary craftsmanship', from its bringing together of diverse materials into what he terms 'a kind of "researched" compilation', to its pointing of the narrative with added passages of reference to the

natural world and of proverbial wisdom.[19] Additionally, Susan Farrier has indicated a few 'structural changes', where the English poet has moved scenes within the narrative, and further instances of added or omitted passages, claiming that these changes contribute to an attempt to portray both Charlemagne and Roland as foolish leaders in a moralizing adaptation of the story.[20] Now, however, with the benefit of the newly available concordance of the different versions of the *Chanson*, it is possible to see that the Middle English fragment presents a sustained rearrangement of the narrative incidents, with a considerable amount of new material not evident elsewhere in the tradition, and to consider the overall effect of the alterations.[21]

The concern for narrative coherence, privileging credible cause and effect over the typical rhetorical structures of the French *Chanson*, is very clearly evident in a major rearrangement of source materials, where several scattered scenes dealing with the disastrous encounter between Gualter de l'Hum (Gauter in English) and the Saracen king Almaris (Amaris) are brought together and relocated, with new material and adapted details, to make a single coherent episode that now functions as the first engagement between the Peers and the Saracens (265–379). The relocated material derives largely from the rhymed versions, which provide a narrative account of the battle as well as the brief retrospective mention later on, found also in the Oxford text.[22] The whole episode is given new and greater significance by being configured as the first, albeit proxy, encounter between Roland and his opposing Saracen counterpart, the Sultan's nephew. In the English poem, this personage is uniquely conflated with King Amaris; in the French versions, the sultan's nephew Aelroth is named – if at all – only at the moment of his death at Roland's hands. First introduced as 'of the soudan kyn' (266), Amaris later states: 'I am thy sister son' (474), using the same phrase 'sister son' that Charlemagne pointedly uses twice to address his nephew Roland during the charged debate about who should lead the rearguard (180, 186), so stressing the parallel between Amaris and Roland. To reinforce the narrative logic of the episode, the English poem also transposes the moment when Roland sends Gauter forth with his men to take the cliff (315), so that it now occurs not before, but after Amaris has made his request to the Sultan that he may lead the advance party, in the express hope that he may 'met with Roulond' (273). A clear progression is thus established between this preliminary encounter and the major battle that follows, in

which Amaris finally does come face to face with Roland. In the light of this progression, a poignant foreshadowing of Roland's own ultimate fate may be felt in the details of the fierce fighting between the Saracen and Christian forces, the loss of all Gauter's men in the absence of any 'socour ne help' (345), and the wounded Gauter's laments. The whole, carefully reconstructed episode thus functions on several levels as an indicative prelude to the catastrophic events that follow.

Other major rearrangements of the material allow the Middle English poem to construct significant narrative juxtapositions, where parallel incidents are linked in sequence and verbal repetition is used to reinforce their relation to each other.[23] A striking example is found at the beginning of the fragment, where the interpolated material derived from the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* (1–3, 28–30, 59–76)[24] is juxtaposed with the account of Charlemagne's ominous dreams and subsequent actions (77ff.) to create a very different effect from the *Chanson*. Throughout this section, the English poem emphasises the peaceful outcome of Ganelon's supposed diplomacy (while still making abundantly clear to the reader or listener that all he promises is false). Charles need undertake 'no further fightinge' (19); he can enjoy the fruits of peace in 'playing' with noble ladies and drinking good wine;[25] there is no honour or advantage in fighting when peace is offered;[26] might mingled with mercy ensures lasting good fortune.[27] All this portrays the king more as a wise statesman than a warlord, and Charles's reply continues in the same positive vein, stressing the future friendship between himself and the soon-to-be Christian Sultan, for whom he plans lavish hospitality with gifts and feasting, and matching Ganelon's proverbial peroration with one of his own: 'Who gothe in woo winters full fell, / yet is frendschipe and faithe fairiste at ende' (46–47). Charles's optimistic view of the future – 'For now I dred no day in all my lyf' (51) – informs the journey home as, only ten miles on their way, the army stops to enjoy a stately supper with plenty of wine; however, the narrator curses Ganelon for bringing it: 'euyll hym betid!'(69), since the knights, completely befuddled as a result, end up in bed with the Saracen ladies.

This interpolated episode from the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* replaces the description in the French corpus of the Saracen army secretly massing near to Charlemagne's forces and the comment in the narrator's voice with its note of dread: 'Deus! quel dulur que li

Franceis ne l' sevent!' (Oxford version, l. 716; 'God! What a grievous thing that the French do not know!'). The elaborate account of the way Ganelon's wine leads to confusion among the knights is carefully presented so as to excuse the knights, while heaping blame on the traitor, disparaged as 'þat vile':

> It [the wine] swymyd in ther hedis and mad hem to nap;
> they wist not what þey did, so þer wit failid.
> when they wer in bed and thought to a restid,
> they went to the women þat wer so hend,
> that wer sent fro saragos of sairsins kind.
> they synnyd so sore in þat ylk while
> that many men wept and cursid þat vile.   (70–76)

Thus the sin which in the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* served for a moralizing justification of so many Christian deaths at Roncevaux ('quia … fornicati sunt, mortem incurrerunt';[28] 'they brought death on themselves because they committed fornication') is here adapted to provide a striking example of the seductive power of Ganelon's treacherous Saracen deceptions. Immediately following is the account of Charles's two prophetic dreams, linked to the wine-and-women episode by reference to the king's experiencing a similar lack of expected rest in bed:

> Charls our kinge in his bed slepithe,
> gladly brought to bed, and no harm thinkithe;
> litill rest had the king in his riche clothes
> for drechinge and dremyng & trobling his wittis.   (77–80)

The English poet has altered much of the enigmatic detail in these ominous dreams,[29] but the incident of Ganelon's breaking Charles's spear remains, clearly foreshadowing the later disastrous outcome of the king's misplaced trust in the traitor's 'flatring speche' (6) with its promises of peace and prosperity, and reinforced by the parallel created with the episode of the knights betrayed into sin by the wine and the women. The combined events fulfil a premonitory function similar to the narrator's lament in the French texts, but with much more complex interplay among issues such as blame and treachery, wisdom and responsibility.

The importance of Ganelon's role here as the counsellor whose advice guides the king's judgement is echoed in several passages added or altered in the Middle English poem that focus on the issue of counsel, one of which follows on directly from Charles's prophetic dreams.[30] A brief detail found in the rhymed *Roland* tradition,[31] stating that Charles told his dreams on waking, is elaborated into a new scene in which the king seeks counsel on the interpretation of his dreams:

he called the wissest men þen aright,
and askid of his dreme hou it be might.   (107–8)

The poet has perhaps recalled scenes from Bible narratives such as Pharaoh's or Nebuchadnezzar's dreams; like theirs, Charles's consultation with his wise men produces inconclusive interpretations. However, the passage ends with an interesting display of properly informed Christian good counsel:

throughe right resson, they said him till:
'now let god alone and do all his will.'   (119–20)

In fact, attention is drawn to the problem of getting wise counsel at each crucial stage of the story. When Charles asks who should stay behind to command the rear, he recognizes that Ganelon's plausible argument proposing Roland is malevolent 'counsell' (149), but in a new scene he is unable to find any replacement for Roland among his barons (134–79);[32] later on, when he fears for the safety of the rearguard, the same barons are presented as self-righteously censuring the king's response to advice:

ye trist no trew men þat tellis you right;
whoo tellis you soothe, gothe out of sight.   (396–7)

Their criticism is immediately silenced by Ganelon's menacing appearance and his formal challenge. This dramatic event is part of another carefully rearranged sequence of episodes. The Middle English poem brings forward the confrontation between the barons and Ganelon's kin from the end of the story (where it prefaces the concluding episode of Ganelon's trial and punishment), and enhances Ganelon's role by making him (rather than Pinabel) issue the challenge (407–14). The transported scene is combined with

a different relocated incident (taken from the later episode in the French texts when Charlemagne hears Roland's horn), in which Ganelon falsely reassures Charles that Roland delays because he is hunting, and adds the new detail that he will no doubt bring Charles a fat deer (419–26) – like the courtly feast with ladies and wine, this is another of Ganelon's seductive images of peace-time normality. In a further new development, Charles then uneasily effects a reconciliation between Ganelon and the barons. Juxtaposed with all this is a new scene in which Roland gets contradictory counsel from his peers:

> … they rod togedur in counsall righte.
> som bad Roulond to blow aftur socour,
> and som bad hym bid of his blast lengour,
> and be redy to fight, for fle they nylle.   (434–37)

This scene does not replace the later iconic dispute over blowing the horn between prudent Oliver and valiant Roland, but it sets it in a wider context of consultation and debate peculiar to this poem. Indeed, the English poet has taken some pains to prepare for the famous moment (not present in the fragmentary manuscript) when Roland finally blows his horn, with several oblique references to this well-known episode added throughout the text, thus creating enjoyable dramatic irony for those who know the story. First, Charles explicitly forbids any blowing of horns unless it be to summon his help against the Saracens (236–42); then Ganelon's elaborate fiction about Roland's recreational hunting (419–26) effectively pre-empts the knights' discussion of whether or not to blow for aid by undermining Roland's credit if and when he ever should sound the horn. Later, when Oliver asks Roland to blow for help, the English poet replaces the conventional repetition-with-variation of the *Chanson* with a cogent progression as Roland convinces first Oliver and then all the Peers that they have no need of help – an argument that serves the important function of encouraging the troops:

> When they vndirstod hou he ne wold
> For to blow his horn for no socour bold,
> They tok hem comfort, and said full hye:
> 'now curssid be he that hens will flye.' (568–71)

Oliver and all the Peers remind Roland of this a little later when he laments their imminent deaths on account of Ganelon's treachery, saying this is no time to lament, that it was his decision not to summon help with 'an horn blast', and reiterating their resolve: 'let on, prik out, and not to rid fast, / so shall they be fellid, yf they fendis wer' (640–41). By reassigning speeches in this passage, the Middle English poet has changed the emphasis from a dispute between Roland and Oliver into a manifestation of corporate solidarity of purpose. As Barron observes, the spirit of this episode is significantly different from the focus in *the chanson de geste* on Roland's heroic *demesure*,[33] but it fits coherently with the different construction of Roland's role in the Middle English poem.

These examples of rewriting and restructuring, besides showing a marked concern for narrative coherence, emphasising the depth of Ganelon's manipulative treachery,[34] and highlighting the need for wise counsel, have the equally notable effect of sharpening the focus on Roland as the central figure. This effect is supported by the way in which other Peers are often mentioned alongside Oliver in the English poem, reducing the impression of a pair of equal companions, and proposing instead the image of a single leader with his band of fellows. Fellowship is held up in the poem as an important ideal and a source of strength. Fervent speeches are reported from the Peers, volunteering to stay behind with Roland and expressing their loyalty to him and to each other: 'all they said atonys they will togedur hold' (207); 'they wold no furþer go ... / and leue lordis behind that they loued euer: / they will hold with them "till our hertis blede ..."' (221–23). Roland correspondingly begins his first speech to the Peers with the words: 'we be fellos and frendis' (304), and when he grieves at the sight of the impossible odds they face, it is 'not for his own sak he soghed often, / but for his fellichip þat he most lovyden' (600–01). As in the French texts, their allegiance to Charlemagne is one element of the bond that binds the fellows together: 'for our lordis loue, þat is god euer' (552); however, the emphasis throughout on Ganelon's treachery and the conviction that he has already sold the Peers to the Saracens effectively neutralizes the good lord Charlemagne's power,[35] and gives more than conventionally pious force to the speeches in which Roland and Archbishop Turpin offer to the others comfort and encouragement based on their confidence in Christ's protection and reward. At a point where Roland believes

they will all surely die, he urges them to think of themselves as a triumphant band of Christian warrior-martyrs:

> '... euery knight be kene, & comfort other,
> ffor this day shall we dy, and go no further,
> but we shall supe ther seintis be many,
> and crist soulis fedithe, this is no nay.
> Think he suffrid for vs paynes sore,
> We shall wrek hem with wepins þer for.'   (623–29)

This inspirational vision is recalled in the knights' response to Oliver's exhortation: 'they went to sadly, and set þer dyntis / In the worship of hym that fedithe seintis' (763–66), and in Roland's cry: 'crist, kep vs cristyn that ben here, / to serue your soper with seintis dere!' (962–63). After the first major battle, a scene is added in which Roland leads the knights in praise and thanksgiving to God for their apparently miraculous victory, and Turpin explicitly portrays them as vassals not of Charlemagne (as in the French texts)[36] but of Christ:

> 'lordingis', said Roulond, 'listynythe aright:
> we haue the formest feld to the ground,
> and yet is our host bothe hole and sound,
> and no man lost that we brought to place:
> we ought to worshippe god myche of his grace.'
> Then callithe furthe turpyn, & tellithe son:
> 'this lord that we serue louythe his own,
> that so few of his fellid so many.'
> euery man tok of his helme & lukyd on hie,
> lift vp ther hondis and thankid crist,
> that he sauf and sound defend hem hase.   (806–16)

Scribal practice reinforces the significance of these linked references to Christian fellowship, for the reader's attention is drawn to the two more extended passages by rubricated *litterae notabiliores* at lines 627 and 811.[37]

Immediately after this reinforcement of the knights' Christian dedication, Roland sees a vast new Saracen army. Battle resumes, and among the conventional expressions used to convey the great numbers of dead on both sides, the English poem inserts a striking

and largely original passage in the narrator's voice that takes a long chronological view, setting the carnage in a time-scale stretching back to two distant milestones of human history, documented in both biblical and classical record, God's giving the Law to Moses and the Siege of Troy:

> sithe god spek with mouthe on the montaigne,
> And taught moyses his men to preche,[38]
> In so litill whille was neuer mo marrid, I you teche,
> As wer drof to dethe as the dais end;
> not in the battaille of troy, who so will trouthe find. (840–44)

These events do recall two occasions of great loss of life (the overthrow of Pharaoh's Egyptians and the destruction of Troy), but they are also significant originary moments, marking God's making a covenant with His people (Exodus 19: 5–6) and the emergence from the ruins of Troy (according to their foundation myths) of Rome, Britain and other European nations. The added passage, with its allusions to the sources of both the religious and national identities of the audience, can be seen to show a sense of the larger historical context as contributing to the meaning of the story, alongside a more predictable impulse to reach after epic comparisons in response to the drama of the moment.[39]

The new material here appears to have been developed from a detail found much later in the text of the rhymed *Chanson de Roland*, in the account of the battle in Spain between Charlemagne and Baligant. Whereas in the Oxford version the fighting is said to be uniquely fierce: 'ne fut si fort enceis ne puis cel tens' (l. 3382; 'none was so fierce before or since that time'), in the Châteauroux / Venice 7 version its fierceness is measured back to the time of Moses: 'ne fu si forz des le tens Moÿsant' (l. 5591; 'none was so fierce since the time of Moses').[40] It seems highly likely that the English poet was prompted by a similar phrase, but developed the stock formula into a more significant instance of historical contextualization by paralleling it with a reference to the fall of Troy. However, this habit of extracting and rearranging material from discrete sites in the source text raises questions about the content of the missing conclusion of the Middle English *Roland* fragment. As the poet has already relocated the confrontation between Charlemagne and Ganelon that opens the last episode of the *Chanson*, the evidence shown here of his

further pre-empting material from the later battle-scene to enhance his account of Roland's battle at Roncevaux suggests the possibility that the Middle English poem as originally composed might have presented a radically abbreviated version of the story, focusing purely on Roland and omitting the subsequent accounts of Charlemagne's conquest of Saragossa and the punishment of Ganelon; however, this can be no more than speculation.

In the radical reshaping of the material shown here in the *Song of Roland*, the main changes fall into several categories. There are new presentations of the central characters: Ganelon, in line with his reputation in late-medieval culture, is represented as known to be false 'long or þat tym' (175), and inimical to all, not just towards Roland;[41] while Roland's heroic pre-eminence is enhanced, reflecting the observed tendency of Middle English romances to focus on the adventures of a single hero.[42] New emphasis is given to certain thematic concerns: Shepherd and Farrier have noted the addition of numerous proverbial or sententious statements in the poem,[43] some as comments in the narrator's voice and some spoken within the narrative, and many of them relate to these thematic concerns – there are more frequent references to friendship and fellowship, both as bonds between the knights and as an ideal; attention is drawn to treachery as an ever-present danger; the difficulties of obtaining wise counsel are rehearsed in a variety of circumstances; and there is a strong sense of the desirability of peace – all topics that could be of particularly acute interest to writers and readers in England in the turbulent late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Encompassing all these innovations is the way the English text has recast the story in an entirely different genre, omitting the characteristic *chanson de geste* structural device of repetition with variation, and rearranging events to produce a coherently plotted linear narrative, in which verbal echoes are used to contribute to the sense of connected developments.[44] Like the focus on a central hero, this restructuring is by no means unusual in Middle English romance – indeed, the process by which discrete scenes are detached from their contexts in the sources and reconnected as a consecutive narrative bears obvious comparison with Malory's treatment of his French sources.[45]

In all these categories then, it appears that the story of Roland at Roncevaux has been systematically adapted to fit new contemporary expectations, and in the process has been recast from a *chanson de*

geste into a different narrative form.[46] This form has traditionally been described as romance, as indicated by the inclusion of the poem among the texts surveyed in Smyser's and Barron's studies of Middle English romances, but as almost every recent discussion of the field points out, 'romance' as a definitive term for the body of Middle English texts so designated is so inclusive as to be of only the most general use.[47] In the case of the Middle English *Roland*, it may be helpful to consider the question of the generic relation between romance and chronicle in seeking to find a way to describe more specifically the narrative form of the poem.[48] As we have seen, perhaps influenced in part by the unique addition of material from the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, the Middle English *Roland* has rearranged the structure of its inherited material in a more linear, chronological pattern, and seems to signal this by the frequent use of simple temporal connecting phrases. It might, then, be appropriate to think of it as an example of narrative form on the boundary between romance and chronicle – perhaps we could call it chronicle-inflected romance.[49]

Appendix

[Correspondences with *laisses* of French texts in bold (sigla from Duggan's edition); references in square brackets to lines of ME fragment; material in italics is apparently unique to ME text.]

O 54   … Ganelon falsely reports the Sultan will convert and submit to Charlemagne [26].

Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle   and has sent presents of women and wine [30].

O 55   Charles rejoices and turns towards France *to prepare hospitality (with emphasis on friendship)* [58].

Ps-T   On the first night of the journey, his men drink wine at dinner and resort to the women when drunk, sinning so grievously that many curse Ganelon [76].

O 56–7/V7 64/C 63   Meanwhile, Charles has two ominous dreams, which he tells *and asks his wisest men to interpret* – the outcome of the battle is unclear, *but right reason and God's will be done* [120].

O 58   Charles indicates the dangerous pass and asks for volunteers to lead and to guard the rear *(he still mistrusts the Saracens)* – Ganelon proposes *himself and* Roland, *assuring Charles that the Saracens will keep their word* [146]. Charles accuses Ganelon of evil will *towards Roland, and himself* [156].

O 61/C 66/V7 67   Roland *kneels to Charles and accepts, but Charles asks again all his barons, and none offers, for fear of Ganelon's treachery* [177]. *Charles urges Roland to give up the task but he refuses* [185].

O 63   Charles offers to give him half the troops. Roland refuses and asks for just *the Peers* [199],

O 64   who all choose to stay with him [229].

O 67–8   Charles rides on, *forbidding any blowing of horns except to call for aid against the Saracens* [242]. All with him are sorrowful; hose left behind are doomed [252].

O 68   ¶ *[CAP] The story turns to* the Saracens who see all this and the Sultan bids them prepare to attack.

O 69   *Amaris asks to go first and hopes to kill Roland [274].*

O 79 He rides with 40,000 to meet the Christians [282]. *Roland, aware of them, arms himself* [elaborate description, perhaps based on account of Saracens in **O 79**] *and mounts, and the knights are heartened* [302]. *Roland addresses them as fellows and friends in hostile territory, vulnerable through Ganelon's probable treachery* [314]. [Some material here is perhaps adapted from **T 20–21**: other speakers.]

O 65   He sends Gauter with 10,000 to a vantage point, *intending to come to their aid if necessary* [321].

C 146–8; V7 137–9; P 46–8   Gauter encounters Amaris's Saracens; there is fierce fighting and the Christians are all killed, except Gauter who, heavily wounded, rides to warn his fellows, blaming Ganelon [367]. *The knights weep, but Roland rallies them with a prediction of victory to be reported to Charles* [380].

O 67–8   ¶ Miles away, Charles *wonders why the rearguard delay so long and* fearfully recalls his dream. The barons denounce Ganelon as a traitor *and criticize Charles for trusting him* [400].

O 273–74, 278   Ganelon and his kin confront the king and *Ganelon* casts down his glove to challenge any accuser, *swearing by God he made no pact with the Sultan* [418].

O 134   He assures Charles that Roland is indulging his love of hunting *and will bring him a fat deer* [427]. *Charles reconciles the two sides, but is still troubled* (based on **O 275–6**?) [432].

¶ *Turning to the knights – they discuss what to do, some counselling Roland to blow his horn for help, some advising waiting and fighting first* [437].

O 68   ¶ *Turning to the heathens* – the Sultan assembles all his men, (**O 112**) 20 battalions and 20 kings, all richly equipped. They bow to Mahoun. *Amaris meets them and reports his success: no Christian king will wear the Sultan's crown* [473].

O 70–78   He asks for 11 kings and men , and those chosen are named, all vowing death to Roland [500].

O 78–79   *Amaris* leads 100,000 with much blowing of bugles. *God help Roland's force* [510]!

O 80–82   Oliver rides out and sees the Saracen army, returns to tell his *friends and fellows* and decide what to do, resist *or retreat* (based on **O 82**, ll. 1047–8). *Ganelon has doomed them unless Christ send aid* [525].

O 83–6   He counsels Roland to blow his horn to summon reinforcements [533].

O 87   Roland rebukes him and asks if he is *afraid and notes their armour is intact; they should fight and trust to God. The peers urge Roland to blow his horn, not for fear of death but for Charles's sake* [557]. *Roland chides them as he did Oliver, and when they see his resolve they take 'comfort' and vow to fight in Christ's name* [577].

V7 93–5; C 102–04; P 2–4   A fair day breaks; Turpin says Mass, *all* offer gold, and (**O 89**) Turpin blesses them [588]. Roland goes to see the size of the Sultan's army, *and weeps for the sake of his beloved fellowship* [601]. He kneels and *prays for salvation when they die in battle against the heathens*, then returns to his peers and states their case: Ganelon has betrayed them, *they must support each other for they will die*, (**O 89**) but they will certainly go to Christ's heavenly feast, *[CAP] for as He suffered for them, so they now avenge Him with their weapons*; (**O 88**) he will sell Durindal dear [632].

O 92   Oliver *and the other peers* remind Roland that he chose not to blow the horn for aid, so should not grieve, but ride out purposefully. The armies meet [646]

O 93   and exchange challenging speeches [657]. *Amaris* is killed by Roland who captures his horse [666];

O 94   this pattern is repeated with Fauceron and Oliver [678],

O 95–103   Sorsabran and Richard [685], Barbarins and Nemys (kills horse) [691]; (other names in **O**) [Lionys?] and Berard, Kastor and Roger (kills horse), Colkard and Geliver (both unhorsed) [736].

O 104–07   In more general fighting, Roland kills the king of Criklond [745]. He and Oliver slay many heathens; *Oliver cries 'Be manly'; they fight in honour of Christ* [764], and (**O 102**) after prolonged battle only two of the 12 Saracen kings remain [777]. Roland, Oliver and others pursue 1000 heathens and slay many. [801]. *No Christians are lost and Roland thanks God. [CAP] Turpin attributes their success to Christ's favour and all give thanks* [816].

O 113   Then Roland sees a huge Saracen army, equivalent to all Christendom, but they have Christ's assurance and lay on anew [824].

O 110   A great battle ensues, *with more dead in less time than ever since God spoke to Moses* (based on **V7 297**, ll. 5590–91, **C 305**, ll. 547–5) *or the siege of Troy* [844]. Meanwhile, in France, extreme weather conditions last a whole day, *followed by a blood-red cloud* [860]. So many on both sides are dead *that the field runs with blood* (based on **O 244**, ll. 3388–90, **V7 298**, ll. 5599–60, **C 306**, ll. 5481–83?) [870].

V4 112–14, C 156–7, V7 147–8, P 56–7, T 49–50, L 25–6   King Magalyn *calls to the Sultan for aid or all will be lost* [892]

V4 116–17, C 158–9, V7 149–50, P 64, T 53–4, L 29–30   The Sultan divides his force *in four for relay dart-shooting*, and warns that Roland must be taken [904]. *He urges them to be 'manly' [x3] and promises to knight all knaves who fight well; great wealth is to be won* (based on **O 245**, ll. 3396–99?). *He calls on Mahoun and* there is much blowing of trumpets and many banners [920]. *A fierce battle ensues, and all fight 'manly'* [929]

O 114   The proud Saracen Bradmond kills Ingler [937];

O 115   Roland goes to avenge him but Oliver intervenes, kills him and defends himself against others [952].

O 116   Dalabern, a prestigious Saracen, kills Sampson [958],

O 117   but Roland kills Dalabern and his horse. *He calls on Christ to keep them for Heaven* [963].

O 118   Rich Auffrik kills Amys [969],

O 119   but Turpin fells him and his horse and curses him [975].

O 120   Cadwen attacks Christians [984],

O 121–2   but 'manly' Roland kills him [991] *and many other Saracens* [996].

O 125   The Sultan is sad to see so many dead *and urges his four battalions to take revenge. He will come himself if needed* [1011].

O 123–4   Many doughty knights are slain on this dreadful day; *Roland routs the Saracens and waits* [lacuna here in narrative in MS Lansdowne 388]. *He comes face to face with a fresh force. He puts the case to his men – they are outnumbered and exhausted* [1042].

O 128   Roland advises they send a man to fetch Charlemagne: without his help they and the land are lost [1046]. Oliver angrily disagrees [1049]. ...

Notes

1 *The English Charlemagne Romances*, Part ii, ed. S. J. Herrtage, London, EETS, 1880 (ES 35). Quotations are taken from this edition, collated with the manuscript, with some emendations of punctuation.

2 There is also, of course, the prior question of the nineteenth-century invention of the title *La Chanson de Roland* for the poem in the Oxford manuscript (Bodleian Library, M. S. Digby 23), discussed in Andrew Taylor, 'Was There a Song of Roland?', *Speculum* 76 (2001): 28–65.

3 H. M. Smyser, 'Charlemagne Legends', in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050–1500*, ed. J. B. Severs, I: Romances, New Haven, CT, Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967, pp. 80–100 (p. 96); W. R. J. Barron, *English Medieval Romance*, London, Longman, 987, pp. 90–91.

4 As both Smyser and Barron point out, it combines details from the earliest manuscript tradition with material from the later rhymed versions, and also incorporates borrowings from the prose *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*.

5   'The single most important generic marker for the *chanson de geste*
    is the *laisse*, that is, the use of rhymed or assonanced strophes of
    uneven length', in 'The *chanson de geste* in an Insular Context:
    Hybridity or Appropriation?', paper read at the University of York,
    Conference on the French of England, July 2007.

6   'The Anglo-Norman Background to Alliterative Romance', in *Middle
    English Alliterative Poetry and its Literary Background: Seven Essays*, ed.
    D. Lawton, Cambridge, Brewer, 1982, 54–69 (63).

7   D. A. Pearsall depreciates this form as 'feebly alliterative' ('The
    Alliterative Revival: Origins and Social Backgrounds', in Lawton,
    Middle English Alliterative Poetry 34–53 (36)).

8   Most versions of the *Chanson de Roland*, unlike other *chansons de
    geste*, do not begin in this way, but note the opening lines of the
    fourteenth-century Venice 4 version (Biblioteca Marciana, MS Fr.
    Z. 4): 'Chi voil oïr vere significance, / a San Donis ert une geste
    in France / ... / Des or comença li traïment de Gayne / e de
    Rollant li nef de Çarle el Mayne' (ll. 1–7; 'Whoso wishes to hear
    true meaning, / at St Denis in France is a narrative / ... / Now
    begins the treachery of Ganelon / and about Roland the nephew
    of Charlemagne'), ed. R. F. Cook, in *La Chanson de Roland – The
    Song of Roland: The French Corpus*, ed. J. J. Duggan and others, 7
    parts in 3 vols, Turnhout, Brepols, 2005, vol. I, Part 2, p. 87. All
    quotations are taken from this edition.

9   There are also numerous first-person interjections by the partisan
    narrator in the course of the story, and the Christians are normally
    identified as 'our' men. Both these features are shared between the
    chanson de geste and the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*.

10 E.g.: 'Now herkeneth alle, y pray 3ow paramour, ...', *Firumbras*,
    l. 1007; 'Lystenyth to my sawe, / And thynkyth nou3t to long!', *Otuel
    and Roland*, ll. 1161–62, both ed. M. I. O'Sullivan, London, EETS, 1935
    (OS 198); 'Lordinges, boþe 3inge & olde, / Herkneþ as we formest
    tolde ...' *Otuel*, ll. 669–70, ed. Sidney J. H. Herrtage, London, EETS,
    1882 (ES 39).

11 Compare, for example lines from La3amon's *Brut*: 'Lete we hit þus
    stonden, and speken of þan kinge' (7645); Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*:
    'And in this blisse lete I now Arcite, / And speke I wole of Palamon
    a lite' (1449–50); Lydgate's *Life of Our Lady*: 'And thus in Ioye, a while
    I late hem dwell / And of this Bisshop, furthe I will yov telle'
    (ll. 1346–47).

12 *Historia Karoli Magni et Rotholandi, ou Chronique du Pseudo-Turpin*, ed.
    C. Meredith-Jones (Paris, 1936; repr. Geneva, Slatkine, 1972);
    R. L. Walpole, *The Old French Johannes Translation of the Pseudo-Turpin*

Chronicle: A Critical Edition, 2 vols, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976; *Turpine's Story: A Middle English Translation of the Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, ed. S. H. A. Shepherd, London, EETS, 2004 (OS 322).

13 See, for example, the fifteenth-century 'continuation' of the prose *Brut*, known as *Warkworth's Chronicle*, in which passages of connected narrative are differentiated from simple annalistic style (e.g. 'Also the iiij^e yere of Kynge Edwarde ...') by heavy use of temporal phrases such as 'And when ...', 'And thenne ...', 'After that ...' (*A Chronicle of the First Thirteen Years of the Reign of King Edward the Fourth, by J. Warkworth, D.D.*, ed. J. O. Halliwell, London, Camden Society, 1839, p. 3).

14 E. D. Kennedy, 'Sir Thomas Malory's (French) Romance and (English) Chronicle', in *Arthurian Studies in Honour of P. J. C. Field*, ed. B. Wheeler, Cambridge, Brewer, 2004, 223–34 (231). Kennedy goes on to suggest that by echoing the syntax and style of Middle English chronicles such as the prose *Brut*, 'including the use of direct speech, which was typical of early historical narratives', Malory 'wanted his readers to recognize the similarity of his book to the chronicles' which it was intended to replace (p. 233).

15 It is important to note that such references to a preserved written source are also prominent in *La Chanson de Roland*. See, for example, the Oxford version, ll. 1683–85.

16 *La Chanson de Roland*, I, pp. 39–124.

17 The evidence offered here for a revaluation of the Middle English text is largely concerned with the plotting, the disposition of the material into a coherent narrative. It is hard to judge the quality of the writing because the manuscript is so patently imperfect, not only at beginning and end but in its frequent cases of unpaired rhymes or missing lines. The text is assumed to be corrupt: 'both alliteration and rhyme have obviously suffered in transmission' (Barron, p. 91). However, as James Simpson claims: 'Romances create meaning much more through narrative structure than verbal particularity' ('Violence, Narrative and Proper Name: Sir Degaré, "The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney", and the Folie Tristan d'Oxford', in *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*, ed. A. Putter and J. Gilbert, Harlow, Pearson, 2000, 122–41 (139)), and it thus seems worthwhile to discuss the 'architectural' features of the extant text.

18 *La Chanson de Roland*, I, pp. 5, 38.

19 S. H. A. Shepherd, '"I have gone for þi sak wonderfull wais": The Middle English Fragment of *The Song of Roland*', *Olifant* 11 (1986): 219–36.

20 S. E. Farrier, '*Das Rolandslied* and the *Song of Roulond* as Moralizing

Adaptations of the *Chanson de Roland*', *Olifant* 16 (1991): 61–76. Farrier bases her argument in respect of the Middle English poem on the unpublished dissertation of Jon Robin Russ, 'The Middle English *Song of Roland*, a critical edition' (University of Wisconsin, 1968). Both Shepherd's and Farrier's analyses contain some misrepresentations of the Middle English text.

21 A summary of parallels and variations between the English poem and the French corpus of the *Chanson de Roland* is given in the Appendix.

22 Venice 7 version (Biblioteca Marciana, MS Fr. Z. 7), *laisses* 137–39, 203; Châteauroux version (Bibliothèque municipale, MS 1, *laisses* 146–48, 213; Paris version (Bibliothèque nationale, fonds français 860), *laisses* 46–48, 119; Oxford MS, *laisse* 152.

23 The narrative effects I describe here are entirely different from the structural devices of *laisses paralleles* and *laisses similaires* in epic discourse.

24 Shepherd persuasively argues that the Old French *Johannes Translation* of the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* is closer to the Middle English poem than is the Latin text ('I have gone for þi sak wonderfull wais', pp. 223–24).

25 'And all thes faire ladys with the to pley: / echon of them is a lordis doughter' (28–29). The verb 'to pley' is ambiguous here: it could mean either 'to enjoy leisure activities' or 'to engage in amorous play'.

26 'Ther is no prow to pryk þer men pece sought' (32). The word 'prow' here is complex, meaning variously 'material advantage, monetary profit or reward'; 'advantage in battle or war, victory'; 'honour; valour, prowess'.

27 'If that mercy and might mellithe to-gedur / he shall haue the mor grace euer aftur' (33–34). Might (or justice) tempered with mercy is a commonplace expression for good judgement and government, but the quasi-allegorical treatment of the idea here, with the promised outcome of 'grace', recalls the celebrated verses from Psalm 84 (Vulgate): 'Misericordia et veritas obviaverunt sibi: justitia et pax osculatæ sunt. ... Etenim Dominus dabit benignitatem' (11, 13; 'Mercy and Truth have met each other; Justice and Peace have kissed ... Indeed the Lord will give goodness').

28 *Historia Karoli Magni.et Rotholandi*, pp. 180, xix–xxii, and 181, xxi–xxiv. Shepherd notes: 'The *Johannes* text draws no such conclusions at this point in the text' ('I have gone for þi sak wonderfull wais', p. 225); the reason for this omission is that it has inserted an explicit mention of the deaths as divine punishment for fornication a little earlier,

where it figures as part of Marsile's cunning plot. See *The Old French Johannes Translation*, I, 162, ch. LI, 7–10, and for Walpole's discussion, I, 110–13. The *Johannes* text (unlike the fifteenth-century Middle English translation in San Marino, CA, Huntington Library MS HM 28,561) also includes the chapter in Pseudo-Turpin in which God's plan in relation to the deaths is explained and allegorized (*Johannes*, I, 164, ch. LIV). The Middle English translation, however, does state that the deaths were a consequence of drunken fornication: 'many of þe hooste were dronke of þat wynne and toke many of þucke women and so were ded' (*Turpine's Story*, p. 35, 1129–31).

29 The second dream (91–103) is on the whole rendered more enigmatic in the Middle English version, but in one detail it seems the poet has changed the dream to make its prophetic function clearer. Earlier in the *Chanson* (before the extant portion of the Middle English poem), Ganelon assures the Sultan that 'Chi purreit faire que Rollant i fust mort, / dunc perdreit Carles le destre braz del cors' (**O**, ll. 596–97; 'If anyone could bring it about that Roland should die there, / then should Charles lose the right arm of his body'), and in the dream the Middle English poet realizes this metaphor by having the boar (a bear in the *Chanson*) not merely bite the king's right arm (**O**, l. 727) but sever it completely: 'he tok hym by the right arm and hent it of / clene from the braun, the flesche & the lier; / the fell and the Flesche at his fete fallithe' (96–98).

30 For further discussion and contextualization of this important theme, see Geraldine Barnes, *Counsel and Strategy in Middle English Romance*, Cambridge, Brewer, 1993.

31 Venice 7 MS, ll. 1093–94 / Châteauroux MS, ll. 1065–66.

32 Roland's acceptance of the charge is interestingly phrased in classic terms of good counsel: 'when euery man hathe said, do ye the best' (160).

33 Barron, p. 91.

34 Critics have often noted the lack of ambivalence in the representation of Ganelon in the Middle English text as compared with the *Chanson de Roland*.

35 The text makes constant reference to 'fals' Ganelon and his treachery as the evil cause of the Peers' plight, with added details such as Charlemagne's assertion that Ganelon acts out of hatred towards him as well as Roland ('For thou louys to slee þat I loue best; / And hym thou hatist, and me next' (155–56): this is contrary to the case in the French tradition), and the Sultan's indication, when instructing his troops, that the Saracen strategy has been

masterminded by Ganelon: 'tak ye no trewes, thoughe ye might, / for gift ne garison as gwynylon hight' (261–62).

36 'Il est escrit en la Geste Francor / que bons vassals out nostre empereür' (**O**, ll. 1443–44, and corresponding lines in other versions; 'It is written in the Gest of France / that our Emperor has good vassals').

37 The only other such large capital occurs at line 253, where it marks a major new departure in the narrative.

38 Moses' conversation with God on Mount Sinai begins with a reminder of God's deeds in destroying the Egyptians (Exodus 19: 4). It was perhaps the thick cloud and fire from which God speaks (vv. 9, 18) that suggested to the English poet the other addition to his source here, the blood-red cloud that appears as a sign of the many dead (859–62).

39 Shepherd notes the 'learned' and 'rhetorical' aspect of the references to Moses and Troy, adding to 'the air of heroic grandeur' ('I have gone for þi sak wonderfull wais', p. 235).

40 This phrase, 'des le tens Moÿsant', is used three times in the C/ V7 version (ll. 4226, 5143, 5591) to express the idea 'since time immemorial'; there are also two periphrastic references to God as giver of the law to Moses (ll. 4078, 5419).

41 See, for example, M. Ailes, 'Ganelon in the Middle English *Fierabras* Romances', in *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance*, ed. P. Hardman, Cambridge, Brewer, 2002, pp. 73–85 (p. 85).

42 See, for example, D. Mehl's argument that many Middle English romances demonstrate a particular English taste for 'a specific type of poem' that he defines as 'a short romance with plenty of incident and a central hero' (*Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, London, Routledge, 1967, p. 58).

43 Shepherd, 'I have gone for þi sak wonderfull wais', pp. 231–34; Farrier, pp. 70–72.

44 A striking example of this use of echo, besides those given above, is the sequence of passages describing harsh and hostile natural landscapes: first in Charlemagne's ominous dream (92–95), then in his description of the 'Gates of Spain' (123–26), and finally in Roland's address to his fellows in this dangerous territory (305–09).

45 This process in Malory's adaptation of his sources is described in detail by Eugène Vinaver in the introduction to his edition, *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 2nd edn, 3 vols, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1967, vol. I, lxiv–xxiii; it is summed up by, for example, J. Lawlor: 'The essential structural difference between the French

Arthurian prose cycle and Malory's work may be expressed as the
difference between complex interweaving and a more sequential
treatment' (introduction to Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte D'Arthur*,
ed. J. Cowen, 2 vols , London, Penguin, 1969, vol. I, xiii), and
Terence McCarthy: '[Malory] manipulates several texts at once,
selecting from them ... and rearranging the chronology to suit his
purpose' ('Malory and his Sources', in *A Companion to Malory*, ed.
E. Archibald and A. S. G. Edwards, Cambridge, Brewer, 1996, 75–95
(86–87)).

46 For discussion of the question of genre in relation to Anglo-Norman
texts, see M. Ailes, 'The Anglo-Norman *Boeve de Haumtone as
a chanson de geste*', in *Bevis of Hampton*, ed. J. Fellows, Cambridge,
Brewer, 2008; and '*Fierabras* and Anglo-Norman Developments of
the *chanson de geste*', forthcoming in *Actes of the International Congress
of the Société Rencesvals, Storrs, 2006*, ed. L. Z. Morgan and
A. Berthelot.

47 See, for example, discussions in A. Putter, 'A Historical Introduction',
in *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*, pp. 1–15; Y. Liu, 'Middle
English Romance as Prototype Genre', *Chaucer Review* 40 (2006): 335–53;
A. Hiatt, 'Genre without System', in *Middle English*, ed. P. Strohm
Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007 (Oxford Twenty-first Century
Approaches to Literature), pp. 277–94 (see 'Romaunce', pp. 281–84).

48 See, for example, discussions in P. J. C. Field, *Romance and Chronicle:
A Study of Malory's Prose Style*, London, Barrie & Jenkins, 1971;
R. Field, 'Romance as history, history as romance', in *Romance
in Medieval England*, ed. M. Mills, J. Fellows and C. M. Meale,
Cambridge, Brewer, 1991, pp. 163–73.

49 M. Giancarlo interestingly describes the 'hybridized' form of
'romance-chronicle' in terms of overlapping concerns: 'If medieval
romances appeal to historical veracity, medieval histories ... also
appeal to romantic promise and attraction: the promise of a good
story, well fulfilled, that makes a certain sense or order of things and
that provides an acceptable genealogy of events in a recognizable
and repeatable arc or form' ('Speculative Genealogies', in Strohm,
Middle English, 352–68 (357)). These concerns seem particularly
prominent in the Middle English *Roland*.