

Essay #2: *Song of Roland*

WESTERN CIVILIZATION TO 1500
HIST 21 WILSON SPRING 2010

DUE: TUESDAY, MAY 11

May be handed in in class or submitted by email in a DOC or RTF format. Note: Your email submission only “counts” if you receive a reply back from me saying I got it. As stated in the syllabus, any late submissions are marked down 10 points per class meeting.

Please format your essay as follows. Your essay should

- ▶ Be typed, double-spaced, in 12 pt. Times or Arial, with one-inch margins on all sides. Please spellcheck and, if you’re not sure about your writing, have a friend read it. I will not mark down for grammar, but clarity is very important.
- ▶ Have a cover page with the title, your name, my name, and the date, and have page numbers on each page after the cover page.
- ▶ Run 2½–3 full pages, not including the cover page.
- ▶ Have all direct quotations, indirect quotations, and ideas from other sources footnoted according to a standard citation style. This is extremely important and failure to do this will seriously affect your grade.

In this case your source will be the poem itself. **Your references to *Roland* should be by line number**, or, if your version is not numbered by line, by stanza. Do not give references to *Roland* by page number.

You may — but are not required to — use secondary sources that discuss this story as additional resources if you want to. Whether you use additional sources will have no effect on your grade, since I am interested in your interpretations and how well you support them with evidence.

ASSIGNMENT

Choose one of the following topics:

1. Discuss the role that Christianity plays in the actions of the characters. Is the knights' faith more important than their chivalry and heroism? How are they related? Give three examples and discuss what these episodes reveal about the characters and about the society in which they live. Consider physical, emotional, economic, religious, or any other factors that these incidents speak to.
2. How are Muslims (Saracens) presented in *Roland*? Are they simply an embodiment of evil? Give three examples and examine what these episodes reveal about medieval society. Consider physical, emotional, economic, religious, or any other factors that these incidents speak to.

Your conclusion should be the last one-third or so of your essay and relate to the following: How, specifically, does this character reflect what the creators of the story are trying to say about their society?

- ▶ Remember to think of the saga as a kind of primary source, in which the creators are giving evidence of idea they want to communicate. What their main points in this document, and how is your character being used to communicate them?

Remember that, as always, I am looking for your opinion and how well you support it with evidence; this essay is less about “right answers” than it is about well-supported ideas. Feel free to praise or complain about the author’s style, techniques, or attitude, as long as you cover the points of the assignment described above.