

145

- 1940 When the pagans saw that few Frenchmen remained,
They feel reassured and gain in confidence.
They say to one another: 'The emperor was wrong!'
Morganice was mounted on a sorrel warhorse,
He urges it forward with his golden spurs,
1945 And strikes Oliver from behind in the back.
He shatters his shiny hauberk into his flesh,
And drives his spear right through his chest.
Afterwards he says: 'You have taken a good beating!
Charles the Great will regret he left you in the passes!
1950 He did us wrong, it is not right that he should boast,
For with you alone I have fully avenged our men.'

146

- Oliver realises that he is mortally wounded.
He wields Halteclere, with its gleaming blade.
He strikes Morganice's golden, pointed helmet,
1955 Knocking the decorative flowers and gems to the ground.
He slices his skull in two down to his front teeth,
Lifts his sword again and has struck him dead.
Upon which he said: 'A curse on you, pagan!
I can't deny that Charles has suffered losses here.
1960 But never to your wife, nor to any lady that you know,
In the kingdom from which you hail will you boast
That you took away even a pennyworth of my wealth,
Or did any harm to me, or anyone else.'
Then he cries out to Roland for his help. AOI

147

- 1965 Oliver realises that he is fatally wounded.
His thirst for revenge will never be sated:
He renews his blows now, like a true warrior,

Smashing to bits many lances and bucklers,
Feet and fists, saddles and ribs.

1970 If you had seen him dismembering Saracens,
Piling dead bodies one on top of another,
You would have known what true bravery was.
Nor does he wish to forget Charles's war cry.
He shouts out 'Monjoie!' loud and clear.

1975 He calls out to Roland, his friend and peer.
'My lord, companion, join me in battle now.
Today our parting will be most painful.'

148

Roland looks Oliver squarely in the face.
It was livid and wan, pale and ashen.

1980 Bright red blood streamed down his body,
Falling to the ground around him in spurts.
'My god!' said the count. 'What shall I do now?
My lord, companion, alas for your heroism!
No man will ever be as valiant as you.

1985 Ah, fair France, how bereft you will be today
Of good vassals, confounded and cast down!
Our emperor will suffer a terrible loss!
On saying this, he passes out astride his horse. AOI

149

See how Roland has passed out astride his horse

1990 And Oliver has been fatally wounded.
He has bled so much that his eyes are dim:
He cannot see clearly enough, at any distance,
To be able to recognize anyone at all.

So when he comes across his companion,
1995 He strikes him on his bejewelled gold helmet,
Splitting it from the top to the nose guard,

But without harming his head in any way.

When struck thus, Roland stares at him,

And he asks him gently and softly:

2000 'My lord, companion, did you mean to do this?
For this is Roland, who has always loved you so!
You had in no way issued me with a challenge.'

Said Oliver: 'Now I can hear you speaking,
But I cannot see you. May God watch over you!

2005 Did I strike you? I beg you to forgive me!
Roland replies: 'I have not been harmed at all.
I forgive you for this now, and before God.'
After Roland has said this, each bows to the other.
See how they part with such great love.

150

2010 Oliver realizes that death has him in its grasp.
Both his eyes are swivelling in their sockets,
He is losing his hearing and is completely blind.
He dismounts and lies down on the ground.

As loudly as he can he proclaims his mea culpa,
2015 With his hands together, raised towards the sky.
He prays to God to let him enter paradise,
And he blessed Charles and France the fair,
Also his companion Roland, above all other men.
His heart stops beating; his helmet falls forward.

2020 His entire body crumples onto the ground.
The count is dead, for he is no more.
Valiant Roland laments and weeps for him.
Never on earth will you hear a more grief-stricken man.

The Song of Roland and Other Poems of Charlemagne, ed. and tr. Simon Gaunt and Karen Pratt
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 66–69.