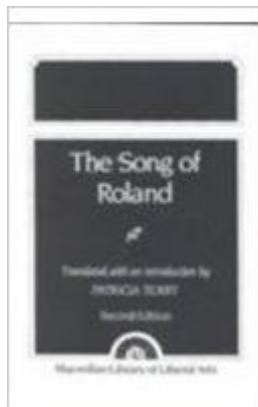


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Song Of Roland



Synopsis

Library of Liberal Arts title.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This review relates to the volume -The Song of Roland-, Translated and with an Introduction by Dorothy L. Sayers, Penguin Classics, 1957 (first translation, 1937). 206 pp. There seems little point in giving a work of world literature a rating of stars as to whether it is better or lesser than some other work of world literature, even of the same genre. The rating for this review is based on this particular edition and translation. The excellent qualities of this Penguin edition include the "Introduction." Sayers discusses this "earliest, the most famous, and the greatest of those Old French epics which are called Songs of Deeds." Her "Introduction" is divided into the highly enlightening subsections titled: The Poem; The Feudal Picture; Vassalage; Tokens; Chivalry; The Rules of Battle; Nurture and Companionage; Horses and Swords; and The Verse and the Translation. She says the poem as we have it "would appear to have achieved its final shape towards the end of the eleventh century." But the events described in the epic took place in 778, and "the anonymous poet describes in detail the betrayal and slaughter by Saracens of the rearguard of Charlemagne's army under Roland -- at Roncevaux -- and Charlemagne's bitter revenge." Perhaps most interesting in the "Introduction" are Ms. Sayers' character studies. She sees that in Charlemagne, "beneath this larger-than-life-size figure, we discern another: the portrait of the ideal earthly sovereign -- just, prudent, magnanimous, and devout." She goes further and posits that in the

way he is described in this epic he even seems like an early medieval version of a "constitutional" monarch.

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