

The Song of Roland and The Iliad: Compare and Contrast Essay

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The Song of Roland and The Iliad: Compare and Contrast Essay

The Song of Roland and *The Iliad* are ancient poems written in the twelfth century AD and eighth century BC. The former shows life in medieval France, and the latter presents Ancient Greece. Both poems are about the fights of noble warriors that are standing for their kings. The main characters Roland and Achilles, are strong and full of courage males that are highly skillful in fighting. *The Song of Roland* and *The Iliad* are similar in terms of content, presence of the narrator, and role of women, but different considering the historical period, perception of reward, and religion.

Similarities in *The Song of Roland* and *The Iliad*

The Song of Roland and *The Iliad* tell people about the heroes that save people from enemies. Although these poems depict different cultures and take place in different periods, they have a lot of features in common. The most outstanding and meaningful ones are the similarity of plots that describe battles, the presenting of the story by the narrator, and the role of women in society.

Content

The Song of Roland and *The Iliad* have similar storylines. Both of them glorify strong warriors that are supposed and expected to defeat all the enemies. Throughout the whole story, they were completing their missions and trying to become heroes. The main characters in both poems are also loyal to their kings and strive to serve them well. The king from *The Iliad* calls the Achilles “[h]is own greatest warrior” (Homer, 1998, p. 60). So, when the warriors perform good, the rulers praise and respect them.

Presence of the Narrator

In both poems, the narrators are the ones who tell the story to the reader. They provide all the necessary details and describe the feelings and thoughts of other people. What's more, they also show the Gods' presence in the stories by describing what they are doing and how they live. The narrator describes how God is looking at the flowers (*The Song of Roland*, 1880). The presence of the narrator helps to understand and analyze the poems a lot better because it is told by a third person.

Role of Women

The role of women in *The Song of Roland* and *The Iliad* is secondary. Bramimonde from *The Song of Roland* and Helen from *The Iliad* are presented as trophies for winning the battle. According to Ishtiaq (2019), females' only value was their presence in male's life as a sign of status. They did not have a choice and could not make any decisions. It was normal at that period of history, and women lived in the same conditions in real life. Females were not as important as males and were not given high positions in society.

Differences in *the Song of Roland* and *The Iliad*

There are many similarities between *The Song of Roland* and *The Iliad*, but there are also quite a few crucial differences. Both poems describe important fights that took place at that time. In *The Iliad*, people were driven by fame (Homer, 1998), while in *The Song of Roland*, the best reward was God's blessing (*The Song of Roland*, 1880). The last factor that was represented in completely opposite ways in both poems is religion.

The Historical Period

The Song of Roland and *The Iliad* show two completely different periods in history. *The Song of Roland* takes place in medieval France. As Blanks (2019) notes, the main character

Roland fights against cruel Muslim Saracens, who are enemies to his people. The war continued for seven years, but the French army was much stronger and did not want to give up. Roland was loyal to the ruler of his country, and was is ready to do everything he asked, that is why he continued fighting no matter what. The events in *The Iliad* take place in Ancient Greece. The poem shows the tenth year of the siege of the city of Troy. The whole plot is built around the Trojan War and everything that has caused it. The main character, Achilles, fights with the Trojan warriors till the last breath.

Perception of Reward

The perception of reward was completely different in both poems. Roland from *The Song of Roland* was a very religious Christian who believed in God's blessing. His main reward was waiting for him after he died and went to heaven (*The Song of Roland*, 1880). He was always loyal to his ruler to be praised on earth, but he knew that he was doing everything for God and his blessing. The main characters from *The Iliad* were also very religious people who tried to please Gods to earn fame. For Achilles, the most important reward was the glory on earth. He never thought about the afterlife in heaven as a reward for his victories.

Religion

Religion was a crucial part of life in both poems. However, it was treated differently in *The Song of Roland* and *The Iliad*. The first poem presents Christianity, and the second one believes in a lot of Gods. For *The Song of Roland*, religion is one of the key issues. The war that is happening throughout the whole story is fighting between two religions. Although Christianity forbids violence, Roland used religion to justify the war. He believed that killing in the name of God is noble and right (*The Song of Roland*, 1880). Other than that, the poem shows the

appreciation of Christianity among people. They believed that God decided their future and, because of that, prayed for him. *The Iliad* characters are also very religious, and they show the importance of religion in their lives. In this poem, people believed in the existence of a lot of Gods. They and their behaviors were considerably different from the Christian God. They performed the role of the audience that was constantly watching people. So, the religion was important for characters from both poems, they just have worshipped different Gods.

Conclusion

Overall, *The Song of Roland* and *The Iliad* are crucial poems that seem very similar but have a lot of fundamental differences. The plots show two similar stories that present battles and warriors that stand as heroes. Both poems are told by the narrators, who give the readers a feeling of their own presence. The next similarity is the position of women who are treated as trophies. *The Song of Roland* and *The Iliad* also possess a lot of differences. The first one is the time when the actions happened. The second one is understanding of the reward, which Roland perceives as God's blessing and Achilles as fame. The third one is different religions worshiped by characters of *The Song of Roland* and *The Iliad*.

References

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