
Comparison Of The Song Of Roland And In The Fellowship Of The Ring

In this paper, I will examine the links between an instance of counsel in *The Song of Roland* and in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Tolkien drew on the importance of counsel in medieval texts throughout his work. I found that an interesting comparison between these two texts is with the illusion of counsel given to people around Isildur and Charlemagne respectively and the subsequent problems it causes. I will first break down the instance with each respective work separately in the context of its own work and then show the comparison between the two. This is an important moment to look at to understand some of the inspiration for Tolkien and to fully understand the importance of counsel in medieval texts.

In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Elrond, while holding counsel, explains the background of the Ring from the time of Isildur. Elrond was at the battle between Sauron where he was defeated for a time. After Elendil and Gil-galad died, Isildur took up the broken sword and cut the ring of power from Sauron's hand (243). After this they held counsel, Isildur would not listen to the counsel of Elrond and Cirdan and took the ring for himself. Specifically, he states "This I will have as were gild for my father, and my brother. (Tolkien 243)" From this point, the entire rest of the *Lord of the Rings* story can occur. If the Ring would have been destroyed right there, none of the rest of this story would have happened. The action of ignoring his counsel causes many problems large and far-reaching and this fact is hammered in throughout this section of the text. It proves how important counsel is in this kind of society. A fictional society that is based on medieval European societies. This section shows how inspired Tolkien is by medieval text.

In *The Song of Roland*, Charlemagne holds counsel several times throughout the text. The point I am examining occurs when he turns down his counsel's suggestions for people to send to speak with the Saracens, until Ganelon is mentioned. During this section of the text, Charlemagne receives counsel from Roland to continue the war immediately followed by Ganelon stating that he has done enough, and they should take the peace offering. The Franks mostly agree with Ganelon and Charlemagne continues this path (35-36). His lords offer counsel on who to send but Charlemagne waves off their ideas until Roland states "It will be Ganelon, my stepfather (37)." In other words, Charlemagne ignores his counsel until what he wanted was proposed. This act of poor counsel causes the actions of the rest of the text. Ganelon plots against the Franks with the Saracens and it generally goes poorly for the Franks. This example of counsel is meant to be in flawed morals with heavy consequence when the counsel is largely ignored. This idea of flawed counsel is very important in medieval literature and in this case is shown in a slightly different way than the standard portrayal of poor counsel.

As shown above, the topic of flawed counsel is important in medieval literature and by extension Tolkien's writing. Tolkien was clearly taking inspiration from this text at this point in his narrative. These are both clear examples of renowned leaders ignoring their counsel to do what they wish. The decision to ignore their counsel also creates a large problem around which the rest of the narrative is based. One aspect Tolkien changed to fit his style is that Tolkien does not provide the entire dialogue of the counsel and chooses to instead just state that he ignores the counsel and why he said he did that. This makes the scene hold the feeling of importance that Elrond is setting without losing momentum throughout it. Whereas in *The Song of Roland*,

since this is meant to be remembered and recanted it makes sense to repeat the entire dialogue of the event.

Another similarity is the stature that both characters hold. Charlemagne is a well-known king who was perceived as very successful during his time in ruling. Isildur didn't last very long in a position of power due to the Ring and his carelessness but he was known as a powerful hero and after that held in a position of high regard and success. Isildur was raised to be a ruler and follow his father as King (Tolkien 243). They were also generally known as just. This similarity creates a disjunct in their actions at this point of counsel. Isildur was trying to destroy Sauron and did not destroy the power of Sauron when given the opportunity (243). Charlemagne was a king who was just and fair but at the point of counsel ignored the advice given until what he wanted came up (38). In both cases, this creates an interesting disjunct between the place they hold in their people's eyes and what they do in the narrative that is against that. Here is where this similarity shifts to a new difference. In the case of the Song of Roland, this moment is used simply as catalyst for the tale, not drawing emphasis to the fact that Charlemagne ignored counsel other than the fact that ignoring counsel causes bad things. In the Lord of the Rings, this moment is both used as a catalyst and to specifically draw emphasis to this disjunct as to show the Ring's power to affect the mind of people who hold it. This difference is important as it shows the writing style of Tolkien as an evolution on medieval literature. This section shows an idea that Tolkien directly draws out of another text and then expands the idea to where it makes it more of a narrative point that draws on many themes of his story, than a catalyst meant to prove a point and move on.

Tolkien's Lord of the Rings draws many different topics from the Song of Roland. This section in the Song of Roland heavily emphasizes the importance of listening to trustworthy counsel and the consequences of not following the advice of your counsel. This concept is important in most cases of medieval literature. Tolkien created a world based on some of the important aspects of medieval societies and counsel is one of the many things he chose to emphasize in his writing. This section of the Tolkien and Song of Roland both show the heavy consequences of not following the advice of trustworthy counsel. This proves that Tolkien is heavily influenced by specific medieval texts to the purpose of building a believable and interesting world based on concepts important to medieval societies.