

Masters of deception



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The element of disguise is often associated with deception and suspense. This literary device is seemingly ubiquitous throughout Eastern and Western folklore, and is seen in Homer's *Odyssey* and the Turkish epic *The Book of Dede Korkut*. Despite the fact that disguise manifests itself in varying capacities, each homecoming evokes a question of identity. Ancient Greek and Turkish culture viewed identity as a representation of the role that one plays in society. Both Odysseus and Bamsi Beyrek are characters of good standing in society. They are portrayed as brave heroes from upper-class backgrounds. In order for the heroes to successfully "return" home, they must adopt a disguise to test the loyalty of those around them. Thus, their homecomings are not only physical, but also metaphorical, because they represent the restoration of their original identities.

The second half of *The Odyssey* focuses on the trials that Odysseus faces after he returns home to Ithaca. Paradoxically, Odysseus must conceal his true self while trying to reclaim both his home and his identity. At Athena's urging, Odysseus disguises himself as a wandering beggar in order to test the loyalty of the suitors (17. 396-398). Antinous, one of the suitors, mocks Odysseus by calling him "a brazen, shameless beggar" (496). Although the suitors continue to taunt Odysseus as he strings his bow, they become frightened when they see his skill: So they mocked, but Odysseus, mastermind in action, once he'd handled the great bow and scanned every inch... so with his virtuoso ease Odysseus strung his mighty bow... Horror swept through the suitors, faces blanching white, and Zeus cracked the sky with a bolt, his blazing sign... He snatched a winged arrow lying bare on the board—the rest still bristled deep inside the quiver, soon to be tasted by all

the feasters there. (21. 451-452, 456, 459-465) This scene captures the key moment in which Odysseus reveals himself. Homer portrays Odysseus in two ways. First, Odysseus is the patriarch of his family. In the external world, Odysseus is the king of Ithaca. Odysseus is a father, husband, and king; these perspectives of Odysseus highlight the core of his identity. Essentially, Odysseus' identity is a reflection of the roles that he plays in society. For Odysseus, the ability to disguise his identity empowers him and permits him to accomplish his task.

As Odysseus reveals himself and defeats the suitors, he reclaims his original identity. In fact, Odysseus seems even more grand and majestic as he reveals himself: “ Now stripping back his rags Odysseus master of craft and battle vaulted onto the great threshold... and poured his flashing shafts before him...” (22. 1-3). Eventually, Odysseus slaughters all the suitors to reunite with his family and his kingdom. Odysseus' homecoming is significant because it proves that identity is the essence of character and personality. Identity was especially important during the time of the ancient Greeks because people identified themselves based on their ancestors and their homelands. The Odyssey refers to this concept when Odysseus introduces himself to Alcinous: “ I am Odysseus, son of Laertes, known to the world for every kind of craft... Sunny Ithaca is my home” (9. 21-23). Thus, the link between a hero and his homeland is crucial because the hero will always return home.

Likewise, Bamsi Beyrek from “ The Story of Bamsi Beyrek” in The Book of Dede Korkut also experiences a similar homecoming. Bamsi Beyrek was held captive for several years and discovers that his betrothed was about to

marry someone else. He laments: Oh, my forty comrades, do you know what has happened? Yaltajuk, son of Yalanji, spread the word that I was dead, and my father's happy tent with the gold chimney filled with mourning. His daughters and daughters-in-law, wearing white like geese, took off that white and put on black. Banu Chickek, whom I loved at the opening of my eyes, with all my heart, is to be wed to Yaltajuk, son of Yalanji. (3. 55-56) This quote implies that he was worried about his father's reaction to the news of his death. In the narrative, Bamsi Beyrek is depicted as son and as a fiancé of Banu Chickek. His role as a son is a major part of his identity; he clearly has already established a good relationship with his father. Furthermore, his engagement to Banu Chickek, to whom he was betrothed to even before his birth, suggests that he is destined to be with her from the very beginning.

Like Odysseus, Bamsi Beyrek also disguises himself as someone of a lower social standing (57). As a minstrel, he is mocked and ridiculed by Yaltajuk (61). In response, Bamsi Beyrek strikes the wedding ring with his arrow and shatters it (62). Not only does this scene demonstrate his prowess with the bow and arrow, but it also proves that one's identity does not change. Each character has a different identity because of the different roles that each character plays. Hence, the only person who can claim Bamsi Beyrek's identity is Bamsi Beyrek himself. In other words, Bamsi Beyrek's identity is what makes him unique.

In final analysis, there are several striking similarities in the homecoming scenes of *The Odyssey* and *The Book of Dede Korkut*. Both narratives send an important message about the concept of identity: Identity cannot be faked. The identities of both Odysseus and Bamsi Beyrek are being

contested by others. In order for Odysseus and Bamsi Beyrek to truly return home and regain their rightful identity, they have to disguise themselves as someone of a lower social rank, only to emerge even stronger than before. As such, the element of disguise is essential to the plots of both narratives because it gives the heroes social mobility. This invisibility allows them to gain knowledge and test the loyalty of others. Although the ancient Greeks and Turks defined identity as how you were viewed by others, modern society perceives identity as how we view ourselves. Despite these differences, identity still continues to play a critical role in human nature and the way in which we view the world.