

The epics of sundiata and the odyssey essay



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An epic is a long narrative poem that recounts the doings of a legendary hero whose action determines the fate of people or a nation surrounding them. The epic of Sundiata recapitulates the story of the foundation of the Mali Empire. The epic is told by the griot, an African oral storyteller who is responsible for persevering and maintaining historical stories. The epic of the Odyssey, also known as the “Father of Epic Poetry”, is about the journey and wanderings of the Greek hero Odysseus.

Though very different, both epics feature distinct themes and epic conventions throughout their story. The themes and conventions between the two epics can be compared and contrasted. The Odyssey is an epic telling the story of Odysseus’ journey as he returns home after the ten year Trojan War. The epic tells of the dangers, distractions, and adventures Odysseus faces on his journey back home. In the textbook used for readings, the text is focused on books nine and ten of Homers great tale. These two books are where most of Odysseus’ travels is both helped and hindered by gods.

Some central themes in the Odyssey include wandering, cunning, and loyalty. Wandering and hospitality are central themes in the Odyssey. Hospitality or lack thereof, affects Odysseus throughout the epic. Odysseus does not have the same home as he once did before the war. He is lonely and although he has a crew with him he yearns to be home with his family. His home has been taken over by a cruel, rowdy band of suitors that have overrun his palace. Believing that Odysseus is dead, his wife and son don’t have the power to dismiss them.

Loneliness does not only strike Odysseus. Penelope, his wife constantly cries out for her husband in his absence, his son is lost without the guidance of his legendary father, and Odysseus' mother claims that loneliness is the ultimate cause of her death. Another example of hospitality is when Odysseus has an encounter with the Cyclops. In Odysseus' travels he stays with a lot of different hosts. When Odysseus runs into the Cyclops, the Cyclops does not invite or welcome Odysseus. Instead, he decides to torture and eat Odysseus and his crew.

Odysseus does, on the other hand, receive great hospitality from civilians he runs into and the god Aeolus. Another theme featured in the Odyssey is Odysseus' cunning. Cunning is being sharp and particular in matters. Cunning is Odysseus' most evident characteristic throughout the epic. Odysseus is known for his strength both physically and mentally. For example, when Odysseus and his men are trapped in the cave with the Cyclops, Odysseus uses his shrewd strengths to think of a way to get them out safely. While the Cyclops is asleep, Odysseus gets him drunk and then blinds him so he is unable to see them escaping.

The men then escape the next morning. Odysseus also displays his cunning when he introduces himself as "Nobody" to Polyphemos. Odysseus does this so when the beastly Cyclops asks who tricked him, there would not be a real name for the Cyclops to go after for revenge. Loyalty and perseverance is also a theme in the Odyssey. A main example is how loyal Penelope was to her husband even though he was absent from her for twenty years. Penelope always remained faithful to her husband and waited for his return. Odysseus' son also shows loyalty.

Although his father was absent from his life for twenty years, Telemachus stood by his father and went against the suitors in honor of Odysseus.

Odysseus' loyalty and perseverance is seen when he stays true to his wife at heart. For example, when he spends seven years of captivity at Calypso's, he resists the beautiful goddess that tempts him. In the epic of Sundiata is a story telling how the heroic Sundiata Keita fights and founds the Mali Empire. This epic is mythical and legendary. It is told by a griot. A griot is a performing storyteller who preserves history.

Some major themes developed and displayed in the epic include legacy, loyalty, and heroism. The epic of Sundiata is greatly affected by the way it is told. Because it is told by a griot, the history and legacy of the story is accurate and told with great passion and precision. The griot is fundamental to telling tribes and people of Mali how their home came about. He takes pride in his position and knows that is important. Tribes and people make peace because of the griot's stories. For example, throughout the story the griot does not hesitate to show hatred towards mankind.

He believes mankind is fickle and says man thinks they are above nature. The people show their fickle ways, for example, when they were very excited and anticipant for Sundiata to be born but when his birth reveals his imperfections, they turn on him. When Sundiata's strengths are built, they are ready to praise him. The griot tells the people in the tribes of this story to teach them that they needed a strong leader to reveal their strengths and better qualities because before they were hidden. Another example of legacy is how Sundiata shows his respect and admiration for great people that came before him.

He wished to mimic the achievements of Alexander the Great and had the urge to succeed following the history he learns from the griot. The Mali Empire also strives off of its value of the past. Another theme revealed in the epic of Sundiata is loyalty. Loyalty is perhaps the most prominent and apparent characteristic shown in the epic. For example, Sundiata knows loyalty and unity is what will form a great army. As he travels back to the places he and his mother traveled during their exile, he recruits people that he met to build his army.

Sundiata made plenty of friends and built relationships with people in his youth who grew to be powerful people such as kings. These relationships created allies and Sundiata's allies offer their armies to Sundiata for the fight against Soumaoro. Sundiata also remains loyal to his griot. The loyalty and trustworthiness in a relationship between the king and griot is essential. Sundiata remained loyal to his griot and in return the griot assures the king that he and his family will loyally tell his stories of accomplishments.

Furthermore, heroism is another theme displayed in the epic of Sundiata. Epics are based off of heroes and their accomplishments. Sundiata was a hero for many different reasons but his strength is what was most manifested. From an early age Sundiata exhibits strength. He learns to walk and use his legs at the tender age of seven after being crippled since birth. Sundiata also exhibits his strength when he and his family were exiled. He uses that time to meet people and learn new things which builds his character and mentality. Sundiata is also a hero because he is brave.

He does not hesitate to take on a challenge with Soumaoro. He states "Prepare yourself, Soumaoro, for it will be long before the calamity that is going to crash down upon of you and yours comes to an end." Sundiata is also very skilled at battle. The griot also makes clear that Sundiata's destiny is to be heroic. Heroism is a part of Sundiata's fate. The griot tells that he and other soothsayers knew of Sundiata's success even before he was born. Many people try to hinder him from achieving what he was born to do. For example, Sassouma exiles Sundiata and his family in fear of his strength.

But, in the end the exile led Sundiata to victory. During his exile he made a lot of connections with other empires and learned about people, culture, and traditions. That very communication and networking is what helped him win the war against Saumaoro. Although the two epics seem to be very different, they do have some similarities. For example, both epics display loyalty. Loyalty is staying devoted to a person or cause. By both epic heroes remaining loyal and faithful to their, people, cause, wives, families, and themselves, their success came to them.

If Odysseus would not have remained faithful to his wife for the twenty years he was absent, he may not have made it home. If Sundiata would not have stayed loyal to his cause and his people, war between him and Saumaoro may have been lost and the Mali Empire would not have been built. In both epics, the themes presented a hero of great importance that made remarkable changes in and determined the fate the nation and human race around them. Both traditional characters, Odysseus and Sundiata, succeed and make epic changes through their conventions and actions although the scope of each individual epic contrast.