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Writing Assignment 1

Stories throughout history have always given different cultures a way to identify with their past. The Germanic people are no different as they created stories of oral tradition and through the years they have formed into many different versions. *The Nibelungenlied* is one great example of an oral story becoming a written piece of text. It has been translated many times and there's many other stories that are similar, however, also contradicting what is written in the book format we used. The Old Norse stories and the *Nibelungenlied* both share similar themes and characters which suggest a similar oral origin story, by looking at the similarities and differences we can see glimpses of the cultures that shaped the evolution of the story.

The examination of the Old Norse stories and *The Nibelungenlied* not only highlights their narrative differences but also shows the influence of orality on their respective traditions. Graeme Dunphy's concept of orality provides a lens through which we can understand the fluidity and adaptability of these narratives as they transitioned from oral to written forms. Orality suggests that stories were shaped and reshaped through communal retellings resulting in variations and reinterpretations over time. In the case of the Old Norse stories and *The Nibelungenlied*, orality is evident in the multiple versions and adaptations of these tales across different cultural contexts. The differences in characterizations, plot elements, and theme between the two traditions can be seen as a reflection of this oral tradition where storytellers added their own

interpretations and details to the core narrative. Dunphy states “The absence of a standard language meant that not only the dialect but also the personal quirks of an author or scribe were reflected on paper”(Dunphy, pg 112) which highlights the idea that authors influenced stories as they told them. This can be a main reason for the adaptations that the Old Norse and The Nibelungenlied have gone through, therefore, creating differences among the actions and events of both epic poems. Thus, while these texts may present conflicting portrayals of characters and events they ultimately serve as highlights to the dynamic nature of oral storytelling and its lasting impact on literary traditions. Through the lens of orality we can appreciate the differences of narratives that have evolved and transformed over centuries, However, we can also acknowledge the confusions that the differences may cause for someone reading the multiple stories.

In terms of consistency both narratives feature similar central characters, such as Sivirt and Prunhilt, and depict their interactions with themes of love, honor, and fate. While in The Nibelungenlied Sivirt was seen wooing Kriemhilt after winning over Prunhilt to make her his wife. This involved quite a bit of explanation addressing those who were involved in giving Kriemhilt as a reward to Sivirt due to his aid in the King getting his wife back to his home land. This showed a lot of their cultural aspects addressing chivalry and loyalty towards a lady as a man of honor. However, in the old Norse text of Sigurtharkvitha en Sakamma(A Short Poem of Sigurth), we don't see the active wooing of Kriemhilt(Guthrun) instead it just states “They offered him a wife and abundant treasure. It was Guthrun they offered, their sister”(PE,Sigurtharkvitha en Sakamma, stanza 2) which doesn't at all address the actions Sivirt took to woo Kriemhilt. Instead it

states Sivirt drank with the brothers and this doesn't highlight his acts of loyalty to a woman or chivalry in wooing a lady. Instead it turns to Prunhilt's(Brynhild) personal feelings of not being able to be with Sivirt. It overlooks the use of the festival in The Nibelungenlied and goes directly into planning how to murder Sivirt for their own personal gain. However, This time it also swaps who is supportive of the murder as Hagen(Hogni) is the one opposing Gunther(Gunnar) who is contemplating his death. Hagen in turn for this story is going against the idea of killing by stating "What a shameful deed you consider! to break our sworn oaths, our sworn oaths, the words we pledged, with violence!"((PE,Sigurtharkvitha en Sakamma, stanza 18,) someone who they have bonded with and trust as a loyal friend Hagen wanted to defend. On the other hand in The Nibelungenlied Hagen is one of the few who go about plotting Sivirt's murder and being a lead hand in his death. This portrayal directly swaps the two characters and how they showed their honor and loyalties to Sivirt in The Nibelungenlied. All these differences in characterization highlight how these Norse stories can cause confusion for a reader of these texts compared to The Nibelungenlied. However, the differences do highlight the culture that Old Norse stories contain as they usually contain more violent events. In the end these events and actions of characters were so different but well developed to display how each culture expressed themselves within epic poems.

Not only were the portrayals of these characters differing throughout the many texts, they also highlighted significant cultural differences, particularly in the portrayal of superhuman strength and mythical elements. In The Nibelungenlied, the character of Sivirt possesses super strength but this aspect is presented with a more subdued tone

emphasizing Siegfried's strength in battle rather than his supernatural abilities. His strength is important to his character yet it is somewhat normalized within the context of medieval culture. Conversely, in *Sigurtharkvitha en Sakamma*, the Old Norse tradition introduces a more pronounced mythical element through the use of a dragon. It stated "Sigurth visited Gjuki-- that young Volsung had killed a dragon"(PE,*Sigurtharkvitha en Sakamma*, stanza 1), which Sivirt's encounter with the dragon is central to his character arc and the dragon serves as a main point in his narrative. The dragon symbolizes existential threats adding a layer of mythical action to Sivirt's journey. Unlike in *The Nibelungenlied* where Sivirt strength is more of a personal attribute, Sivirt confrontation with the dragon has a higher connection to mythical Norse stories out there. These differences in the portrayal of super strength and mythical elements highlight the distinct cultural and literary contexts of the Old Norse stories and *The Nibelungenlied*. While both traditions feature legendary heroes and supernatural beings, the manner in which these elements are depicted reflects the unique cultural orality of the stories and how over time aspects can be adapted to form unique differences.

In summary, comparing the Old Norse stories and *The Nibelungenlied* reveals both their differences and the impact of spoken tradition on their development. Graeme Dunphy's idea of spoken tradition helps us understand how these stories changed from being told aloud to being written down with various adaptations over time. These tales reflect the dynamic nature of storytelling across different cultures. The variations in characters, plots, and themes between the Old Norse stories and *The Nibelungenlied* show the diverse literary traditions they come from. While these differences might confuse readers they also provide insight into the beliefs and values of their societies.

Overall, the existence of different versions of these tales demonstrates the enduring appeal of storytelling and its ability to capture people's imaginations. By understanding how spoken tradition influenced these stories, we can appreciate how they've evolved over time and across cultures. Despite their differences, both the Old Norse stories and The Nibelungenlied remind us of the desire to share and preserve stories.