

A Hero's Quest Script

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Ordinary world

Mulan

Honor is vital in Mulan. As Mulan dishonours her family, she does not fit into the traditional female values that all must adhere to. Mulan is also clumsy and embarrasses herself in front of the matchmaker, which both go against the aforementioned values as well. It is important to remember that Mulan is not doing this on purpose, and actually *wants* to be liked and fit in, but she finds this too difficult to maintain for more than a short period of time.

Odyssey

King Odysseus is at home in Ithaca, with his wife, Penelope, and newborn son, Telemachus. Odysseus is well-liked, popular and respected by his people, which gives him pride and happiness.

Comparison

While Odysseus is full of pride and honor, and is respected by his people, Mulan is clumsy and is not respected by her family or anyone else in her home village. Polar opposites between these two tales can be seen already! It is not very surprising, since the Odyssey was chosen by us for this very reason.

Call to adventure

Mulan

Mulan witnesses her father being conscripted, and immediately realises that he will die in war. She decides to disguise herself as a male to save her father.

Odyssey

Odysseus sets out for the war in Troy to save his kingdom and protect his family and people.

Comparison

Odysseus' motivation to set off on a grand adventure is to save his people, while Mulan's motivation is saving her father. This could be interpreted as Mulan only being confident in her ability to save one person, while Odysseus is quite sure he can save the thousands under his care.

Refusal of the call

Mulan

Mulan doubts her disguising abilities and almost gives up in front of the training camp, but Mushu convinces her to go, despite her fears that she will be uncovered and possibly even executed for being a female in the military.

Odyssey

Odysseus does not want to leave his family and sail to Troy because he knows it will be a long trip. He is worried that something bad might occur during his long absence while he is on his trip.

Comparison

While Mulan fears for herself, the confident Odysseus fears for others, while not giving a second thought to the personal risks he is taking. Some say that the only way to truly tell if a person believes in themselves is to look if they genuinely fear for themselves. If they do not, then they are both caring (as they are fearful for others) and fearless (as they are not fearful for themselves). This clearly demonstrates that Odysseus believes in himself, while Mulan does not.

Meeting with the mentor

Mulan

The captain fills the role of the Mentor in Mulan, who is inspired by his ridiculing of the soldiers' minuscule strength and ability to improve her own battle skills and not fall behind the others. She is determined to excel in the new life that she has found. Mulan's confidence grows, but is still performing significantly worse than the other soldiers.

Odyssey

Athena, the goddess of wisdom, crafts, and battle is Odysseus' guide. She wants to help Odysseus, though she has been instructed not to by the other gods. She takes pity on him while other gods forsake Odysseus for this very reason. Athena constantly saves him from death while giving him guidance.

Comparison

Mulan does not have a person that constantly guards her, while Odysseus does. This may be an indication that Odysseus' struggles will be so much more difficult that he needs others to guard him, unlike Mulan whose childish little *adventures* do not really amount to much. Of course,

this may not be the case, and Odysseus is just a little wuss and needs Athena's *divine aid* to save him every time he falls into a tricky situation; you decide.

Crossing the threshold

Mulan

This really should come *before* the Meeting with the mentor, but I will say it now anyway for continuity's sake. The threshold was crossed when Mulan finally walked into the training camp, all tough and male, ready to *tussle* with the others. She also spits on the ground in the least manly way possible, to the suspicion of her soon-to-be friends.

Odyssey

After the war, the gods become angry with the Greeks for their prideful ways. Indeed, the gods are *so* angry that they form a great storm which emerges and throws the Greeks off course. The gods sure do hate those Greeks! This can be considered a threshold because it represents the first major struggle of Odysseus' trek, and is also a *point of no return*, as the ship has now sailed too far away to consider turning back now.

Comparison

The main difference between the crossing of the threshold in Mulan and the Odyssey is the timing and the definition of the threshold. In Mulan, the threshold is when she commences her adventure properly and could not turn back, even if she wanted to. This is contrary to the definition in the Odyssey, which only specifies that the threshold must be the point of no return, which in this case is strengthened by the first major struggle of Odysseus' journey. It is really quite interesting how the definition of threshold is different in almost every story, but this definition does not really imply anything about the rest of the story's content; only the structure.

Tests, allies, enemies

Mulan

Mulan improves her skills and becomes even better at being male in a montage with a catchy song that Harrison seems to really enjoy (*Let's get down to business—To defeat—The Huns!*)

Odyssey

Odysseus is faced with many tests as he travels back to Ithaca which include many of the famous and well-known Greek mythological creatures

in popular culture. This list of creatures includes the Lotus Eaters, the Sirens and also Scylla.

Comparison

The fact that Mulan had to endure only vague “montage-y” tests, allies, enemies in the form of training implies that Mulan’s journey will be soft and easy. This is in direct contrast to the Odyssey’s journey, which has real life-or-death scenarios, and is more serious than the tests found in Mulan.

Approach to the innermost cave

Mulan

The army that Mulan is a part of travels to a village the Huns decimated after being tricked by Mushu into going to war with the Huns. The music ramps up and an encounter with the Huns is all but certain.

Odyssey

Odysseus nearly makes it home, but unfortunately for him and his crew they open a bag that had been given to Odysseus by Aeolus, god of the winds. The bag released a wind that blew them far away from Ithaca after it was sadly opened.

Comparison

The Approach is much more subdued in Mulan, and feels “set” and “official” due to the government involvement in the whole situation. The very fact that the military is involved in an organised and official manner subdues the entire situation because it feels like the government is keeping everyone safe. The Odyssey’s Approach could not be a more direct polar opposite to the one found in Mulan. It is spontaneous, surprising, and completely unregulated. It is also more dangerous, which sets the tone for the Supreme Ordeal that lies ahead.

Supreme ordeal

Mulan

Mulan’s army is ambushed by the Huns who are hiding behind the summit of the mountain. At first it seems that all hope is lost, but then Mulan saves everyone by firing a rocket into an overhang of snow, causing an avalanche. Almost all members of the army and the Huns are buried in the snow, never to be seen again (or so we think...). As Mulan was firing the rocket, she is stabbed by Shang Yu, the leader of the Huns. After the avalanche has passed, other members of the army tend to Mulan’s wound, undressing her. They realise that she is a female!

Odyssey

Odysseus is sent to the underworld seeking information to guide him home, which unfortunately brings him to the verge of death!

Comparison

Mulan sustains little damage, having only suffered a small gash, while Odysseus is brought to the *verge of death*! That is comparatively huge personal damage. The storyline is, in general, much more extreme and serious in the Odyssey.

Reward

Mulan

As Mulan does not yet receive a reward, the rules must be bent slightly to allow the reward to go to the others in the army after they realise Mulan is female. As this reward is in a more unorthodox sense, you might be wondering what the reward consists of. Well, it consists of beating the Huns and not perishing! Lame, I know. Under normal circumstances, Mulan would be executed, but her life is spared due to her spectacular performance and, you know, *saving everyone*! To reach a middle ground between *being executed* and staying in the army (which are both unacceptable outcomes), Mulan is left to die in the snow with Mushu, the cricket and her horse.

Odyssey

The King of Phaeacia gives Odysseus passage home.

Comparison

The reward in Mulan is vague, and cannot really be classified as reward. Again, this is completely contrary to the reward in the Odyssey, which is as traditional as a reward can get. On another note, the Odyssey is much more epic. In general, as goes for any story in which powerful kings of faraway lands lead a classic hero home.

The road back

Mulan

Mulan glimpses some of the Huns rising out of the snow, and realises most of the Huns did not die in the avalanche after all, and must make her way towards the Imperial Palace. She deliberates for a while whether she should just go home or save China, but decides that saving China is the only proper option. Mulan arrives at the Imperial palace and attempts

to convince the others from the army that the Huns are in fact not dead, and that they are there, trying to murder the Emperor.

Odyssey

Unlike other heroes, Odysseus was not in search of treasure. Instead, he was desperately trying to reach his home. Once he returns, he finds out that his house has been overrun with suitors trying to steal his wife and palace.

Comparison

In this extremely rare case, Mulan's story is much more dramatic and heroic, while incorporating some grand and *creative* ideas (Trying to save China! Yeah!) The Odyssey's Road Back is much more noble than Mulan's, as Mulan is dumped by her friends while Odysseus is desperately trying to find his home to make sure his wife and son are alright. Admittedly, the idea of someone trying to return to their family is not nearly as dramatic or interesting as a brave woman who was kicked out of the military for being female while trying to save her father. Plus, the stakes are much lower in the Odyssey (All of China versus one family)

Resurrection

Mulan

No one believes her, because they believe that Mulan cannot be trusted as she had already lied to them before. The Huns reveal themselves, and take the Emperor hostage within his own palace. Some of the Huns are guarding the doors from inside the palace. The remaining members of the army, directed by the captain, attempt to ram the Imperial Palace's doors open, but to no avail. Mulan eventually convinces all members of the army to join her in her plan to disguise themselves as women, sneak into the palace, assault the Huns and free the Emperor. Mulan's plan succeeds, and she is rewarded by the Emperor by being offered a seat on the Imperial Council, which she politely declines.

Odyssey

Instead of rushing in and killing the suitors, Odysseus is patient. He wishes to learn if his wife has been faithful. With the help of his son and a loyal swineherd, he devises a plan. Athena disguises him as an old beggar so that he can enter his house undetected. Telemachus steals all the suitors' weapons, and a final test is proposed. Penelope will marry the man who strings Odysseus' bow and shoots an arrow through a line of small circles; a seemingly impossible task

Comparison

The situation in *Mulan* is much more dramatic, but is a childish, impatient and immature plan that would not have a chance of working in real life. Once more, a complete antithesis is presented by the *Odyssey* in the form of a mature, realistic and clever way to handle a plausible situation (ignoring all magic and mythical creatures of course). The plan being mature and clever implies that Odysseus is mature and clever, while *Mulan*'s plan is just brute force with a bit of disguising and imagination.

Return with the elixir

Mulan

Because *Mulan* didn't accept the Emperor's gift of a seat on the council, the Emperor hands her a sword and a necklace instead. *Mulan*'s family had always longed for her to get into a relationship, so they are delighted when *Mulan* returns home with the captain in tow. Obviously, *Mulan*'s family is also extremely impressed with the gifts she received (who wouldn't be?!).

Odyssey

Odysseus, still dressed as a beggar, completes the task and is restored to his original state. He and his son expel the suitors from their home by force. Penelope, seeing how Odysseus has changed, tests him to make sure it is actually him. She tells him she moved their bed, to which he replies correctly that this would have been impossible, and all is returned to normal.

Comparison

Both scenarios are noble and dramatic, but it could be argued that the *Odyssey* is slightly more dramatic. *Mulan*'s scenario is very unrealistic, while, assuming all mystical creatures are real, the *Odyssey* scenario is quite realistic after all.

Archetypes

The Shadow

In the *Odyssey*, the most prominent Shadow-like character is Poseidon, who conforms to his archetype by always creating trouble for Odysseus. The Shadow in *Mulan*, on the other hand, is Shang Yu. He conforms to his archetype because he is the leader of the Huns, and it goes without saying that *he is evil*.

Similarities

So, some similarities. Both of the characters are villains, in that they both harm, or, at least attempt to harm, the hero. In the *Odyssey*, Poseidon isn't the main threat to Odysseus—the main focus for everyone is still the war—but Poseidon still causes trouble throughout the journey. Poseidon is more cunning and mischievous than your traditional Shadow. In comparison, Shang Yu is not exactly the sharpest knife in the drawer, but is quite big and strong.

The Hero(ine)

In most tales of the Hero's Quest the hero or heroine is the main character and pushes the story forward, saving many lives in the process. Odysseus fits this mold almost perfectly. Mulan, on the other hand, does not really fit into the whole “loved by their family” and “respected by everyone” cliché, but she is still a hero because she saved the whole of China.

Similarities

Mulan is introduced as a free-spirited outcast, clumsy, and unable to follow rules, regulations, or traditions. Nevertheless, she has a warm heart and wants nothing more than to uphold her family honor, while keeping true to herself. Perhaps Mulan's flaws are her greatest strength because they help the moviegoer to identify with the main character, maybe because they have the same faults as Mulan. Nevertheless, Odysseus has two major flaws:

- Arrogance
- Pride

In comparison, Mulan is very selfless and puts others before her. The parallels between the two characters could not be more symmetric: Mulan has more faults than Odysseus, but they are far easier to identify with due to the nature of the faults. The exact opposite is true for Odysseus: his faults are ones no one would be happy owning up to, and the people that have these faults would not be inclined to admitting anything wrong with themselves anyway.

The Hermit/Helper/Mentor

There is often a helper or mentor in a Hero's Quest. The mentor or helper must always aid the hero in their quest for the elixir. The helper in *Odyssey* is Goddess Athena, who conforms to her archetype by helping through the journey. The helper in *Mulan* also conforms to the archetype, but in a different way. Mushu, the helper in *Mulan* guides her

and helps her as a helper should do, but he is also cunning and accidentally (or maybe on purpose) starts a war between Mulan's army and the Huns by tricking the consul into thinking that the army was needed at the battlefield, even though they really weren't. Mushu also helps Mulan by convincing her to not give up and to overcome the Threshold.

Similarities

The characters in both help the protagonist, but in different ways: Mushu helps Mulan by cheering her spirit and gives her confidence, while Athena sends Odysseus divine aid and help.

The Dream Person

Almost all works of fiction of any kind are partial to some romance, but what better time to be romantic than during an epic quest to find the lost elixir! The dream person in *Odyssey* is Penelope, who conforms to the archetype of the dream person by being married to Odysseus. The dream person in *Mulan* is much less cemented than the marriage that can be found in the *Odyssey*, as the dream person in *Mulan* does not reveal their true nature until the very end of the movie. The Captain conforms to the archetype by liking Mulan, and Mulan liking him back.

Similarities

Odysseus is married to Penelope whereas Mulan and the Captain aren't. There aren't many other notable differences.

The Threshold Guardian(s)

The threshold guardians play the role of those that make sure the hero is ready to enter the Special World. The threshold guardians in the *Odyssey* are the Lotus Eaters, who test Odysseus' strength and ability to problem solve by making his men forget about home. The threshold guardians in *Mulan* are the ancestors, who conform to their archetype by not being real people and guiding Mushu to help Mulan.

Similarities

In *Mulan*, the threshold guardians want to bring her back to not fight for the war. In comparison, the Lotus Eaters are native to their land and help the *Odyssey* crew with the 'lotus' fruits.

The Trickster

The trickster in *Odyssey* is Poseidon, who conforms to his archetype by tricking Odysseus throughout the adventure. The trickster in *Mulan* is Mushu, who conforms to his archetype by lying to the consul and in general causing mayhem.

Similarities

In *Mulan*, Mushu tricks the consul to go to war, but he doesn't manage to harm *Mulan* in any way, while Poseidon tricks Odysseus many times in harmful ways by getting him into frustrating situations.

The Herald

The herald is the character that warns the other characters of an oncoming danger or challenge. The herald in the *Odyssey* is the starting of the war in Troy. This conforms to the archetype because it tells Odysseus to go to war. The herald in *Mulan* is Mushu and the Consul of the Emperor. He conforms to the archetype by telling the "news" to the Captain.

Similarities

In *Mulan*, Mushu lied about going to war; the news was fake, while in the *Odyssey*, the starting of the war warned everyone to stay.