

The Epic Tradition 2014-15: Assignment One

Assignment: Write a brief comparison of these two passages. You should identify common themes that are important. You may also comment on any other features of the epic tradition that are central to the epics you have studied.

Submission: Hand a printed copy of your commentary to your tutor during your seminar in Week 7, and submit an electronic copy by 6pm on the Friday of Week 7.

Iliad VI.212–31

He spoke, and Diomedes of the great war cry was gladdened.
He drove his spear deep into the prospering earth, and in winning
words of friendliness he spoke to the shepherd of the people:
'See now, you are my guest friend from far in the time of our fathers.
Brilliant Oineus once was host to Bellerophontes
the blameless, in his halls, and twenty days he detained him,
and these two gave to each other fine gifts in token of friendship.
Oineus gave his guest a war belt bright with the red dye,
Bellerophontes a golden and double-handled drinking-cup,
a thing I left behind in my house when I came on my journey.
Tydeus, though, I cannot remember, since I was little
when he left me, that time the people of the Achaians perished
in Thebe. Therefore I am your friend and host in the heart of Argos;
you are mine in Lykia, when I come to your country.
Let us avoid each other's spears, even in the close fighting.
There are plenty of Trojans and famed companions in battle for me
to kill, whom the god sends me, or those I run down with my swift feet,
many Achaians for you to slaughter, if you can do it.
But let us exchange our armour, so that these others may know
how we claim to be guests and friends from the days of our fathers.'

Odyssey I.178–194, 206–212

Then in turn the goddess gray-eyed Athene answered him:
'See, I will accurately answer all that you ask me.
I announce myself as Mentès, son of Anchialos
the wise, and my lordship is over the oar-loving Taphians.
Now I have come in as you see, with my ship and companions
sailing over the wine-blue water to men of alien language,
to Temese, after bronze, and my cargo is gleaming iron.
And my ship stands near by, at the country, away from the city,
at the harbor, Rheithron, underneath wooded Neion.
Your father and I claim to be guest-friends by heredity
from far back, as you would know if you went to the aged hero
Laertes, who, they say, no longer comes to the city
now, but away by himself on his own land leads a hard life
with an old woman to look after him, who serves him his victuals
and drink, at the times when the weariness has befallen his body
from making his toilsome way on the high ground of his vineyard.
Now I have come. They told me he was here in this country [...]
But come now tell me this and give me an accurate answer.
Are you, big as you are, the very child of Odysseus?
Indeed, you are strangely like about the head, the fine eyes,

as I remember; we used to meet so often together
before he went away to Troy, where others beside him
and the greatest of the Argives went in their hollow vessels.
Since that time I have not seen Odysseus nor has he seen me.'

The Epic Tradition: Christmas Vacation Essay 2014-15

First-year undergraduates: write an essay of 2,500 words on one of the subjects below. A printed copy should be handed in to your seminar tutor during or before your usual seminar in Week 1 of next term, and an electronic copy submitted online by 6 pm on the Friday of Week 1.

Honours-level students: write an essay of 5,000 words on one of the subjects below. The work should be submitted according to the office by noon on Tuesday 6 January. An electronic version of the essay must be submitted via tabula by the same deadline.

1. What functions do the gods fulfil in *The Iliad*?
2. Discuss the role of disguise and duplicity in *The Odyssey*.
3. 'Epic codifies the values handed on in society from father to son, and the father-son relationships in the poem reflect this.' Discuss with reference to *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.
4. 'Mortal females in epic often appear merely to obstruct and confuse the endeavours of their male counterparts, but if looked at carefully they provide a searching critique of the value of those endeavours.' Discuss with reference to the Homeric epics.
5. 'Homer portrays the best sort of men' (Aristotle). Do you agree?
6. With reference to both Homeric epics discuss ONE of the following topics: the quest; the underworld; war; sex; the temptress.
7. Discuss the treatment of shame OR fame in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.
8. Discuss the theme of journey and travel in one of the Homeric epics.
9. How does *The Iliad* address the issue of the justification or lack of justification of Achilles's anger?
10. What are the similarities and differences in the culture and value systems depicted in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*?
11. How are epic heroes portrayed as being different from, and yet similar to other mortals?