

The differences between the aeneas and odysseus essay sample

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Both the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* share some similarities as epics; both describe the trials of a heroic figure who is the ideal representative of a particular culture. There are even individual scenes in the *Aeneid* are borrowed from the *Odyssey*. Yet, why are Odysseus and Aeneas so unlike one another? The answer is that the authors lived in two different worlds, whose values and perceptions varied greatly of a fundamental level. Greek culture and literature had a great dominating influence over Roman life, therefore, the influence of style and the stories written by Virgil adopted many of the old Greek ways. However, Virgil did not imitate, he gave a new meaning to the works that he borrowed and added his own thoughts and opinions that expressed and explained Roman life to the rest of the world.

To illustrate, a common idea is woven into the *Odyssey*, custom. Customs were handed down by the gods, and were meant to keep men safe by giving them civilization. When men flaunted their customs and the gods, they invited retribution and chaos by placing themselves outside the ordained scope of humanity. Moreover, if the customs are followed and proper respect given the gods, it is possible for man to live in harmony indefinitely. These differences in ethos are most easily seen when Virgil borrows a scene and transforms it to his own ends. For example, Virgil adopts the episode where Odysseus is washed up on shore and meets the Phaiakians and uses it to form the core of *Aeneid* I and II. In the *Odyssey*, the episode begins with Odysseus on his makeshift raft, heading home after all his trials. His eventual passage home has been agreed upon by Zeus.

However, in the past Odysseus wounded Polyphemos and in reckless

abandon questioned the power of the gods, while he was fleeing from the
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Cyclops. For this affront, Poseidon decided to make Odysseus' journey home a long and difficult one. The god of the sea sends a storm his way but Odysseus survives with a gift and guidance. After Poseidon departs, he finally reaches the shore with Athena's help. The opening scenes in the Aeneid corresponds to Homer's sequence. Aeneas and the Trojans are on their ships, heading to accomplish their goals after much difficulty. However, Juno is worried that the Trojans' descendants will eventually surpass the Greeks, so she convinces Aeolus to release to some winds to destroy them. Aeolus releases them by pushing his spear at the flank of the mountain, nearly devastating the Trojans. Much to the avail of Aeneas, Neptune quiets the winds and the seas, and then rides away.

Odysseus and the Trojans have much in common. Both are plagued by gods (shows how the Gods played a large part in both of their cultures). Despite their troubles, both are also guaranteed eventual success, for their accomplishments have been ordained by the supreme God, and this cannot be denied. However, the distinction between the source of their difficulties is an important one. Odysseus willingly invited disaster by flaunting the power of the gods. If he had not done so and followed custom as he should, he would have returned home much sooner with much less travail. The Trojans are simply subject to disaster, for no reason whatsoever. There are again basic similarities between the two situations; both Phaiakia and Carthage represent ideal societies to the wanderers. But again, the differences between the two societies illuminate the differences in ideology. Phaiakia is a static culture, a type of fairy tale place where everything is in perfect harmony. As long as its citizens follow custom as they should, it will continue

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to exist in perfection. Carthage is a dynamic culture, one link in the chain of successively better societies.

The former is an immortal society, existing forever; the latter is a mortal society in the process of birth, and consequently the possibility of death. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus sits in the ashes of the fire. Everyone rests, and the next day is spent in festivities. Afterwards, Odysseus recounts his various wanderings to the Phaiakians. Then he is sped on his way home. In the *Aeneid*, Venus sends Cupid in the form of Ascanius to make Dido fall in love with Aeneas. Aeneas then recounts two tales to Dido and her court: the fall of Troy and the Trojan wanderings. Meanwhile, Dido has become enamored with Aeneas, and eventually Aeneas reciprocates her love. He decides to stay in Carthage and help with the building until he is chastised by Hermes. When he then prepares to leave, Dido becomes enraged and then despondent. Finally, after he is gone she takes her own life. Even though Odysseus is given very good treatment by a variety of people, he never doubts for a moment that he belongs home on Ithaca. For example, when he was with Calypso, he had immortality and divine companionship; moreover, his return home would be fraught with adversity. His wanderings merely represent his unceasing climb back to his proper place, where he always has and always will belong.

However, Aeneas' tale is far different. He begins with the fall of Troy, which was precipitated by the Trojan Horse. Aeneas is the pinnacle of his culture, the paragon of sacrifice and duty who carried his father out of Troy. Even he falls prey to his human passions and stays with Dido. Dido is then consumed

in flames just like Troy, and her final words are prelude to strife between Rome and Carthage in the future. The comparison of these scenes shows the fundamental differences between the Greek and Roman ideals. The Greeks believed in the everlasting power of custom to protect and preserve them, and that any tragedy stemmed from their own recklessness. In a sense, Odysseus brought his troubles upon himself. The Romans' world was much more uncertain because of the constant possibility for disaster, and believed that human existence was inherently a tragedy. Even had all the Trojans done nothing wrong, they still would have received the winds sent at Juno's wish. All they had was vulnerable, their lives, their cities, and their civilization; anything could be destroyed by the godless discord. Thus, it is not surprising that the Greek and Roman epics were so different, since what they perceived were really two different worlds.