

Odyssey and aeneid

Literature



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In order to arouse interest in a battle scene, certain fundamentals must be explored. Many would argue that battle scenes need " blood and guts". This can be seen as the basis of a battle scene, if there is no gore, is it really a battle scene at all? There is however more to an interesting battle scene than just the gore. In contrast to authors creating moments of vivid gore, many authors will also try to evoke pity in order to keep the reader on the side of the hero. Evoking pity for the hero can also keep the reader attached to the hero on a heightened emotional level.

A well-described battle scene will often use dramatic irony, that is, where the reader knows what will happen next when some or all of the protagonists have no idea about future events. This makes a reader want to read on because they will want to see the reaction of an unknowing protagonist when the truth dawns on them. In contrast to this is using the unexpected, that is, where the reader cannot see what will happen and so will read on to find out what will happen. Written battle scenes will also often include many vivid descriptions to allow us to picture the events and have a deeper emotional connection with the protagonists.

Similes are used by epic poets to create vivid image. One of the purposes of the simile is to make the impressive feats of heroes easier to relate to.

Similes also deepens the response on an emotional level, they can create more disgust, evoke more pity and increase the levels of horror. Varying the pace of the story can be important because it will show the reader that they are effectively in " the eye of the storm", that is they have just had an exciting scene and now there is a moment of quiet before another moment of great anticipation will be upon us.

A successful battle scene shows how skilful or powerful the hero of the epic is, this increases the admiration the reader may have for the protagonist, which makes the reader more engaged. The motive for the battle must be portrayed. This adds excitement to the battle scene and generally makes it more interesting and intense. This is because it enables us to sympathise with the motive that the hero may have. If the reader agrees with this motive, then they are more supportive of the hero. Epic poets would also frequently include divine intervention that is gods would often help or hinder the hero.

This increases interest by showing that a hero is loved by the gods. If the god is hindering the hero and the hero overcomes it, it emphasizes how great the hero must be. Use of divine intervention also adds tension, because we do not know if the gods are going to intervene and if they do, we have no idea what they are going to do. Perhaps the most obvious element of an interesting battle scene is the close shaves, for example perhaps the injury of a hero or an arrow that narrowly misses him.

This would increase the tension and intensity and could be used to vary the pace of the battle scene in order to keep the reader's adrenaline flowing. Close shaves can also be used to hint to the reader that a climatic moment is coming up and so keeps the reader reading. This essay will judge whether Virgil or Homer creates the more interesting battle scene based on blood and guts, the basis of the scene, examples are littered throughout both books, the Odyssey has "Antinous' life-blood gushed from his nostrils in a jet".

The use of the word turbid maximises the gore that a reader will imagine, by making us imagine blood coming from Antinous' throat like water comes through a river. The word life-blood shows that Antinous stands absolutely no chance of surviving. The Aeneid also has gruesome scenes, the first gore filled passage actually comes before the main battle scene, that is when Laocoon is gruesomely murdered by two serpents with " blood-red crests... eyeballs blazing and bloodshot" this shows just how gruesome and gory the serpents were before they had killed Laocoon.

These serpents also attack Laocoon's sons, they are said to " bite off and swallow the poor child's limbs" this can attract readers who enjoy such graphic gore, such as the Romans who this epic poem is intended for. The next graphic moment in the Aeneid can be seen when Aeneas and his company " slaughter Androgeos". The word slaughter implies no chance of Androgeos surviving; this is in contrast with the rest of the situation, where the Trojans have no chance of surviving. Slaughter also implies a gruesome death with much blood and gore.

The way that a man who is almost laughing at the way the Greeks are burning Troy and has the sudden reality of who he is talking to rapidly changes the tone of the passage, he is then " slaughtered" and the tone lightens again when the Trojans come up with a plan. This enables the reader to become more engaged with the way the Trojans were thinking. The Odyssey too has many gory parts, for example Odysseus is said to " strike Leodes full in the neck, so that his head fell in the dust before he had even stopped speaking.

This would strike many people as being cruel, however Leodes was one of the suitors who coveted Odysseus' wife. The way Leodes head falls in the dust before he even stops speaking shows how quickly Odysseus must have swung the sword and so would also be an example of showing just how great the hero (Odysseus) was. Portraying the battle in a gory way cannot be done effectively without the use of vivid descriptions, these can be found throughout both books, for example in the Odyssey, Antinous is just reaching for his " fine cup" when he is shot in the neck, this shows how peaceful the moment was prior to his execution.

Fine implies it was a rich setting, surrounded by affluent men and so no killing is likely. This word is also used to good effect in that it changes the pace of the story, from Odysseus firing the bow, to a slow moment when nothing really happens, and on to a face off between the suitors and Odysseus before the main battle scene. In the Aeneid, Greek troops are said to " force their violent way in", using both the words " force" and " violent" shows that everything must succumb to their superior power and strength.

Back to the Odyssey, as Eurymachus attacked Odysseus he let out a " blood-curdling shout" this brings the shout to the mind of the reader as being particularly piercing and so not just a shout. To follow on from the previously mentioned quote of the " fine cup" varying the pace of the scene, other examples must also be mentioned, in the Aeneid, Sinon is used to great effect, because little happens whilst he is pontificating, and virtually as soon as he is done, Aeneas is having a dream about Hector and suddenly Troy is under attack.

This changes the pace and tone of the epic in a very speedy manner, thus enabling the reader to emotionally interact with the way the Trojans must feel the moment they realise that they were tricked. The next point to consider is dramatic irony, in the Aeneid it is obvious, due to Aeneas telling Dido at the beginning of the book, that bringing the great horse into Troy was a bad move, Aeneas says the horse was "packed... with a squad of armed soldiers". Also the mere fact that Aeneas is in Carthage is a clue that Troy has fallen at the hands of the "horse the size of a mountain".

The reader therefore knows that the horse will be the downfall of Troy. In the Odyssey, the suitors have no idea who Odysseus is even when told, they still believe he is "just a beggar". The reader knows that this is not the case because the reader has followed Odysseus on his quest to return to Ithaca. The suitors then presuppose that Odysseus killing Antinous was an accident, "each of them had laboured under the delusion that it had been an accident". The reader clearly knows that Odysseus shooting Antinous was no accident because we know that Odysseus is Odysseus.

The suitors being under the "delusion" that it was an accident also implies stupidity on their part, almost as if they are just imagining Odysseus being a beggar who could not deliberately shoot a man. Due to the way in which Odysseus has control over the situation and Aeneas does not, the reader will be more emotionally inclined to favour Odysseus, more knowledgeable readers will also know that Aeneas fails in his attempt to save Troy and that Odysseus succeeds in killing the suitors.

The natural "glory-hunting" part of the reader will therefore be inclined towards favouring the battle scene in the Odyssey. The ensuing point already noted was the use of similes. This technique is used extensively in both of these epic poems; firstly I shall focus on the Odyssey. The suitors say to Odysseus that for shooting "the greatest nobleman in Ithaca: for that the vultures shall eat you". This implies that the suitors know that they can be compared to vultures, not just for scavenging of a beggar, but also for coveting Penelope and raping Odysseus maids for so long.

Vultures also do not tend to fight, more scavenge, and so a fight would mean that the numbers of the suitors would be more equal to Odysseus' greatness, thus adding tension and making the battle scene more exciting. The next two similes come in quick succession, firstly the suitors are compared to "a herd of cattle that a darting gadfly has attacked and stampeded, in the spring-time when the long days come in." By comparing the suitors to a herd of cattle, it shows that their only real defence is their numbers; Odysseus is compared to a gadfly, which shows how easily she can disperse and panic such tame opposition.

This also shows how the suitors outnumber Odysseus and his company, resulting in a more exciting battle scene. The second of these two similes compares the suitors to "small birds" who are attacked by large vultures with "curving claws". Comparing the suitors to small birds, does however, evoke a degree of pity for the suitors, as small birds are quite defenceless and are also considered to be pleasant creatures that also would not hurt anybody (this is quite obviously not the suitors, as they would hurt Odysseus

and his comrades, however they are unable to due to Athene's " deadly aegis").

Homer evoking pity for the suitors shows that Odysseus cannot be entirely in the right, even for Greek standards, thus emotionally provoking a response from the reader and so increasing interest. The next simile can be found further into the book when the dead suitors are compared to " fish that fishermen have dragged out of the grey surf in the meshes of their net on to a curving beach, to lie in masses on the sand longing for the salt water, till the bright sun ends their lives.

This emphasizes further just how helpless the suitors were, and now how they are lying in piles on the floor. The final simile can then be found when Eurycleia finds Odysseus, he is said to be " like a lion when he comes from feeding on some farmer's bullock, with blood dripping from his breast and jaws on either side, a fearsome spectacle. " This shows again what an advantage Odysseus has in the prior situation and then how he killed the suitors, almost in a hurried fashion, thus demonstrating ease and so increasing admiration for Odysseus and so increasing interest.

Moving on to similes in the Aeneid's book two, the first example comes a little further into the book than the first simile in the Odyssey, once the battle has begun, the sounds of battle are compared to " a fire fanned by a furious wind, raging through the corn fields, or the roar of a river in flood rampaging down from the mountains, flattening the fields and the welcome crops that the oxen have toiled for, wildly sweeping the woods away.

This not only emphasizes but also to some extent exaggerates the monstrous noise from the battle and so evokes a large degree of pity for Aeneas as realisation hits him and so the reader can become more emotionally involved with Aeneas' actions from there on. The next simile compares "reckless fighters" (Rhipheus, Epyus, Hypanis, Dymas and Coroebus) to "wolves in a dense dark fog, whose nagging hunger has sent them out prowling blindly, whose cubs wait behind the den, their stomachs quite empty."

Comparing these fighters to wolves in search of food shows the desperation that must be involved to kill a Greek in this situation. A dense dark fog" shows that it is near impossible to see where they are going let alone to even find a Greek. This adds tension to the moment, because a Greek could sneak up behind them or the like. The penultimate simile describes how Pyrrhus is like "a snake that glides into the light after a cold winter couched underground, swollen with the poisonous herbs it has fed on; now having sloughed off its skin, in gleaming bright colours, all new, it sinuously slithers its coils and lifts its head high to the sun, its forked tongue flickering.

This portrays Pyrrhus as a creature, which is puffed out, almost as if flowing with adrenaline, thus puffing out. His "forked tongue flickering" shows clinical precision about the way he "prances own the hall". "Bright colours" would emphasize his "gleaming armour". This adds to the descriptive qualities involved and so would increase the interest to even higher standards. Battle scene motives must also be outlined, the motive in the Odyssey is to take revenge upon the suitors who "courted" Penelope and "raped" Odysseus' maids when he was away in Troy for 20 years.

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This is a motive, which many modern readers would agree is slightly over the top, however that is by modern standards, for a Greek that may well seem to be a fair punishment and so the reader would agree with this motive. In the Aeneid, Aeneas has no choice but to fight, otherwise the Greeks would simply kill both him and all other Trojans. All readers, both modern and ancient, would agree that Aeneas' actions are entirely justified.

Therefore because Aeneas would have the more sound reason for slaughter, the reader would prefer his character in that particular point in the story. Thus at that particular point in the story the Aeneid is more interesting. Epic poets opt for events affected by divine intervention because divinity was a common belief then; anyone who did not believe in the Greek or Roman gods was seen as barbaric. Moments where the gods are either mentioned or play a significant role are used frequently and were clearly at the disposal of these epic poets.

For example in the Aeneid when Venus appears to Aeneas to show many other gods sacking parts of Troy " and Pallas Athena - look! - bestrides the citadel ... with the grim Gorgon's head on her shield. " In the Odyssey Athene appears to Odysseus in the form of Mentor, Odysseus's childhood friend. " Odysseus had a shrewd idea, when he said this, that he was addressing the warrior goddess, Athene". Using divine intervention in an epic poem also shows that both the hero and the author have a degree of piety about them.

This can increase interest for a Greek or Roman, as they were deeply pious. Close shaves are used in all battle scenes to increase tension and so keep the reader's interest alive. Examples in the Odyssey can be seen when the

suitors are throwing spears at Odysseus and his Company and " Amphimedon succeeded in catching Telemachus on the wrist - a glancing blow, the bronze just grazed the skin". In the same volley " a long spear from Ctesippus, flying over Eumaeus' shield, scratching his shoulder before it passed beyond and fell to the ground".

This can be seen as interesting because of the tension built up about whether or not the spears will cause any lasting damage. In the Aeneid, Trojans are throwing spears at people who they think are Greeks when in fact they are Trojans in disguise. This builds up tension in wonder about whether or not Aeneas will be among the wounded or dead, however, if the reader thinks then they will realise that it is Aeneas who is narrating the story and so he cannot be dead.

Despite this tension is still built up. Building tension in this way can be used to increase the pace of the passage and so vary the pace in a differing manner from earlier. Due to the way in which tension is still built up despite the reader already knowing that Troy will fall and Aeneas will escape, the battle scene that Virgil creates must greatly appeal to the human subconscious and so this must be a truly great battle scene,

In balance, both epics have their high points of interests with few points of less interests, however on balance the Odyssey's battle scene does appeal more to the gore-loving reader, as the Romans and Greeks were. Odysseus' morbid thoughts would appeal more than the pious thought of Aeneas to most readers and so that is why book 22 of the Odyssey has a more interesting battle scene than book 2 of the Aeneid.