

"the epic of gilgamesh" and homer's "odyssey" essay sample

[Literature](#), [Poetry](#)



“ The Epic of Gilgamesh” and Homer’s “ Odyssey” Essay Sample

In this essay I am going to deal with the two epic texts called: “ The Epic of Gilgamesh” and Homer’s “ Odyssey”. For both texts, I will discuss the cultural value of “ heroism”

In order to make a good analysis of both texts we have to know what “ Epic” means. Webster’s defines it as “ a long poetic composition, usually centered upon a hero, in which a series of great achievements or events is narrated in elevated style” (Webster’s Universal College Dictionary, New York: Gramercy Books, 1997). In each of the texts there is a protagonist as a hero, these are Gilgamesh and Odysseus. “ Odysseus, of Homer’s The Odyssey, is an appropriate hero and ruler of Ithaca. He does not act irrationally but contemplates his actions and their implications. Odysseus is a perfect example of a hero because he embodies the values of bravery, intelligence and competency. Odysseus is an appropriate ruler for Ithaca by virtue of his hereditary right to kingship as well as his diplomatic skills, familiarity with his male subjects, discipline, and his impartiality and compassion. (, accessed on 20. 03. 2003).

In the Odyssey, Homer depicts Odysseus as a very brave character: He must be brave in order to be a hero. “ You must not cling to your boyhood any longer-it’s time you were a man. Haven’t you heard what glory Prince Orestes won throughout the world when he killed that cunning, murderous Aegisthus, who’d killed his famous father? And you, my friend-how tall and handsome I see you now-be brave, you too, so men to come will sing your

<https://assignbuster.com/the-epic-of-gilgamesh-and-homers-odyssey-essay-sample/>

praises down the years." (Fagles, Robert, *The Odyssey*, ' New York: Penguin Books. 1996 p. 87). The values and expectations of Greek society are very clearly indicated in this quotation.

While Odysseus is trying to return home from Ilium, there were lots of men attempting to persuade his wife to marry them these are the suitors. And at the home there is his son, Telemachus who have to deal with the suitors. He is waiting his father with his mom Penelope and he don't know even if Odysseus is alive or not. Odysseus' wisdom is won Athena's support, who is also impressed by his battle heroics, and so she decides to help Telemachus and Odysseus. She become Mentos and she shows Telemachus what to do, she does that because she is thinking Odysseus and his sake, she wants Telemachus to be like his dead. Also she don't want him to dissapoint his father. With Athena's assistance, Odysseus becomes a true hero. Even in the first four book we feel the heroic character of Odysseus. Goddess and gods are allways with him and everybody talks about him and his deeds.

In *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the character, Gilgamesh, is also depicted as a hero: " Supreme over the other kings, lordly in appearance, he is the hero, born in Uruk, the goring wild bull."(Kovacs, Maureen *The Epic of Gilgamesh* California Stanford University Press, 1989, p. 4) Since he has supernatural powers, he is physically strong, brave and protects his people. He is two-thirds god and one third human and this extraordinary condition explains why he was seen as a hero by others. Also like Odysseus his deeds makes Gilgamesh seen as a hero. " He walks out in front, the leader, and walks at the rear, trusted by his companions". (Kovacs, Maureen *The Epic of*

Gilgamesh ' California: Stanford University Press, 1989, p. 4). In order to become a hero for others, he must be perceived as a real hero by them. For example, Gilgamesh dug wells so that his people could do agriculture " It is he who opened the mountain passes, who dug wells on the flank of the mountain" (Kovacs, Maureen, The Epic of Gilgamesh, ' California: Stanford University Press, 1989, p. 4) and constructed the walls of Uruk to protect his people.

In both of the books, the two main characters also have conflicted characteristics; showing that heroes are not considered as perfect in either society. Gilgamesh, for example, is accustomed to sleep with new brides before their husbands can and this makes his people question his character. " Gilgamesh does not leave a son to his father, day and night he arrogantly (?)... Is Gilgamesh the shepherd of Uruk-Haven, is he the shepherd...bold, eminent, knowing and wise? Gilgamesh does not leave a girl to her mother" (Kovacs, Maureen, The Epic of Gilgamesh, ' California: Stanford University Press, 1989, . p. 5) Odysseus, too, has a conflicting character. That is why he is called " cunning" and Homer describes his as " the man with twists and turns" (Fagles, Robert, The Odyssey, ' New York: Penguin Books. 1996 p. 77). On the other hand, Odysseus is the exact opposite of Gilgamesh because he really cares about his people, above all his family and his wife. Both characters try to reach a goal. Gilgamesh tries to be immortal, while Odysseus tries to come back to his home and family.

Heroism appears as a cultural value in both The Epic of Gilgamesh and Homer's The Odyssey. Because both of the main protagonists are depicted

as heroes, we see that both societies consider heroism to be an important value. As readers of these two epics, we learn what heroes are expected to be like in each society and we see what other values are related, such as bravery, loyalty wisdom or competence. These virtues are also combined with less desirable characteristics, such as cunning or trickery. While these can be seen as character flaws, they also help the heroes to achieve their goals.