‘There are tears for suffering’ *Aeneid* 1.462. Show how Virgil conveys the pathos of suffering in the *Aeneid*. To what extent is a sympathetic vision of life evident in Homer’s *Odyssey?*

Above all else, the Odyssey is a moral poem, where the guilty are punished and the good are exulted. No loose ends or unfinished business obstruct our certainty that all those involved have received their just deserts. Due to the lack of *tragedy* in the Odyssey, it was Aristotle that labelled it a *‘comedy’*. However, the Aeneid is a far more complex arrangement of characters, many of which perish for the glory of Rome to be realised. The constant and unalterable question hanging in the background throughout the poem is whether duty and honour overrides all this tragedy. Is the Roman race really worth all this inflicted pain?

The future of the Romans is secured by the end of the Aeneid, and the final scene is representative of the themes of the story as a whole. We are left with an ending that is unsatisfying in the same way that the end of the Odyssey is appealingly simplistic. In the end of the Odyssey is left with the hero returning home to his wife and laying down on the bed together (or a triumphant end to the warring by Athene). But in the Aeneid, we find the man who will found the Roman race ends the story plunging his sword “full into his enemy’s breast”, an enemy that has just attempted to supplicate to Aeneas. It is impossible to contest that Turnus deserves his death more than someone like Pallas (“he will bitterly regret this spoil” A.10.505). Yet the description of Turnus’ fleeing spirit departing his body to “join the shades” is deliberately similar to that of Pallas’ death two books earlier. Pallas is an inexperienced and beloved son of Aeneas’ ally Evander, who bravely fought the aggressor Turnus as the “weaker” of the two and Turnus is an “insolent” warlord who scornfully and frequently disparages the father son bond (“giving him back the Pallas he deserves” A.10.493). But they *both* die. In his past, Mezentius was a hideously victimising King, who was hated by all his people (“barbaric crimes committed by this tyrant” A.8.485). But in the final scene of Mezentius’ death in Book 10, Virgil depicts him as a brave fighter who faces down the killer of his son, even though he knows he will perish (“I have come here to die” A.10.882). Do we look on this tyrant now as a Suitor of the Odyssey or a Hector of the Iliad?

This does remind us of an important factor in Virgil’s portrayal of death in the Aeneid - that no one is whiter than white and sympathy for the loser is quintessentially Virgilian, no matter what they have done. People die in the Aeneid and a reason is not always supplied. The gods, supposed arbiters of fate and justice, do not make events so clear cut and rarely supplies a reason for a death we might think unjust or undeserved. Virgil indeed asks this question at the start of the poem, and does not resolve the issue by the end (“Can there be so much anger in the hearts of the heavenly gods?” A.1.11). The poet also has a frequent quirk of bringing in characters just for them to die. Camilla in Chapter 11 has her life story told to us before she dies on the battlefield, at the hands of a cowardly long-range spear throw

and the aid of Apollo. Nisus and Euryalus also had only the briefest of mentions before their monopoly of Chapter 9, which tells the story of their heroic venture into the enemies camp and their doom therein. By bringing in these characters, enriching them by describing their impressive feats of arms and then having their tragic death within the same chapter emphasises to us the brevity of life and the life of a successful warrior in particular. The references of their past life through flashbacks ("Metabus…took his infant daughter with him…called her Camilla" A.11.540) is also important, as it reminds us of the life they have left behind to become engrossed in the war which will bring their doom. This technique is particularly employed in Book 2, as Virgil steps outside the narrative to comment on the death of Priam, referring to how he "had once been the proud ruler over so many lands". But he has now come to an ignominious end, without even a burial ("a corpse without a name" A.2.558). In this way he has given a flashback and a prophecy in the same episode, referring to glorious days passed and still more dishonours yet to come beyond this pitiable death at the hands of Pyrrhus.

The ultimate evocative episode in the Aeneid is that with Dido, where we see once again the use of destruction from exultation, and eventual pitiable ending. Aristotle described in his analysis of a perfect tragedy for the stage that the tragic figure should be seen from glory, through revelation, into reversal and destruction, and this is exactly how we see Dido. The entirety of her tragic and impossible love is shown, from its development, through its fulfilment, to its eventual destruction of her and her people. We finally see her even in the Kingdom of Dis. We hear about her escape from Tyre and her murderous brother. She has brought her people through many hardships to enjoy a prosperity which they have worked hard for ("tossed from one wretchedness to another until at last I have been allowed to settle in this land" A.1.629). Every description is made of her admirable and enviable qualities in Book 1, her efficiency, and the respect she received from the Carthaginians ("bore herself joyfully among her people…giving laws and rules of conduct" A.1.505ff). She is described as beautiful and majestic "as Diana" yet the irony is that she will eventually become the wounded deer, not the huntress, due to her crippling and debilitating love. She is a good host ("safe under my protection" A.1.571) and her city is flourishing in its prosperous infancy. However, the exultation of the Queen is all so that her eventual doom is all the more pitiable, as we remember what she was like before.

When the debilitating love hits her she is unable to do anything and is a shadow of her former self. Her people require the help of the Queen to build the city but receive none, due to her wounded state. They are like the bleating cattle of Polyphemus, unable to help them in their distress. She has been brought low by the goddess Venus and her son Cupid ("breathe fire and poison into her" A.1.689). Tragic irony is poignantly employed, playing upon our knowledge of what happens to the Queen, in episodes where she is enjoying exultant festivities ("fixed her whole heart on him…dandled her on her knee, without knowing…marking her out to suffer" A.1.716ff). The entirety of Book 4 builds up to the revelation as she shows down Aeneas about his abandonment of her. Her terrible suicide and curse on the Trojans and the line of Aeneas occurs after a long lament of shame ("you have done wrong and it is now coming home to you" A.4.595). She dies at her own hand then, and is unable to take the honourable death she would have had had she led her people to glory. Thus we see her as a shadowy wraith in Book 6 on the "mourning plains" ("their suffering does not leave them even in death" A.6.445), not the "land of joy". If she had remained alive and led her people to their great future awaiting them, then she would not have been imprisoned to this everlasting place of weeping

and grief. It is no coincidence that Phaedra is included on the plain with Dido – they were both victims of the frivolous will of Venus. She is described rejoining Sychaeus, poetically because we as readers have come to the stage where we can not take any more suffering on one person.

Whilst in the Aeneid there is no one that absolutely deserves his or her death, in the Odyssey there are few characters, if any, that are dealt a judgement they do not deserve. Cause and effect rule the events of the poem. The young sailor Elpenor got too drunk in Book 10, fell off the roof of Circe's house and broke his neck. Whilst it is indeed unfortunate, it was his own fault. If he had not become so inebriated he would not have died. The Suitors are disloyal to the absent King Odysseus, wilfully consuming his reserves of his palace, rebuking seers, and courting the sorrowful Queen Penelope, at the dismay of the growing Prince Telemachus. The Suitors in turn then are slaughtered, all 108 of them. Odysseus' crew killed and ate the Cattle of Hyperion on Thrinacie, despite warnings from Circe and Tiresias that to do so would mean no homecoming for them. The crew, then are destroyed by the thunderbolt of Zeus, God of Justice. As Zeus declared in Book 1, Aegisthus ignored the warnings of Hermes, killed Agamemnon and married Clytemnestra. As a result, the avenging Orestes killed him. In the song of Demodocus, Ares the adulterer courts Hephaestus' wife Aphrodite and sleeps with her. He is then trapped whilst in fornication and shown to the Olympians in disgrace. Odysseus endures his trials with fortitude and temperance, and is in turn given a restful old age with his wife. Odysseus told his name to the Cyclops in as spark of Iliadic pride and is punished by the curse of Poseidon as a result. Thus the Odyssey is a moral tale of justice being carried out. The scholar Jones declares correctly that the end of the Odyssey "would be repugnant if the slaughter of the suitors were not seen to be morally justified".

Whilst the people who are killed or punished in the Odyssey deserve their fate, the descriptions of their deaths are never so one sided. We are left in no doubts by the end of Book 21 that the Suitors deserve their death and countless references have been made to their blasphemy, greed, treachery and disrespect to the House of Laertes. It is only due to the pitiable descriptions of their doom which make us slightly uneasy ("dead men and the sea of blood" O.22.408). Odysseus is very careful to remind us that this deed had to be done and the opinions of those who did it are not important ("gloat in silence…their own transgressions have brought them to this ignominious death" O.22.409ff). The descriptions of the sailors' doom on the sea are far more pitiable than the Suitors' within the feasting hall, even though both have been treacherous. We can account for this by remembering that these Suitors are princes and young men who didn't join the Trojan War. Thus their descriptions of their ignoble deaths amongst their gluttony are less evocative of pathos than the Ithacan veteran sailors' death, on the high seas.

However, with that said, Homer frequently shows those who are receiving their deserved fate in a more positive light than we would expect. The monstrous Cyclops Polyphemus, despite his horrific consumption of six members of Odysseus' crew is pitiably depicted, futilely trying to herd his flocks, attempting to help his animals though he was "tortured and in terrible agony". It pains him that his females are standing "bleating at the pens" because they have not been milked. Odysseus' crew, whilst frequently treacherous and disloyal to their Captain, are described with massive pathos when they are killed ("as though they had been puppies" O.9.290). Similarly, Odysseus feels terrible pity for their death at the hands of Scylla ("shrieking…in their last desperate throes…never had to witness a more pitiable sight than that" O.12.258) and at the hands of Laestrygonians ("the groans of dying men…was appalling" O.10.123). This fantastic use of rhetoric as Homer describes the

gory sights of pitiable doom magnify the pity we feel for the crew, who have fallen victim to misfortune and at other times doom they have brought upon themselves. The pity evoked when the men are killed at the hands of monsters is natural revulsion at their gory demise. The pathos Homer creates when we hear about the Suitors' doom, the Cyclops or the destruction of the Ithacans must not be mistaken for disapproval at their judgement. It is normal human disgust for another person in torment and in their death throes, nothing more. It is intended to evoke pity but not anger at their doom and does not reflect upon those who inflicted the agonies. This is true in most cases. Odysseus' destruction of the suitors had to be done. Zeus' destruction of the Ithacan crew had to be done. But the Laestrygonians, Scylla and the Cyclops are unfortunate mishaps, committed by terrible monsters, with no piety or civility. It does not reflect on their leader Odysseus that they endured this torment – it was just ill luck along the voyage, a voyage which, if anything, was elongated by the crew.

The Aeneid on the other hand has difficult distinctions between who deserves their suffering and who does not. The entirety of Book 2 is packed full of pathos. There is no reference to the Trojans deserving their doom, instead saying that "divine Fate" and "the minds of the gods" were "set against" them. We are certain from the start that the Trojans have no chance of surviving the night. The descriptions of episodes such as Priam and Pyrrhus, the weeping women in Pergamum, the death of Creusa, and Laocoon with his sons all convey such massive pity that we are left with a sense of revenge at the end of the book and hatred for the Achaeans. The pathos evoked even makes us question the gods ("this was the last day of a doomed people and we spent it adorning the shrines of the gods" A.2.248) and our thoughts return to the Proem ("Can there be so much anger in the hearts of the heavenly gods?" A.1.11). But we still have no answer.

The didactic message within the entirety of the Aeneid is that the Romans reading Virgil's work must live up to the sacrifices made in the poem so that Rome might survive. The more pitiable the scene, the more the expectation is on the contemporary reader to be a good Roman citizen to make up for what they suffered ("So heavy was the cost of founding the Roman race" A.1.34).

The literary techniques employed by the two poets, Virgil and Homer, include the use of similes at moments of intense drama. These include scenes of pathos and torment and help to magnify our natural pity by appealing to yet another kind of compassion we are prone to, usually our sympathy for animals. Dido's love is frequently referred to that of a "wounded deer", the Ithacan crew's death at the hands of Polyphemus to helpless "puppies". Virgil's most impressive tool in evoking pity though is his reference to the family of the murdered person, and usually to the father/son bond. This is used to great effect in the Pyrrhus and Priam scene in Book 2 ("defiling a father's face" A.2.539) and also the references to Evander when Pallas is killed ("I wish his father were here to see it" A.10.445). Virgil even takes an interlude to tell us of the pain of Evander when he receives the body of his son ("A father should not survive his son" A.11.160). Family references are also employed with Dido's death. She frequently laments that she did not keep "faith with the ashes of Sychaeus". Her thoughts of suicide are also observed by the unknowing sister Anna, who is eventually the first to be at her dead sister's side ("tearing her face and beating her breast, calling out her sister's name" A.4.674). As Aeneas drives his sword through Lausus' chest and through his tunic, a reference is made to how it was his mother that made it. The pain therefore does not just touch Lausus but will fall to his mother also. With Aeneas' words such as "Why do you take on tasks beyond your strength?" the insinuation is made that this is a boy fighting way past

his own capabilities. His youthful depiction outweighs any heroism. Even Aeneas' murderous "anger" is dissolved in pity as his thoughts turn to the motive for Lausus' ill-fated attack (his attempts to defend his father, despite Mezentius' dishonourable character) and also his identification with his love for his own father Ascanius. The technique is masterful, as Virgil makes us understand the reversal of places and a connection is made between both killer and victim. Homer makes no connection between Antinous and Odysseus for example, and the hero feels no remorse for what he has done. It had to be done. But in the Aeneid, the death was just the felling of an innocent life, not due to crimes committed, but just because he became entangled in the terrible war.

If we try and answer Virgil's enduring question (can the gods justify all this?) we are at a loss. The pains of Dido were brought about by the goddess Venus, who wishes to look after Aeneas, at the expense of all others ("I am afraid of Juno's hospitality" A.1.671). The fate of the book is ruled by favouritism. Camilla is an extreme favourite of Diana, who releases her wrath on the killer Arruns. Yet Arruns would not have 'struck lucky' if it wasn't for the assistance of Apollo, who was appealed to by the cowardly Arruns, referring to the Trojan honours given to him. Juturna excuses Turnus from the battle at the expense of the thousands of combatants who die whilst she elongates his life in futility. The gods are working for their mortals but only because of their own feelings for them, not understanding them. Juno saves Turnus from the battlefield at great distress to the hero ("thanking no one for his safety" A.10.666). Venus assists her son but never consoles him or comes to him in person in his distress ("you too are cruel" A.1.408). The Gods work on their own rules and whilst Hercules is not allowed to help his favourite Pallas ("helpless tears streamed from his eyes" A.10.468), Juno gets others to assist her in her aims, such as Allecto and Juturna. The quarrels of the Gods, not justice causes men's ills in the poem. Whilst the Zeus of the Odyssey is exasperated that the mortals wrongfully attribute their suffering to the Gods' lack of intervention and assistance, the Jupiter of the Aeneid turns "his eyes away" from the suffering on the battle field. The Gods of the Aeneid both cause suffering to those such as Dido, and do not give help to those who need it like Pallas. They do not comprehend mortals and can not relate to them in the Aeneid. They treat them more like pets than favourites. But contrast this with one such as Athene in the Odyssey, who smiles at her favourite's attempts at deceiving her since she understands him so well ("You were always an obstinate, cunning and irrepressible intriguer…we both know how to get our way" O.13.293). The justice and morality of the Gods in the Odyssey, even by those such as the unruly Poseidon, who still asks Zeus before destroying the ship of the Phaeacians, and is well within his rights when he pesters Odysseus across the oceans, due to the blinding of Polyphemus and Odysseus' exultation over him afterwards (spreading kleos). But the Aeneid is no learning poem. Virgil is not intending to teach us but to move us. Mortals are caught up in the juggernaut of Rome's creation and are trampled underfoot. The reader must take the suffering and make Rome live up to the sacrifices.