

What Evidence is there in The Aeneid Book 1 that Virgil is an innovator rather than a plagiarist of Homer?

The two epic tales (written as songs to be sung by a muse as stories) both have several similarities. This does not necessarily mean that Virgil has in any way copied any of the material. However, with both the era and the some of the characters being the same it would be unfair to suggest that anything said or referred to in both the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* is merely accidental and or coincidental.

Virgil attempts to reproduce the epic style that the ancient Greek poet Homer established by invoking the muse at the opening of his poem, "Tell me, Muse, the causes of her anger." A similar invocation begins both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the Homeric epics that seem to be the models for Virgil's epic, and the *Aeneid* picks up its subject matter where Homer left off. The events described in the *Aeneid* form a sequel to the *Iliad* and are told at about the same time as that of the nostos of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*. Although Virgil mentions happenings in Homer's epic and frequently appears to come up with lines very much like those of Homer, he also attempts to surpass and revise the works of his contemporary, and the differences between the two authors' epics are important markers of literary evolution. Whereas the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* call the muse in the first line, Virgil begins the *Aeneid* with the words "I sing of arms and of the man," (meaning the story will talk of war and of a male character) and waits a number of lines before making his invocation for the Muse. It is as though Virgil is only the muse out of obligation rather than out of a genuine belief in divine inspiration. He emphasizes his presence as a narrator and becomes more like a medium through which the epic poem is channelled.

The hero at sea, buffeted by weather and hindered by unexpected encounters, is another frequent storyline in epic poetry. According to the Greeks, men's actions and fortunes are compelled by one unitary fate, and the specific events of their lives are dictated by a number of supernatural forces. Aeneas, sailing from the ruins of Troy toward Italy, is not completely in control of his direction and progress. Fate has ordained, we learn, that Aeneas and his people will found a new race in Italy that will eventually become the Roman Empire. Jupiter ensures this outcome, and none of the gods can prevent it from happening. They can, however, affect the *way* in which it happens, and the rivalries and private loyalties of the meddling gods make up the conflict in the poem. The difference between what happens in the *Aeneid* and in the *Odyssey* is that the gods do not interfere as much. As Jupiter has already determined his fate, the gods cannot do much to stop it, and in the *Odyssey*, there has been no fate already destined for Odysseus, and so no one has any need to affect him (other than Poseidon)

The way that Virgil begins the third paragraph shows a definite difference between his style and that of Homer. The way that Virgil begins with the line "The Trojans were in high spirits" after having said "so heavy was the cost of founding Rome". It seems strange that he would begin with such a different tone directly after such a moving last line. It is as if he is trying to show the vast difference in mood between the two races.

Prophecy and prediction take many forms in the *Aeneid*, including dreams, visitations from the dead, mysterious signs and omens. These windows into the future guide mortals toward fate as they endeavour to find out what is to come. Virgil's audience, however, hears these predictions with the advantage of hindsight, looking backward to observe the realization of an already accomplished fate. In the *Odyssey* however, Homer does not allow the audience to know what happens until it does happen. When Homer writes about the prophecies he speaks of them like they are directly from the gods, however when Virgil speaks of them he makes it sound like they are actual prophecies that have been made irrespective of the gods.

This rivalry between the gods looms over the narrative of the *Aeneid* so heavily that at times the story seems to be less about the deeds of the mortal characters than about the arguments of the gods, who continually disrupt and meddle with events on Earth. One of the *Aeneid*'s main **themes**, though, is that for both gods and mortals, fate always wins in the end. Aeneas is destined to settle in Italy, and not even the spoils of the queen of the gods can prevent this outcome. Jupiter, whose strong will is closely identified with fate because he is the highest of the gods, sees to it that his overall plan comes to pass. The fates that Homer writes of do not occur in the same way. Poseidon prevents Odysseus from returning home and so delays his fate.

Both Homer and Virgil allude to the existence of unchangeable laws, one of which is the mortality of human beings. This can be seen by the fact that character after character dies during war, and the underworld is referred to many times. Homer indicates this law by writing of Patroklos' spirit's return to remind Achilles that, until he has been properly buried, he must wander the earth. These events show Virgil's and Homer's belief in laws that cannot be changed. Virgil however demonstrates the mortality of man by describing the underworld and all of its inhabitants, such as the men who died at the battle of Troy. The way that Virgil describes Hades, in much more detail and with real geological and manmade formations is very much different to the character-only based Hades of Homer's *Odyssey*.

Still, Virgil does not simply ignore the traces of Odysseus, nor of the Homeric tales. The most important realization of his rival's influence comes into play

when talking on the same subjects as Homer did. Instead of submitting wilfully to the stories told by Homer, he reforms them, making them harsh and unheroic, attempting to belittle the Homeric tales by setting up his own version of them, and in the process writing a new and different tale with only slight resemblances of what was an inspiration to his own epic story.