

## **The Iliad and the Odyssey: Shapers of the Future**

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The views and beliefs of societies are often portrayed in the literature and art of a certain era. Homer's poems, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, give scholars and historians an idea how the ancient Greeks lived their everyday lives. By reading the two, the reader is able to experience the three thousand years old society of Homer. Admired through the ages as the ultimate epic, Homer's *Iliad*, along with its companion-piece, the *Odyssey*, was recognized by the ancient Greeks themselves as the cornerstone of their civilization. In his book, *The New History of the World*, J. M. Roberts raises the issue of the impact of Homer's epics when he writes, "The *Iliad* and *Odyssey*...throw light on prehistory; they were also shapers of the future." For centuries, study of these two epics formed the basis of all Greek education. Roberts states that by the sixth century, they [*Iliad* and the *Odyssey*] were already regarded as the authoritative account of Greek history, a source of morals and models, and the staple of literary education. For many, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* mark the beginning of western literature and represent its earliest surviving works. They were both recognized in antiquity as great works of art and still retain this place in western literature, while the lessons learned from them are just as relevant today as when they were written.

The *Iliad*, by the strength of its prestige, sets the standard for the definition of the word *epic*: pertaining to a long poetic composition usually centered upon a hero, in which a series of great achievements or events is narrated in elevated style. These deeds were meant to arouse a sense of wonder or marvel in those who heard them. In the *Iliad*, Homer shows his views on heroes, villains, and war, writing that heroes have great qualities to them and that villains have evil qualities to them. He also shows that even heroes have villainous qualities. Homer also tries to convey that all warriors, and everyone for that matter, have a choice between a life of war and a life of peace. Homer's view of a hero displays bravery, martial skills, and even friendship. In the epic, most characters have their own heroic qualities and villainous qualities, some more than others. Homer shows that war brings out the best and worst in people and even warriors can battle and also live a life of peace and friendship. The *Iliad* brings out the best of martial ability, loyalty, and love to family. It also brings out pettiness, disloyalty, and murder.

In the *Odyssey*, the traveler discovers that life's lessons are learned through epic dimensions as seen through life's adventures, life's test of loyalty, and life's mistakes. Homer tells the reader a great tale of one man's life and the adventure to prove himself worthy. He writes that life is a grand adventure, and for one to understand and complete the grand adventure it can be seen as an abundance of small adventures. Homer shows that throughout the adventure of life, one must trust those closest to get through rough and hard times. In life most humans make mistakes throughout their life and so do Homer's heroes, such as Odysseus. When a person takes a grand journey it is a great test and opportunity to prove him a worthy person in front of family and friends. Homer shows that in order to reach ones objective victoriously one must endure hardships. Time and again Odysseus has proven himself but the gods intervene and throw him a new journey or hardship any time they can with the intention of increasing Odysseus' greatness.

In the *Odyssey*, the traveler discovers that life's lessons are learned through epic dimensions as seen in adventures, loyalty, and mistakes. Homer teaches valuable life lessons using his mastery of many writing techniques. His unique use of epithets and epic similes prove and display the dimensions and proportions used in his writing. In the *Odyssey*, one realizes that life is an epic adventure and that ones adventure can only be grasped if told in smaller tales. Homer's describes how daunting challenges in the many adventures one completes and in life itself would be all too hard to endure without the

assistance of loyal friends and family. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus makes mistakes during his journey along with every other human because, as Homer shows, no one is perfect.

In conclusion, according to Roberts, "The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* not only became the first documents of Greek self-consciousness, but the embodiment of the fundamental values of classical civilization. Later they were to even become more than this: together with the Bible, they became the source of western literature." The classical world made many contributions to the development of science, literature, and ethics. These contributions have influenced the modern world today. Homer, author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, made contributions to the field of literature through his writing that influenced all writers who followed. Roberts is correct in highlighting the contributions of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Their contributions were both recognized in antiquity as great works of art and continue to be recognized today as life lessons that continue to shape our future.

### **Bibliography**

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