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Throughout the epics of *The Odyssey* and *The Aeneid*, divine intervention and overcoming seemingly insurmountable odds are employed to materialize and define the culture’s values. While *The Odyssey* employs difficult situations and Athena’s magical and skillful impersonation to showcase Odysseus’s intelligence and witty character, whereas *The Aeneid* puts the hero in situations where the difficulty in solving them is choosing to do right instead of wrong.

In both epics, each hero overcomes obstacles that are hand picked to highlight each hero’s values and ideals. In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus’s curiosity after his curiosity leads him and some of his men into imprisonment in a man-eating Cyclops's cave, Odysseus calls himself “noman,” so that when he and his men attack the Cyclops, the Cyclops would be unable to gain help, as the monster says “Noman is killing me by tricks” (252). The other Cyclops hear “no man” instead, rendering the Cyclop’s legitimate plea for help just a joke to the others. With the display of his cunning trickery and unusual wittiness, Homer is able to demonstrate a highly prized skill during his time. Furthermore, even the epithet, or the commonly repeated phrase used as a nickname”, for Odysseus is a “complicated man,” which could be interpreted as a man of deceit and trickery (1.1 Emily Wilson). In a similar way, when Aeneas faces probably one of the most difficult obstacles in the epic, he must make a difficult decision between Dido and his quest to conquer Rome. While both encounter obstacles, what sets the two apart is the fact that the problem for Aeneas requires a clear moral conscience and unwavering dedication to the Roman Empire. Aeneas has two choices, either he will “not hang back” and that they “exert [his] courage” (6.806 Sarah Ruden), or he will continue to “[place foundations / For lofty Carthage, such a splendid city--/Forgetting your own kingdom that awaits you” (4.265-267 Sarah Ruden). Even though it seems harsh and almost cruel to leave Dido, Aeneas upholds the values of doing what is right and not what feels good. In both scenarios, it is apparent that they were designed to be solvable only through the character’s realization of his or her talents and ideals. In the case of Odysseus in the cave of the Cyclops, no amount of valour and conscience that Aeneas showcases would save Odysseus, and in the case of Aeneas, no amount of deceit could have prevented Dido from her insatiable desire for Aeneas. With tailored problems, the authors depict their values and the values of their culture as solutions to people’s problems. Not all problems in both epics were specifically tailored to just its hero’s unique talents. Some problems, such as the witch Circe who turns Odysseus’s men into pigs and the case where Aeneas is outnumbered by the Italians, showcase a universal trait of bravery and loyalty to one’s mission. After the witch Circe turns many of Odysseus’s men into pigs, the smart and clever decision would be to abandon his men, since at the time Odysseus is not aware of any way to escape the witch’s powers. A fellow soldier warns Odysseus that “[he] will not return” (10.268 Emily Wilson). However, Odysseus in this case goes against his usual tactic of thinking logically; instead, he does what he knows is best and rushes in to save his men. The only reason for making the decision is that he “must do this” (10.271 Emily Wilson). Fortunately, he manages to get an antidote and saves the day, but the purpose of this problem is to showcase the need sometimes for doing what is right and honorable, even when that may go against his intelligence. In modern times, the multitude of superhero movies also often employ specific problems with specific solutions. Each epic offers a piece of advice or showcases a value and a tool that is when combined together into a problem solving toolbox becomes a highly effective strategy for solving problems.

Furthermore, in both epics, the divine beings interact and sometimes interfere in the world and strongly affect the outcome of the story, supporting the theory that humans are naturally curious and interested in the supernatural. In the very start of *The Odyssey*, Odyseus is in captivity under the rule of Calypso, a “great goddess” who is “deathless [and] ageless” (5.218-219 Emily Wilson). Apart from the rote invocation, or the common calling to the muse god usually found at the start of epics, epics show the dichotomy and seemingly contradictory nature of a world of both people who seem to have independent control and also the idea of higher powers who have control. In both epics, the question with how much power humans have versus gods is called into question. Furthermore, the question is left unanswered in both epics. For example, while Athena claims that “a god / can easily save anyone, at will,” she also says that they are unable to “protect the people [from] fate and cruel death” (3.230,231,234 Emily Wilson). In *The Aeneid*, the deity interference is especially seen in the tension between June and Jove that results in the destruction of Dido’s sanity and as a result her reputation. However, even in *The Aeneid*, humans are not powerless. When Aeneas had enough of his troubles, Aeneas stands up for himself and his country in the face of the gods, commanding them that “Troy’s fortunes must not dog us any farther” (6.62 Sarah Ruden). Once again, however, to continue the tension between human and divine control, Aeneas also recognizes their superiority by offering to build “a solid marble shrine,” and establish “a festival / Named for Apollo” (6.69-71 Sarah Ruden). While the confusing inclusion of divine intervention raises many questions in these epics, what is most surprising is that deities have a part to play at all. With a modern perspective, many people jump to the seemingly contradictory ideas that these epics present, but in doing so, they are missing the point of these tales. The point of including the deities is to show the values of the writers’ cultures, which at the time held high regard for the deities.

In addition to divine interaction and tailored problems, both epics emphasize the importance of family responsibility through showing shared characteristics and by employing family problems as the major source of conflict. Throughout both epics, the family of the hero receives praise for being like the hero. For example, Penelope possesses a similar talent for cleverness and trickery as Odysseues. When the suitors want to know when she will marry them, she promised that she would marry them as soon as she finishes weaving a cloth. In the daytime, she would work on weaving the cloth, but during the night, she would unweave it. Using this trick, she is able to delay the suitors by “three long years” (2.108 Emily Wilson). In a similar fashion, Anchises and his son Aeneas both share a common interest to establish Rome. Anyone in their family who does not share that interest is eventually ignored, including Dido as Aeneas’s wife that holds him back from Rome. When meeting Aeneas in the underworld, Anchises wishes to “share [his] joy that [Aeneas has] reached Italy,” and Anchises then explains how it will be the duty of the family line to rule Rome, starting with Aeneas’s “posthumous son Silvius” who will be a “king and father kings” (6.718, 762, 765 Sarah Ruden). In a way, utilizing shared characteristics and goals among family members strengthens the bond of the family and showcases the fact that a hero does not often stand alone. In the case of Odysseus, without the cleverness and loyalty of Penelope, Odysseus, even if gifted all the intelligence and wit in the world, would be unable to save his home or his *oikos*, a Greek word meaning the economy of the household. Furthermore, to further stress the value of family, both epics use family as the major source of conflict. Although many may think this point dismissable, one should be surprised that in each of the two epics, family seems to take almost a more important role than the hero. For example, in *The Aeneid*, the author dwells for a long time on the doomed romance between Aeneas and Dido. While some may argue that Aeneas and Dido were never married and therefore Dido cannot be considered a familial relative, Virgil shows that the two were married by the symbol of lightning, writing that, “Juno, giver of brides, / Signaled, and in collusion lightning flashed / At the union” (4.166-167 Sarah Ruden). Even when Aeneas leaves to fulfill the prophecy of Rome, he even meets his partner again in the underworld as if to show that their love episode was just as important to the story as was Anchises’s dream of the future for Troy. One can argue that the conflict between choosing to continue his marriage with Dido or founding Rome is the central conflict. In *The Odyssey*, the family is so important to the story that not only is the goal of Odysseus to return home and restore his family, but even the first few chapters of the story focuses on Telemachus his son.

In conclusion, each epic employs tailored problems, familial problems as the source of major conflict, and the peculiar use of divine intervention are employed to showcase the unique and shared values of both epics.

Works Cited

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Virgil. *The Aeneid.* Edited and translated by Sarah Ruden, Yale University, 2008.