

By ANNE DONNELL

What is the difference between the Odyssey and the Iliad? I remember studying the Odyssey in the ninth grade. Are there any more great ancient works about the Trojan War? -Noticed a Book on This Online

The two works, long thought to be about a mythical city, have deep roots in history. Credited to Homer, whose existence, birthplace, and time of birth are disputed by many miles and hundreds of years, the two works have some significant differences. Some scholars insist the Iliad came first, perhaps by several decades. The Trojan War, which could be something with little resemblance to the epics about it, is often dated to the 12th century B.C. (or B.C.E. – your preference). Homer, code for the person or persons who created these works, is placed closer to the 800's B.C., maybe earlier.

Perhaps these are works polished over many generations of bards, an appealing idea as we think of the input of many gifted people contributing speech patterns both refreshing but also typical of specific locations in the ancient world -- people with prodigious memories who could repeat these works "by heart" to audiences equally capable of reciting the epics. Art growing through the ages.

Some scholars maintain that Homer existed and stylistic similarities in the two works speak to a common author, like the famed Homeric simile, a lengthy comparison unlike our typically short similes. From Book XXI, line 451 (Odyssey) "So they mocked, but Odysseus, mastermind in action, once he's handled the great bow and scanned every inch, then, like an expert singer, skilled at lyre and song--who strains a string to a new page with ease, making the pliant sheep-gut fast at either end--so with virtuoso ease Odysseus strung his mighty bow."

As to differences between the Odyssey and the Iliad, here are some general ideas. The Iliad deals with the years of the war and shows the complicated relationships between the people on each side (Greeks and Trojans) and the Olympic gods, who cannot get along with each other or with humans. There are glimpses of the pain of being human that are deeply effective. The great losses, the wastes, the longings are all here.

Perhaps the Odyssey could be said to have tailored its depiction of longings to a primary one: a man's longing for his own -- home, hearth, family -- when the fire for adventure, for fulfilling duty has been quenched. The epic tells of Odysseus's long journey home, complicated by his mistakes, his weaknesses, his offenses against the divine, but propelled by his desire for Ithaca -- home. It takes 10 years.

There certainly are other ancient works about the 10-year Trojan War. One is the Aeniad, a much later propaganda epic, but fine poem, in which Aeneas, the Trojan, journeys after the war and finally lands in Italy where he'll found Rome (Romulus and Remus be darned!). The point here being that Romans, who took a whopping cultural hit from ancient Greece, want the world to know they are proudly descended from an important (and non Greek) Trojan! The famed wooden horse leading to Troy's destruction is in this epic, not in Homeric ones. Vergil (also spelled "Virgil," 70 B.C. – 19 B.C.) is said to have been commissioned for this great work, 10 years in the writing, by Caesar Augustus.

ONLINE DEPARTMENT "You Can't Make Up This Stuff" (Thanks, J.A. and P.W.) [This e-mail consists of photos of newspaper headlines clipped from real newspapers, none local. Who's editing is unknown as is the condition of that editor and the people about whom these are written.] □ • *Worker suffers leg pain after crane drops 800-pound ball on his head* • *Bridges help people cross rivers* • *City unsure why the sewer smells* • *Meeting on open meetings is closed* • *Man accused of killing lawyer gets a new attorney* • *Puerto Rican teen named mistress of the universe* • *County to pay \$250,00 to advertise lack of funds* • *Army vehicle disappears [Wait, there's more] An Australian army vehicle worth \$74,000 has gone missing after being painted with camouflage.* • *Caskets found as workers demolish mausoleum [followed by heading] We had no idea anyone was buried there* • *Federal agents raid gun shop, find weapons* • *Statistics show that teen pregnancy drops off significantly after age 25* • *Meat head resigns* • *Barbershop singers bring joy to school for deaf* • *Homicide victims rarely talk to police* • *Hospitals resort to hiring doctors* • *Man with 8 DUIs blames drinking problem* • *New sick policy requires 2-day notice* • *Parents keep kids home to protest school closure* • *Police arrest everyone on February 22 [February 30 is a better choice for this.]* • *Rally against apathy draws small crowd* • *Starvation can lead to health hazards* • *The bra celebrates a pair of historic milestones this year* • *Total lunar eclipse will be broadcast live on Northwoods Public Radio* • *Rangers get whiff of colon* • *Miracle cure kills fifth patient.*

BW (Bigtime Word) heteroclite – abnormal, off the beaten path. Perhaps ancient Troy is altogether heteroclite for you?