

The Evolution of Epic Genre Across Ages: A Thematic and Ideological Study of The Homeric Epic

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Abstract

In antiquity, works of culture, created by the Greek-Roman people, passed centuries, the test of centuries and reached our era. Many samples of European literature, born in the Modern Age, have long been forgotten, and unique works, such as the Homeric epic and the tragedies of Sophocles, have been translated again and again, always bringing spiritual energy and aesthetic pleasure to readers' hearts. Homer was unique among the poets of that time, and indeed the supposed author of the Iliad and the Odyssey must undoubtedly be one of the world's greatest literary artists. The two epics formed the basis of Greek education and culture throughout the classical era and laid the foundation of human education up until the time of the Roman Empire and the spread of Christianity so this is proof that Homer is also one of the most influential authors in the broadest sense. The article reveals the ideological and artistic features of the ancient Greek poet Homer's poems "Iliad" and "Odyssey". The authors of this article analyze the thematic, ideological, and artistic features of these epic works. The methodological basis of the work is the principle of historicism, which contributes to the objective study and evaluation of literary phenomena in the process of evolutionary development. The scientific article uses a traditional set of analysis methods: typological, systemic, and comparative.

Keywords: folklore, antiquity, poem, idea, image, character.

The significance of writers' works of the ancient era lies in their fine craftsmanship. Ancient literature was also a reflection of the thoughts and dreams of those people. Greek-Roman people sought to solve the age-old problems of mankind in fiction. They tell us about courage, struggle, patriotism and the power of the human mind. At treason, betrayal and similar epidemics, they looked with disgust.

That is why the literary heritage, born in ancient times, has not lost its significance to this day.

Homer's poems "Iliad" and "Odyssey" have been sufficiently studied and analyzed in Russian and foreign historiography. Among all the works, one can single out the works of N.A. Chistyakova and N.V. Vulikh (1963), L. Lyubimov (1971), S.L. Utchenko (1974), N.N. Trukhina (1993), A.F. Losev (2001), N. Hammond (2003), E. Dekel (2012), C. Due

(2018). The best works of modern European culture originated from the heritage of the ancient world. The ideas and artistic images of those ancient times inspired Rabelais, Corneille, Racine, Moliere, Voltaire, Lessing, Goethe, Schiller and many other talented writers and artists. V. G. Belinsky deeply understood the value of the ancient literary heritage. Belinsky wrote to Stankevich: "The Iliad" [...] is a very noble example for me, I sometimes feel some kind of sweet excitement of the soul from its power" (1950, 32). "The poems of Homer "Iliad" and "Odyssey", are the first monuments of ancient Greek literature known to us in time, and at the same time, in general, the first monuments of literature in Europe" (Losev 2006, 4). It is noteworthy that cultural contacts existed between Central Asia and the ancient world. According to historical data, economic and cultural ties between Central Asia and Greece began in very early times. Greek culture had a great influence on the formation of Central Asian culture.

"In the era of the Seleucids and the Greek-Bactrian domination, an East Hellenic culture arose with the participation of the peoples of Central Asia, Iran and other regions, which enriched Greek culture and contributed to its prosperity. Since the Hellenic era, among several religious beliefs of Central Asia, there was a tradition of worshiping the Greek gods (Zeus, Athena, Poseidon, Apollo, etc). After the campaign of Alexander the Great, Greek writing began to spread widely in these areas" (Koshelenko 1979, 72).

Discussion

The epics "Iliad" and "Odyssey" are examples of ancient Greek written literature that have come down to us. The plots of these two poems, which are associated with the name of the great poet Homer, are taken from the legends of Troy, i.e. from stories about the war between the Greeks and the Trojans. The city of Troy is one of the ancient cities on the southern coast of the Dardanelles peninsula in Asia Minor. The remains of a city that flourished about three

thousand years BC, and subsequently destroyed due to various cataclysms were discovered as a result of archaeological excavations carried out by scientists several years ago on the site of the ancient city of Troy. In their opinion, the attack of the Greeks on the Trojans is a major historical event that took place around the 13th-12th centuries BC. As the legends say, Prince Paris of Troy came to visit the king of Sparta Menalai. Menalai warmly welcomed Paris and arranged a rich feast and refreshments in his honor. At one of these meetings, Paris saw the king's beautiful wife and fell madly in love with her.

The beauty of Paris also touches Helen's heart. Once, when Menalaus went on a long journey, Paris took Helen to his country. When Menalaus returned from his journey, he saw the unfaithfulness of his guest and wife and became very angry. He vows to avenge the insult. At the request of Menalaus, the kings of the entire Greek region set off on a campaign against Troy in several ships. Menalai Agamemnon's brother, the king of Mycenae Odysseus, and the famous hero Achilles (Achilles) were among them. Greek troops besieged Troy for ten years. Eventually, they sneak into the city and burn it down. They kill all the inhabitants of the city, rob wealth and return to their country with the beautiful Elena. But many difficulties will befall the winners on the way. Most of them will die. Those who reach the country safely will die at the hands of someone else. One part was lost at sea and suffered from waves for several years.

Collection of Greek mythology called "Legends of the Trojan War" was born from the collection of stories about this war. The plot lines of the epics "Iliad" and "Odyssey" are taken from the legends of this cycle. But in both poems, not the whole big legend is told, but only two small stories. Therefore, the Iliad depicts a significant event that occurred in the tenth year of the Trojan War. The work ends with a story about the death of Hector, the heroic hero of Troy, and the tradition of his burial. The poet tells a simple story about events that happened before and should happen later.

One of the works associated with the name of Homer - the epic "Odyssey" tells about the experiences of Odysseus, one of the main characters of the Trojan War, the king of Ithaca. After the battle of Troy, Odysseus returns home with his troops and allies. However, the enemy of Odysseus, the god of seas Poseidon, blocks his path with huge waves and causes many difficulties for the hero. After the end of the Trojan War, Odysseus wandered for another ten years on the waves of the sea and in foreign lands. A lot of things happen to him.

The story of Odysseus is presented in four chapters (IX-XII) of the poem. These four chapters are full of amazing stories from the beginning to the end.

After the defeat of the Trojans, Odysseus set off with his allies and wandered the sea for several days. The wave carries them to the shores of the state of Latofags. The inhabitants of this island feed on the lotus. A person who has tasted a lotus forgets everything, even his family, and becomes a slave to this fruit. Some of Odysseus' companions ate the magical fruit. Seeing this, the king tried to get as far away from the dangerous island as possible, despite their cries. After that, we see Odysseus in the country of the one-eyed Cyclopes giants. The king leaves his army on the shore and, together with his twelve comrades, goes to inspect the island. After walking for some time, they find a cave. Inside the cave there are fruit baskets and dishes full of yogurt. At the same time, there is a rustle outside, and large sheep and goats enter the cave, followed by the owner of the cattle, the giant Cyclops Polyphemus. He has a single bulging eye on his forehead. Seeing the monster, Odysseus and his companions were frightened. Polyphemus catches two of them, beats them to death with a millstone, and puts them in a cauldron. After eating, he closes the entrance to the cave with a large stone and falls asleep for a long time.

According to the author's description, this stone was so large that twenty-two wagons could not have moved it. Odysseus tries to kill the sleeping giant, but realizes that he cannot move

the stone and hesitates. In the morning, yesterday's situation will repeat again. Polyphemus eats two companions of Odysseus, closes the entrance to the cave with this stone and leaves to graze his cattle. Odysseus is looking for a way to get rid of the monster. He will find a solution. Odysseus takes a long pole lying in a cave, sharpens it on a spear and hides it in a corner of the cave.

In the evening, when Polyphemus returned to the cave after chasing the sheep, ate two people and was about to lie down, Odysseus offered him a cup of wine, which he brought with him. Polyphemus liked the wine. He drinks another cup of wine and asks for the name of his guest. This question makes Odysseus think.

Offering the cup to Polyphemus: "Do you want to know my name? My name is Nobody, I said. 'Listen, Nobody, I will eat you last, this is my gift to you,' the Cyclops laughed hoarsely. Having drunk the wine from the third cup, he became drunk and fell asleep" (Takho-Godi 1986, 418).

Odysseus made a sign to his comrades, and they brought the end of the pole to the fire and pierced the eye of the Cyclops. Hearing the cry of Polyphemus, who could not stand the disease, the Cyclopes on the island gathered at the entrance to the cave.

"What ails you, Polyphemus," said they, 'that you make such a noise, breaking the stillness of the night, and preventing us from being able to sleep? Surely no man is carrying off your sheep? Surely no man is trying to kill you either by fraud or by force?'

But Polyphemus shouted to them from inside the cave, "No man is killing me by fraud! No man is killing me by force!

Then," said they, if no man is attacking you, you must be ill; when Jove makes people ill, there is no help for it, and you had better pray to your father Neptune" (Homer 1900, 155).

The Cyclopes were angry with Polyphemus for such answer and left. In the morning, Polyphemus groans in pain and moves the stone away from the entrance to the cave. He pets each

sheep and goat and begins to bring them out one by one. Odysseus, who understood Polyphemus's thought, divided the sheep into pairs of three and tied his comrades one by one to the stomach in the middle. He hanged himself on the belly of a ram. Thus they escaped from the cave and were saved from death, taking with them the sheep of Polyphemus. When Odysseus climbed onto the ship and moved away from the shore, he looked at the one-eyed Cyclops and cried: "Cyclops, if anyone asks you who it was that put your eye out and spoiled your beauty, say it was the valiant warrior Ulysses, son of Laertes, who lives in Ithaca" (Homer 158).

Cyclops, in a rage, threw a mountain-like rock into the sea. The ship almost sank from a wave of the stone which fell into the water. Thus, although Odysseus slipped away from predatory Cyclops' hands, he became a real enemy of the god of seas, Polyphemus' father, Poseidon.

After going through many difficulties, Odysseus reached the island of the sun god Helios. Fat sheep and oxen grazed on green pastures. The weather deteriorated from the day the passengers set foot on the island. They had to stay on the island for a month. Food ended and hunger began. One day despite Odysseus' strong warning, his comrades took advantage of his absence and slaughtered two of Helios' oxen. Helios complained to Zeus outraged by their theft. When the weather cleared and Odysseus set sail, Zeus flashed his lightning and destroyed their ship. All people went under water. Only Odysseus survived and managed to get to the island. This was the island of Ogygia of the fairy Calypso. Odysseus spent seven years there.

The Theacians listened to Odysseus's stories with interest. Tsar Alcinoos presented gifts to Odysseus as the heroic guest and sent him to his country on a special ship. Odysseus arrived safely on the island of Ithaca, and while he was contemplating what to do, the archer goddess Athena appeared and advised him on what to do next. Tsar Alcinoos dressed Odysseus as a beggar and sent him to the camp of his faithful slave Eumeus. Odysseus hid the gifts received

from Alcinoos, and came to Eumeus. Eumeus met the beggar well.

He did not recognize Odysseus. While talking to him he mentioned that he had met Odysseus and that he would soon return to Ithaca. During this time, Athena saw Telemachus in her dream and told him to return to his own country and go to Eumeus' camp as soon as possible. That was how father and son met in the house of Eumeus. Odysseus and Telemachus decided to get revenge on their enemies. They came to the palace in the morning. The suitors of Penelope squandered Odysseus' wealth and got drunk at a rich table. Left without money Odysseus asked them for alms. The aristocracy did not give alms, they laughed at him and insulted him. On that day, Penelope took control of Odysseus' bow and arrow. She said that whoever shoot an arrow from that bow and hit right on target would become her husband. None of the candidates could draw a bowstring. At that moment, Odysseus informed Eumeus and his loyal servants who he was and warned them to get ready for battle.

He asked permission and tried to draw the bow. Despite the opposition of the nobility, Telemachus presented the bow to his father. Odysseus easily drew his bow and hit the target. After that, he gave the signal to Telemachus to start the war and fired a second arrow at Antinous.

The nobles, who recognized Odysseus, began to defend themselves. Some of them asked Odysseus for forgiveness. But Odysseus did not listen to them and killed everyone. Odysseus also punished his unfaithful slaves and maids. However, after much bloodshed, the uprising was crushed, and peace was restored between the tsar and the people. Odysseus and Penelope lived a happy life together (Koblanov 2020, 69).

In terms of artistic quality, storyline and stylistic device, both epics were much higher than the oral-literary heritage created in the communal system. The content of both epics revolves around one hero and his feelings. That was why the author's attention was focused on

describing the anger of the main character Achilles in the poem "Iliad", and the rest of the events developed depending on that situation. The events that took place in ten years fit in fifty days. In order for the listener and reader to have a complete impression, in the course of the development of the work, the author gradually made lyrical digressions and supplemented the main narrative with various stories. Such compactness and craftsmanship are seen in the poem "Odyssey". The return of Odysseus to his homeland and the various sufferings and amazing events that befell him during this journey form the main plot of the work.

Although the journey of Odysseus by sea lasted ten years, only the last forty days of these painful ten years are described in this work, and the previous events are told from the lips of the hero himself at the amusements in the palace of Alcinous. These features of the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" are proof of the author's great talent and skill. Homer's method is first and foremost a realistic method. The life of the Greeks in antiquity, excerpts from vivid scenes of life are vividly depicted in both poems. The following events occupy an important place in the epics among the great works of world literature, for example, the meeting of Hector with Andromache, the arrival of Priam to Achilles, the meeting of Odysseus and Penelope, the scenes of a terrible storm in the fifth chapter of the second epic, vividly depicting changes in the inner world of the hero, temptations and natural phenomena.

The poet brings images of insignificant things to our attention describing some events, that we do not notice in real life. For example, the poet expresses the moment of the murder of one of Penelope's suitors and death of traitors in the XXII chapter of the poem with the words: "... Odysseus shot an arrow at Antinous. As Antinous was about to drink the wine, an arrow flew straight at him when he raised the cup to his mouth. Antinous, covered in blood, overturned the table, fell like a corpse and was speechless. The grooms were frightened and jumped up from their seats. They looked for weapons hanging on

the wall, but there were no weapons. Odysseus yelled angrily at the suitors:

Dogs, did you think that I should not come back from Troy? You have wasted my substance, have forced my women servants to lie with you, and have wooed my wife while I was still living. You have feared neither Cod nor man, and now you shall die (Homer 1900, 364).

In describing the image of the characters, their behavior and actions the poet uses many realistic techniques. Reading the epic, you will see people from different classes of society, mystical forces: the gods of Olympus, giants, fairies, legendary monsters, kings, heroes, ordinary warriors, princesses, concubines, slaves and maids, babies. Although there are so many participants in the poem, they are not depicted simply, monotonously, as the heroes of oral literature created by the community structure.

No matter how many heroes there are in Homer, none of them repeats each other. Each of them has his own character. This realistic method of revealing person's inner experiences is clearly visible in the images of the main characters as Achilles and Odysseus.

There are great differences in the content of the two epic poems. The "Iliad" is mainly about war and bloody events, while the Odyssey is about amazing events and family life. The most virtuous qualities of a person in the epic "Iliad" are courage and heroism. This is embodied in the image of Achilles.

The hero and subject of the epic poem. Achilles brought his troops known as the Myrmidons, was insulted by the leader of the Achaean (Greek) forces, and was sitting out the war until his close friend Patroclus was killed. Achilles then went after the man he blamed for the death, Hector, the prince of Troy (Gill, 2021).

Achilles is a symbol of power, strength and energy which were the ancient Greeks' dreams. A hero is a man of conscience, moral duty and honor. Achilles is completely alien to disloyalty, hypocrisy, cheating.

Cowardice awakens disgust in the hero's heart. Achilles comes to Troy not in search of

wealth, but to take revenge on the enemy who trampled on the honor of the country. He realizes that no one can be compared with him in heroism among the Greek army. That is the reason why the government does not spare those who are used to talking and insulting. Achilles wants to kill Agamemnon for his inappropriate behavior. When his heart breaks with anger, he rushes at his enemy like a rabid predator. He fills the river Xanthus with the corpses of his enemies avenging for his friend Patroclus, and even fights with the god of this river. He insults Hector's body and cuts off the heads of the Trojan heroes at his friend's grave, attempting to suppress his anger.

But the quality of Achilles is not only in physical strength. A person must be strong, courageous and persistent in order to instill fear in the enemy. Achilles is naive, generous, persistent and honest in comparison with other heroes. He is the person who lost his friend and does not feel any mercy and intercession, belligerent, an avenger who humiliated the corpse of his enemy, changed in an instant, like a young child drowned in the tears of a grieving Priam, mourning his son, but the corpse of Hector he gave to his father and this proves the hero's generosity. This episode of the poem increases the spiritual wealth of Achilles. It is full of dramatic scenes and enhances his moral qualities. Dreams and aspirations of the Greek people are associated with the names of such heroes, which changed from century to century. Achilles is the hero of revenge and loyalty, love and perseverance.

If the poet expresses the concepts of heroism and valor of the Greek people in the image of Achilles, then he shows their wisdom and intelligence, acquired by life experience, through the image of Odysseus. The only defender of Odysseus in his dangerous journey are his characteristic features as dexterity, caution, composure and cunning, ingenuity. These qualities of Odysseus are experiences shaped by the ordeals of life. Achilles knows in advance which weapon his enemy will use, when he

enters the battlefield and faces his enemy. There was a certain order of battle according to ancient Greek laws. The opponents began the battle, talking about their origins and swearing to fight honestly. Therefore, during the battle they did not betray each other, and won the man who was brave and strong. Odysseus has a completely different situation: a deadly trap lured him at every step and in every movement during his ten-year journey that he spent on the waves of the sea, on foreign lands.

Odysseus had a habit of acting with intelligence, ingenuity, and caution in order to survive unexpected dangers. When Odysseus and his companions were imprisoned in the cave of Polyphemos, they were all in danger of becoming predator's prey. Even being in a tight corner, Odysseus behaves calmly, collects his thoughts and comes up with an escape plan. The hero understands that he is not able to defeat this monster with courage and strength. Only cunning and caution can save from the trap of death.

At first glance, one can think that Odysseus is a hypocrite who likes to deceive others, but in reality he is not. Reading the work, one can understand that the inner world of this person is full of good thoughts. He is very cheerful, interested in everything, strives for education, art, eager to learn about the life of foreign countries and peoples. The fact that Odysseus decides to stop on the island of giants and cyclops proves that the desire to know everything is his main character trait and it leads him to overcome death and new trials.

Love for homeland is another best quality in Odysseus' heart. This feeling is described by the poet with special inspiration from the beginning of the epic to the end. Odysseus never forgets his homeland when he struggles with death in the waves of the sea and in other dangerous situations. Odysseus does not succumb to difficulties and strives for his "wonderfully beautiful Ithaca"; he even refuses the eternal life promised by Calypso.

Such characteristic traits of the hero Odysseus as cunning, deceitful speech, prudence are all simple mischief, and his passion for interesting events is arisen not from a desire to live an easy life. This hero is an example of a vivid image of social and political life at a certain stage of Greek history.

In addition to the main characters that were talked about, there are several other characters in both poems. All of them are individuals with their own characteristics and actions as well as their position in society.

The poet describes arrogance and dissatisfaction in the character of Agamemnon; Menelai is a very tough and mean person despite his heroism; Diomedes is too hot, strong man; Nestor experienced many life's sorrows and became a wise and reasonable person; Paris is a selfish person and he is a slave of personal feelings; Hector is a wonderful person who is not inferior to Achilles in heroism and honor is above all for him. He is faithful to his wife and kind to children; Priam is a unique image, who mourns the loss of his heroic son. The mastery of portraying characters in different situations is striking even in the depiction of Penelope's suitors. There are several female characters in both poems depicted by the great writer; Andromache and Penelope are among them. The author could convince his readers of the existence of beautiful women who were at the top of honesty and spiritual purity even in communal periods of human society.

Hector's faithful wife Andromache's whole life is full of sorrow. Andromache's family, her father and brothers were killed by the Greek invaders. Her sister taken in prison, also died soon after. Hector was her sole guardian and the loss of him struck fear into the heart of Andromache. The death of her husband and beloved son and her suffering were the reasons of her great sorrow.

The poet reveals the ideas of honesty and spiritual purity in the image of Penelope more profoundly and artistically.

In his work, Homer embodies his views on unfaithful women in such images as Helena, Clytemnestra, and conveys beautiful thoughts about faithful women in the image of Penelope. Here are the main characters of the Homeric poem. All these simple and energetic souls which are characteristic for the infantile era of human society are depicted in purely realistic colors, fragments of real life. There is one invariable thing like Homer's images, though they are viable: the characters of all heroes, good or bad, are indicated by one or two important features. They do not change depending on various circumstances, or contradictions. For example, if the hero is faced with conflicting feelings and then makes one strict decision, then the fact that this resolution is the result of a struggle between internal spiritual laws and feelings inherent in man is not reflected in the works of Homer. The conflict between Achilles and Agamemnon is evidence of this. Achilles was about to kill him, outraged by Agamemnon's dishonor, but then he changed his mind. This change in the inner feeling of the hero is presented by the poet not as the result of unrest in the human character, but this was a desire of powerful mysterious forces.

In general, the inner experiences of Homer's heroes cannot be as simple and naive as these people themselves. Indeed, at the communal stage of human society, the study of the human soul did not occur to anyone. Perhaps the secret of the unique beauty inherent in the works of Homer lies in this simplicity, in naivety!

Conclusion

The critical analysis reveal a great similarity between these poems among the heroic poems of other peoples. For example, the French epic poem the "Song of Roland", the "Poem of the Nibelung's" by the Germans and several Kazakh and Eastern and Western peoples' epic poems belong to them. This similarity is also felt in the proximity of the content, in the depiction of heroes, and in the artistic features of the works of different peoples. It is not an accidental phenomenon that the general consonance is inherent in epic works. The main reason for this

is that the conditions of social life which are reflected in all heroic poems are almost the same. The epic poem genre is one of the oldest types of fiction and it has gone through various stages, sorted and formed in the course of a long historical development. The epic poems are written in the form of voluminous poems. They describe the events of ancient times. The authors of such ancient poems create miracles with special inspiration transferring these times to the literary language when presenting the events of the past. The main characters of such poems are ordinary people. They simply destroy and crush enemies, paying no attention to wars.

“The main characters of Homer's works are not only strong heroes, but also comprehensively mature personalities living next to the race of gods. The lords of Mount Olympus always give them strength, show care. The gods even give heroes eternal life. Achill's mother, Thetis, decided to bathe him in the waters of the sacred river Styx as she was afraid for her son. The water of this river made a person invisible. But dipping the baby into the water, Thetis held him by the heel, and the sacred water did not touch it with its jet. Paris, with the help of the god Apollo, shoots and kills Achilles right from this vulnerable spot. The heroes of the Homeric poems are armed with weapons appropriate to their strength, as in the folk poems. Nestor's wine glass was so large that not every person could hardly move it from the ground; to lift the spear of Achilles, his friend Patroclus makes considerable efforts; none of the suitors who claim Penelope can pull Odysseus arrow for its weight. The armor of heroes is most often made of gold and silver, decorated with diamonds, white stones; clothes are made of beautiful fabrics, and horse harness is also full of precious stones. Laudatory praise of the heroes is often heard in both works of Homer” (Artistic Features of the Iliad and the Odyssey 2021).

The works of Homer also abound with epithets. For example, the poet gives more than forty-character traits to one Achilles. Although there are numerous epithets used in relation to

gods, people, natural phenomena, animals, products, all they, like repetitions, have been normalized.

In conclusion, we should say that the general features of the strict epic style and its everlasting objectivity is distinguished by plastic traditional and monumental heroism, reflecting the eternal cycle and the eternal return of a national or tribal life. Homeric poems received their final form already in the period of its decomposition and almost on the very eve of the slave system so they were not just an artistic manifestation of the existence of a communal-tribal system. So, Homer, as an artist, already learned the complexity and depth of individual life, and could not be an uninterested and indifferent chronicler of life. His passions manifested themselves, political assessments matured, a protest arose against various social aspects of the life around him. Therefore, the style of the Homeric epic, as well as its socio-historical basis, and its ideology are full of contradictions. They are so far from that childish and primitive perception of life, which was often attributed by various researchers from the heights of European cultural development.

The centuries of national development and, in particular, not only the communal-clan formation but also its decomposition and the development of private property and private initiative are reflected in the Homeric poems. The strict epic style of works of art could no longer remain at the level of its ancient severity, beginning to reflect the individual development of a person with new, much freer feelings and with the help of new, much more complex poetic devices. An amazing vitality in Homer's poems are the result of all these artistic devices. Reading these poems, we are impressed as if we see heroes, the events that are narrated in them with our own eyes.

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