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### Writing of Homer and Virgil

“The Illiad” and “The Aeneid”, two of the greatest poems written by two of the greatest poets. Two poems with the same story and format but with very different themes. Homer and Virgil lead the reader through the story of the Trojan War, one poet focusing on the destruction of a city and the other on the creation of a city. The Illiad is based solely on the war, its heroes driven by rage and revenge –“an eye for an eye”. It is ultimately the gods who fuel this fury and destruction, “and Zeus’s will was done” (1) of a hero, Achilles, who already, because of anger has set his own fate. The Aeneid is based on the journey of one man, Aeneas, who doesn’t think of himself as a hero but as a survivor who with the help of the gods has his fate planned out for him.

Homer writes with a sense that there has to be a renowned hero who pushes onward out of the need to rectify a wrong – the killing of his friend. Achilles at first does not want to fight but is a warrior at heart and despite the pleas of his mother Thetis chooses to fight rather than survive. This is his mission and satisfies his need for revenge and retribution regardless of the fact that he may die before his mission is accomplished. Virgil on the other hand writes of a hero who is drawn to complete his mission out of a sense of duty to his people and the need for survival. Aeneas chooses not to stay and fight knowing death would be imminent and retreats in order to save his people by finding them peace and stability. “They had come together from every quarter, belongings, spirits ready for me to lead them over the sea to whatever lands I’d choose”.(2) This is a very strong quote as it gives the reader the sense that Aeneas will become the model for the Roman people to follow to survive no matter what happens.

Although both poets are writing about the same event- the Trojan War, Virgil’s writing has more power of expression. Through his use of multiple similes in his works leads to much stronger descriptions and imagery. These also give the reader a better idea of the character or event being described and give the reader scenes so vivid and compelling that the reader can almost see the event unfold before them. Such imagery is found when Aeneas sees Pyrrhus on the battlefield of his once great city, “ There at the

very edge of the front gates springs Pyrrhus, son of Achilles, prancing in arms, aflash in his shimmering brazen sheath like a snake buried the whole winter long under frozen turf, swollen to bursting, fed full on poisonous weeds and now it springs into light, sloughing its old skin to glisten sleek in its newfound youth, its back slithering, coiling, its proud chest rearing high to the sun, its triple tongue flickering through its fangs.”(3)

Both poems are a continuation of the other, not done intentionally, but possibly done to show a more positive side of mass death and destruction, It also gives the reader the answer to the question - What happened to Troy? The only ones who really knew were those survivors that set out places unknown and the gods and goddesses who helped along the way. Like modern day there are always struggles and obstacles along the way and people can either accept the inevitable or make it work. Much like Aeneas when he did not let the pleas of Dido deter him when he was urged by the gods to continue on his quest, “We follow you, blessed god, whoever you are - glad at heart we obey your commands once more”.(4)

Two poems, two poets, two heroes with two very different themes - one the need to conquer and destroy and the other to find peace and world harmony. The ironic thing is, is the fact that one could never have happened without the other.

## Works Cited

*The Norton Anthology World Literature*. New York: Martin Puchner, 2012. Page 230, Lines 6 (1): Page 1007, Lines 991-993(2): Page 998, Lines 584- 592(3) :Page 1024, Lines 720-724.