

Humanities 1
Professor Stanley Chodorow
Winter 2014

Writing Assignment #2: Hebrew Bible and The Odyssey

Choose one of the two following essay topics:

1. The notion of the hero is generally regarded as originating in the Greek tradition, especially in the Iliad and the Odyssey. Could the concept also be applied to the Judaic tradition as represented in the Bible? In considering this question, ponder the following questions: Homer seems to have an unconventional definition of heroism when he portrays his hero, Odysseus, as having characteristics of cunning, trickery, disguise, and deceit, as well as intelligence and strength. Are these traits contradictory? Are they consistent with the notion of a hero? Do any of the biblical characters have these traits? Would one be justified in calling anyone in the Bible a hero? Is the idea of a hero culture-bound – that is, a concept that is a function of a culture as opposed to one that is supra-cultural? Using one figure from the Hebrew Bible, write a thesis-based essay in which you compare or contrast Odysseus and one biblical figure on the concept of hero.

2. Both The Odyssey and the Hebrew Bible are filled with stories of violence. What role does violence play in shaping the biblical and the Homeric worlds? Do Homer and the biblical writers regard violence as justified or necessary? To what extent are these writers similar or different? Write a thesis-based essay in which you compare or contrast the depiction of violence in the Hebrew Bible and The Odyssey.

Thesis: Make sure that your claim meets the standards outlined in the “Thesis” handout.

4 tests for a good thesis:

1. Is it an explanation, not a fact?
2. Can someone argue against it?
3. Is it too obvious to be worth defending?
4. Is it precise?

Evidence: Make sure your argument shows just how the textual evidence supports the thesis.

Length: 4-5 pages.

Due: After lecture, Tuesday 18 February. Late papers will be penalized by the subtraction of one-third letter grade per day. Finally, don't forget turnitin.com!