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Candidate session number

Candidate name

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Examination session (May or November)

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Diploma Programme subject in which this extended essay is registered: Classical Greek

(For an extended essay in the area of languages, state the language and whether it is group 1 or group 2.)

Title of the extended essay: Mortal Superiority Over the Supernatural

Candidate's declaration

This declaration must be signed by the candidate; otherwise a grade may not be issued.

The extended essay I am submitting is my own work (apart from guidance allowed by the International Baccalaureate).

I have acknowledged each use of the words, graphics or ideas of another person, whether written, oral or visual.

I am aware that the word limit for all extended essays is 4000 words and that examiners are not required to read beyond this limit.

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Please comment, as appropriate, on the candidate's performance, the context in which the candidate undertook the research for the extended essay, any difficulties encountered and how these were overcome (see page 13 of the extended essay guide). The concluding interview (viva voce) may provide useful information. These comments can help the examiner award a level for criterion K (holistic judgment). Do not comment on any adverse personal circumstances that may have affected the candidate. If the amount of time spent with the candidate was zero, you must explain this, in particular how it was then possible to authenticate the essay as the candidate's own work. You may attach an additional sheet if there is insufficient space here.

is very passionate about Greek mythology and literature. This is not a subject we teach, but as her English teacher, I took this as so that she could write about something that she could about. It was an uphill learning curve for both of us and we worked hard in trying to get her to frame her paper based on literature. Towards the end, she seemed to give up a bit and stopped coming to meet with me and incorporate feedback.

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I have read the final version of the extended essay that will be submitted to the examiner.

To the best of my knowledge, the extended essay is the authentic work of the candidate.

I spent hours with the candidate discussing the progress of the extended essay.

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Assessment form (for examiner use only)

Criteria	Achievement level					
	Examiner 1	maximum	Examiner 2	maximum	Examiner 3	
A research question	1	2		2		
B introduction	1	2		2		
C investigation	2	4		4		
D knowledge and understanding	1	4		4		
E reasoned argument	1	4		4		
F analysis and evaluation	1	4		4		
G use of subject language	1	4		4		
H conclusion	1	2		2		
I formal presentation	2	4		4		
J abstract	1	2		2		
K holistic judgment	2	4		4		
Total out of 36	14					

Mortal Superiority over the Supernatural as Seen through Homer's Works

Classical Greek Mythology

May 2013

Word count: 3,245

Abstract

Despite the fact that Homer's literature gives historians and readers a look into the unique culture of the Grecian people and how they live, there is more to Homer's epic stories. They portray the superiority of man over the supernatural and the Gods lending a proud and heroic depiction of the ancient Grecian heroes. **In this paper the question do the Greek works of Homer are simply a reflection of culture or are they a bold statement showing man's superiority over the super natural?** The comparison between the Gods and the heroes of Greek literature are shown best through Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Characters such as Helen, Odysseus, and Hector all contribute to the depiction of a Homeric Hero through their actions in battle and character. They play off of many of the values and emotions that strike readers as genuine and noble. Some of these include Odysseus' need to return home, Hector's honor, and Helen's remorse for her actions. These characters are shown in sharp contrast to their supernatural foils, the Greek Gods. Zeus, Hera, Aphrodite, Athena, and Achilles are depicted as less powerful and heroic when looked at compared to the mortal heroes. They depict few of the Homeric hero values and instead act childlike and create their own drama and issues through irrelevant quarreling. The Gods are often shown as vain and self-absorbed characters who act to benefit themselves rather than others. They also fail to exude the traditional Homeric Hero traits that make up most of the mortal characters. Through Homer's description of these characters, both supernatural and mortal, it can be seen that the mortals are depicted as overall stronger and better characters.

Word count: 281

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Introduction

Throughout the history of literature, mankind has been seemingly dominated and ruled over by greater beings whether that be Gods, demons, or any other higher power; however, when looked at more carefully, a pattern emerges. In every culture, human beings are at times shown as equals to their higher beings of myth and religion and in some rare occasions are depicted as superior to them. This case is especially true when looking at Greek mythology through the works of Homer. There are countless stories of mortal humans showing superiority over their gods and goddesses. Homer uses anthropomorphism of the ancient Greek Gods and Goddesses to promote the strength of the Grecian people. Many historians believe that Homer's works are used as a way to depict the opulent culture of Greece, but when looked at more; his works can be used to show man's ultimate supreme power. **This creates the question if the Greek works of Homer are simply a reflection of culture or are they a bold statement showing man's superiority over the super natural?** Through analyzing at mythological accounts of Homer's literature the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, characterization of his human characters and anthropomorphism of the Gods and Goddesses are used to show man's ascendancy over the Gods.

One of Homer's greatest strengths is his ability to reflect the culture of ancient Greek society in his works with great accuracy. This allows the reader to connect with his characters and portray the social normality's of the ancient Greeks. Though Homer's life is not clearly recorded and historians are not completely sure when Homer was born and where he lived, his

works are still considered the most reliable and true to the ancient Greek culture. In the Grecian culture, “men do not have rights, but only duties. By serving the city-state with their virtuous behavior, they are also serving themselves.” (Kreis). This type of mentality is shown throughout both the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* in the actions of characters like Odysseus, Helen, and Hector. They all share the sense of duty to their city-state, their family, and their honor. Homer also emphasizes the Grecian culture Panhellenic. Panhellenic is “the general acceptance of these gods is a sign of a specific culture that arose during the Greek Renaissance.” (Kreis). Homer brings up multiple times in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* the Panhellenic culture of the Greeks especially when trying to express the wishes or demands of the Gods. An example of this is in the *Odyssey*. “A bird flew to his right, a hawk...he held a dove within his claws...this bird flew on our right, sent surely by some god-for I could see he was a bird of omen” (Mandelbaum, 312) symbolizing the presence of Zeus. Another aspect of culture that is brought up through Homer’s works is how the people of ancient Greece act in a normal day to day interaction. Everything they do revolves around what the Gods would see fit as worthy from what they say, eat, and how especially how they interact with others. One thing that is greatly emphasized on both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is how one treats strangers. In the Grecian culture it is customary to treat strangers and guests with the upmost respect and honor. This tradition was said to be set and watched over by Zeus himself. In the *Odyssey* there are many times when the gratuity towards a guest is emphasized. When Odysseus visits Alcinous and Arete they both meet him with hospitality and warmth even as a stranger. They “seat him upon a chair with silver studs” (Mandelbaum, 136) away from the “ashes on the ground” (Mandelbaum, 136) and offer him “mixed bowls of wine” (Mandelbaum, 136). In Grecian times, this hospitality is referred to as *xenia*, which is seen throughout all of

Homer's literature in his heroes. No matter the circumstances they are greeted with *xenia* and show *xenia* to all.

The comparison between Odysseus and Zeus and how they handle themselves throughout both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is an example of man's superiority over the supernatural. Odysseus possesses the key characteristics of a Homeric hero; he has strength, courage, acts honorably and has a keen intellect. Through his experiences, Odysseus shows his balanced warrior mentality of being aggressive in his decisions and actions but also very level headed and calm. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus encounters many obstacles that test his warrior mentality and ethic. One of his biggest ordeals that portrays his warrior cunning is when he is trapped in the cave of Polyphemus, the Cyclops. Instead of simply attacking the Cyclops like many warriors, Odysseus produces a plan to blind the Cyclops then ride out on his sheep's' bellies into the pasture and say "No-one" (Mandelbaum, 180) is his name. This scene shows multiple levels of Odysseus' character. He does not kill the Cyclops because he knows that he is not strong enough to move the boulder that blocks the way out of the cave and he also respects the life of the Cyclops. He also knows that he cannot wound the Cyclops unless it is under some sort of influence, so Odysseus offers wine to the Cyclops until he is drunk and asleep. Only then does Odysseus take on the Cyclops by blinding him. This shows that Odysseus is not rash or arrogant in his actions. He realizes that even though the Cyclops is drunk and asleep he is still powerful enough to kill Odysseus if he tried a full on attack, so Odysseus does the minimal amount of damage to the Cyclops that will still ensure the safety of his men and himself. This type of intelligence and sympathy are some of the key aspects of a Homeric hero which were very important values to the Greeks. "One of the most prominent of the mental characteristics the ancient Greeks valued was the cleverness and the wit of an individual." (Ancient Greece). The

respect that Odysseus shows towards the life of the Cyclops is a reflection of the Grecian hospitality to always show respect to strangers. This scene is best known for Odysseus telling the Cyclops his name is “No-one, so I’m called by both my mother and my father, and all my comrades.” (Mandelbaum, 180) so when the Cyclops asks for help he says “No-one, No-one is using treachery” (Mandelbaum, 182) which confuses the other Cyclops and makes them think nothing is wrong. This shows that Odysseus makes plans using another Homeric hero quality, foresight, to ensure the safety of himself and his men instead of acting rashly on his emotions. Another value of Odysseus is that he is honorable, but not prideful. Unlike most men he hides his identity until he feels it is the right time to identify himself. For example, when he meets Nausica he does not reveal himself to her until he meets with the Phaeacian king and Queen who offer him safe passage back home to Ithaca once they know who he is. Odysseus also hides his identity from his friend Laertes and his servant Eumaeus until he knows that their loyalty is still with him demonstrating that Odysseus rationally thinks through his plans to ensure his success. Odysseus also stays loyal to his wife throughout his journey from Troy even though he is tempted by many other beautiful mortal women and Goddesses. He stays focused on his main goal which is always to return home to his wife and son. This shows that even though Odysseus is a powerful warrior he still has morals and holds importance on family. All of Odysseus’s actions are examples of those found in traditional Homeric heroes.

This is very different when compared to Zeus. On many occasions it is depicted that Zeus raped other Goddesses and also mortal Greek women for their beauty. Europa, Io, and Semele are only a few to name, along with Zeus’ three wives. Zeus is not loyal to any of his wives and does not hold any importance on family. This is shown when he kills his father and traps his siblings in an underwater prison. To the Greeks this is an extremely vulgar act because so much

value is put on the family, so by treating his family so poorly Zeus is portraying a negative and inferior persona. Zeus also demonstrates this inferior persona through his selfishness, power thirst, and inactivity when it comes to the Trojan War. "Zeus watched these scenes from his throne with great amusement" (Classical Mythology). Along with all of the quarreling there is betrayal among the Gods. Zeus promises Thetis that he and the other Gods will not get involved in the war, however "Hera, Poseidon and Athena had rebelled against Zeus, and bound him in chain, in Olympus" (Classical Mythology). This shows that Zeus has little authority over the rest of the Gods and is a bad leader. He and the other Gods act in childlike manners. Some even resorted to punching and throwing rocks at each other. Compared to the bloodshed and battles in Troy during this time the quarrels of the Gods seem much less important; therefore rendering the Gods less powerful because it emphasizes how insignificant and childish their fights are. The Greeks view these types of childlike behaviors as inferior and expect more from even the Grecian children. So when these values are seen in the Gods it shows how immature and inferior the Gods are in the Grecian culture. When Zeus and his values are seen in comparison to the way Odysseus handles his quarrels and the way he is portrayed in both the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, it can be seen that Odysseus is a more powerful character than Zeus.

Though Helen is not considered to be a notable character in the *Iliad*, she is quintessential example when looking at her superiority over the power of the Gods in the *Iliad*. Throughout the *Iliad* it is shown that Helen hates herself for what she is doing to her country. She knows leaving Sparta to be with Paris is the cause for the death of many of the men from not only her homeland but also her new home in Troy. She battles with huge amounts of internal conflict calling herself a hateful creature and blames herself for being a main cause of the war. This shows Helen's ability to prioritize her feeling and actions. She sees the safety of both of her countries and her

people as the most important aspect of her new role in Troy and her earlier role in Athens: not herself and not her beauty. The Greeks put a huge emphasis on where they were from, so even though leaving her home of Sparta might go against that Grecian value, the fact that she shows remorse shows that she has a great tie to that value and it hurts her to break it. It is said in many ancient myths that Helen was the most gorgeous mortal women whose sheer beauty rivaled even the Gods, however she never emphasizes her beauty or uses it advantageously in any way throughout the *Iliad*. Even though Helen does suffer from this internal conflict of what she is doing to both states she still boldly accepts her responsibility as the new princess of Troy. She does not take time to pity herself or question her abilities to become a great leader of Troy. This type of behavior that Helen embodies is very different in contrast to that of the Goddesses Hera, Aphrodite, and Athena. In another mythological story, that of Paris' Judgment, it is said that these three Goddesses were the reason for the start of the Trojan War. The three Goddesses' morality is put to the test when they are given an apple encrypted "For the Fairest" (Hamilton, 256). The apple is given to Paris to decide who is the most fair based off of the Goddesses bribes, not their beauty; so Paris choses Aphrodite. This outrages the other two Goddesses who decide to take their rage out on Paris and battle against Troy in the upcoming war. This story shows two faults of the Goddesses. One is that they view their beauty as one of their highest priorities and become so obsessed with it that they are willing to initially start the Trojan War. Their immaturity and vanity when looked at in comparison to the noble Helen is an example of their inferiority to mortals. The judgment of Paris also brings out that the Goddesses are willing to unfairly bribe to get what they want. The use of their bribery is a way of demonstrating that they are not confident enough in themselves to believe that they are good enough to win the apple from Paris. Paris is not asked, "to gaze at the radiant divinities and choose which of them

seemed to him the fairest, but only to consider the bribed each offered” (Hamilton, 256). They use bribery to try to make themselves more appealing to Paris, again showing their immaturity and lack of confidence. This lack of confidence and immaturity is greatly looked down upon by the Greeks. They value honorability and confidence in not only their warriors, but also their women. When these three Goddesses are looked at in comparison to Helen they are seen as drastically inferior in their morals, maturity and confidence in their abilities.

The character foil between Hector and Achilles is one that greatly supports the idea of mortals showing superiority over the ancient Gods. Through Homers characterization of Hector it can be seen that he is a strong and noble character. Hector is shown as a more devoted to the ideals of heroic honor rather than he is devoted to his own safety. He pledges “To stand up bravely, always to fight in the front ranks of Trojan soldiers, winning my father great glory, glory for myself.” (Lattimore, 210). Hectors commitment to his honor and dignity is best shown when he faces Achilles, despite him knowing that it will be a fight to his death. This scene portrays one of Hectors most valuable traits as a Trojan warrior, he knows and accepts the power of Achilles, yet does not flee. Instead he turns and faces Achilles and throws the first attack saying “So now I meet my doom. Well let me die--but not without struggle, not without glory, no, in some great clash of arms that even men to come will hear of down the years!” (Lattimore, 551). This demonstrates his bravery and drive to keep his honor as a warrior and a Prince of Troy. This scene also shows that Hector is humble and level headed. He does not face Achilles because he is vain or arrogant in his abilities as a fighter, but instead to uphold his honor as a Trojan and the honor of his family and the city of Troy itself. This value of honor for his city and family was greatly admired by the Greeks and their culture. A lot of emphasis was put on preserving honor as a warrior and a Prince of Troy. Another scene that shows Hectors superiority is when he

confronts Ajax, an Achaean commander. Despite their opposing sides in the war, Hector and Ajax exchange arms demonstrating a pact of friendship. Creating this friendship with opposing sides shows that Hector sees the value and honor of individual dignity and respects Ajax as a man and a good warrior much like himself. The Greeks respected these values in Hector because of their cultures emphasis on honor and treating strangers with respect. By showing this pact of friendship to Ajax, Hector is demonstrating some of the core values of a Homeric hero. Hector's mentalities as a warrior and as a person are much different than those of the demi-god Achilles. Throughout the Iliad Achilles rage and hatred is what drives the plot of the poem, however his inaction due to his hatred towards Agamemnon makes him miss most of the war and the epic battles in the play. This renders him an inactive character unlike Hector. Achilles persistent anger is also a childlike attribution. By not participating in the war for the majority of the fighting, he is showing that he will not do something unless he can get his way showing his immaturity not only as a fighter, but also a man. Achilles immaturity is also seen when he begs for help from the Gods. Whenever he has a problem or is in a tight situation he prays to his mother for assistance. For example, he pleads to his mother to ask Zeus to punish the Achaeans and also asks his mother to have Hephaestus make him divine armor so he can beat the great Trojan warrior Hector. Achilles need for his mother's Godly powers shows that he is not mature enough to survive on his own. He does not have the confidence of a Homeric hero because he asks for the divine armor made by Hephaestus to ensure his victory. His actions show that he is very childish; he always returns to his mother for guidance and counseling before he does anything and asks for help from the Gods when he does actually do something. Achilles immaturity is also shown through his mad morals portrayed throughout the Iliad. Achilles greatest act of anger, immaturity, and dishonor is when he drags the body of Hector through the dirt around the walls

of Troy, then drags him back to his camp to leave him for the dogs and birds saying “No more entreating, dog, by knees or parents. I only wish my fury would compel me to cut away your flesh and eat it raw for what you've done. No one can keep the dogs off of your head, not if they brought me ransom.” (Lattimore, 345-350). His actions towards Hector’s body show the greatest disrespect that Achilles can show, which in turn shows that Achilles holds little regard for respect. This is looked down upon greatly in the Grecian culture because they value and respect the dead for their honor, especially Hector since he was a great warrior. Achilles does everything for himself and holds no respect for others, for his own honor, or the honor of his country. His complete selfishness and immaturity is inferior to the way Hector is portrayed throughout the *Iliad*.

Though Homer’s works are said to be merely a reflection of ancient Grecian culture, there is more to the poems when looked at further. Homer emphasizes the culture of ancient Greece through his character showing their superiority to any other culture and even the supernatural. Homer’s characters embody all that is a Homeric Hero. Characters such as Odysseus, Helen and Hector all have traits such as bravery, honor, and intellect that overpower the characteristics of the Greek Gods and Goddesses who are anthropomorphized as childish and rash in their decisions. The differences that Homer makes between his mortal characters and his supernatural Gods make the bold statement that the Gods and Goddesses of ancient Greece are inferior to the people of Greece.

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