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RAINBOW, SKY, AND STARS IN THE *ILIAD* AND THE *ODYSSEY*:

A CHORIZONTIC ARGUMENT.

THE opinion has been expressed frequently of late, notably by Professor Mackail and Miss Stawell, that the *Odyssey* may well be the work of the advanced years of the Homer of the *Iliad*. Miss Stawell remarks that one of an alert mind must feel that the *Odyssey* is the poem of an older man—one who has conceived and written a poem before. She suggests that that poem may have been the *Iliad*. So Professor Mackail argues that a 'different mind may come to a poet with the lapse of years and with fresh experiences,' and that 'the poet who produced the *Iliad* in the early prime of his life was a poet capable of the artistic and poetical change that is felt in the *Odyssey*, among new surroundings, with an altered view of life, with an imaginative ardour burning less strongly and with increased constructional mastery.'¹

I cannot feel that the poet of the *Odyssey* with his delight in the tale for its own sake, his love for *märchen* and the marvellous, gives indication of a greater maturity than that of the poet who tells of the sorrows of Priam, of Hecuba, of Andromache, of Achilles. The passages in which, as Professor Mackail says, 'a whole criticism of life is concentrated,' are as many in the *Iliad*. Indeed the two² which Professor Mackail cites as pre-eminent in this are taken by him from the *Iliad*.³ The thoughts put in the mouth of Glaucus and of Paris in these places are those of a man who has known the contemplative life as fully as the *Odyssey* poet. In no poem do we find old men represented with greater sympathy and understanding.

I believe that no changed circumstances or experiences in the life of one man can explain the great difference in the temper of the poems. More than one generation of men has passed away between the epic of the *Iliad* and the enchanted tale of the *Odyssey*. A different age, a different taste, a changing faith produced that highly civilized poem. The old weather-gods of the Achaeans are fading out, and Athena, no longer a Valkyrie, but the patron saint of Odysseus, and rather more honourable, though less vigorous and vivid than the Athena of the *Iliad*, and on her way to be goddess of city life, is the divinity most fully in evidence.

In the following discussion of a point of difference which I hold to be of

¹ *Lectures on Greek Poetry*, p. 12.

² *Ibid.*, p. 73.

³ II. VI. 145-9; III. 65, 6.

the greatest importance, and not yet, so far as I am aware, sufficiently emphasized, I shall, for the sake of convenience, speak of the poet of the *Iliad* and the poet of the *Odyssey*, without intending to commit myself to a belief in an absolute singleness of authorship for each poem, but realizing with Wolff 'quam egregie Carmini utrique suus color constet.' My argument is that the *Odyssey* differs from the *Iliad* not only in knowing Zeus less in his aspect of Sky-, that is, *aether*-God, but in its lack of sensibility to all the phenomena of the heaven:—'Fire and hail, snow and vapours, wind and storm fulfilling his word.'

The rainbow and the Rainbow Goddess, who acts as messenger for the Sky-God, are found only in the *Iliad*. The Rainbow Goddess appears by implication once in the *Odyssey* in the jest at the expense of Irus the beggar, so called because he ran on errands. The bright rainbow itself, as a thing sent by Zeus as a portent (τέρας) to mortals, is spoken of twice in the *Iliad*. In the second instance it is Athena who comes from heaven wrapped in a gleaming (πορφυρέη)¹ cloud like the gleaming rainbow. In the *Odyssey* Athene never comes so meteorologically as in this case and in *Iliad* Book IV., where she shoots down in the form of a meteor into the Greek camp. In the *Odyssey* she comes as a hearty ship-captain, or a shepherd, or a little girl carrying a pitcher.

The word αἰθήρ 'the scene of meteorological phenomena'² and 'the home and realm of Zeus as raingiver,' appears twenty-one times in the *Iliad* and five in the *Odyssey*. The words οὐρανός and ἀήρ occur much oftener in the *Iliad* than in the *Odyssey*, though both, especially οὐρανός, are usual words in both poems. In two places³ in the *Iliad* the genitive Διός is used in the sense of sky, and the preponderance of that aspect of Zeus in the older poem may be seen by referring to Geddes',⁴ where a list of physical epithets of Zeus is given with the number of instances in *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The epithets ἀστεροπητής, ἀργικέραυνος, ἐριβρεμέτης, στεροπηγερέτης, occur only in the *Iliad*, and κελαίνεφής (8-3), νεφεληγερέτης (27-7), ἐρίγδουπος (7-3), ὑψιβρεμέτης (4-2), τερψικέραυνος (8-6) occur more frequently in that poem. It may be argued that the name of Zeus himself occurs only half as often in the *Odyssey*. But this very recession of the Sky-God has its significance, which has never been explained away by those who advocate the single authorship. His ὄρος σημαντικόν is mentioned about five times as often in the *Iliad*, and in that poem the adjective 'Ολύμπιος is far more common.⁵

Lightning and fire have a far greater part in the *Iliad*. 'Nowhere except in Dante does fire so penetrate the whole structure,' says Professor Mackail. The splendour of fire, σέλας, is used eleven times in the *Iliad*, and but twice in the *Odyssey*. The *Iliad* poet uses the word for the glory of the full moon and for the lightning of Achilles' angry eyes, as well as for the flashing of the lightning bolt and for blazing fire. Radiance, αἴγλη, is used but twice, and of the gleaming of metal in the sun. The phrase ἀπ' αἰγλήεντος 'Ολύμπου appears

¹ 'Lurid'? So Leaf.

² Leaf, *Iliad*, II., App. H, on οὐρανός, αἰθήρ, ἀήρ.

³ *Iliad*, XIII. 837; XIX. 357.

⁴ *Problem of the Homeric Poems*, p. 137.

⁵ According to Gehring's Index, 32-12.

twice, and gives the starting-point for that line of magical beauty in the famous Olympus passage of the *Odyssey*—λευκή δ' ἐπιδέδρομεν αἶγλη.

The whirling snowflakes, *υφάδες*, which give such splendid similes to the poet of the *Iliad*, are never mentioned in the *Odyssey*. The *Iliad* poet seems even to have imagined an avalanche. At least his mountain of snow¹ is represented in motion. The poet of the *Odyssey* speaks of snow (*χιών*) three times²—once of its absence from shining Olympus, again of the alleged suffering of Odysseus at Troy on the night of the freezing snowstorm, and third, the comparison of Penelope's tears to snow on the mountain tops melted by the east wind. This last has been well compared by Professor Geddes with the splendid falling snow of *Iliad*, XII. 280, as a 'contrast between two landscapes under snow.' The flight of Iris in *Iliad*, XV. 170, is compared to snowflakes or hail from the clouds. Hail, snow, and ice are mentioned in *Iliad*, XXII. 151. Hail does not occur in the *Odyssey*. And *ὀμίχλη* mist, 'vapours,' is another non-Odyssean word. Though rain is mentioned in the *Odyssey* on occasion, there is nothing to match the magnificent description of the autumn floods, when Zeus pours down his raging waters.³

It is in his awe and wonder before the stars and moon—*λαμπροὺς δυναστὰς ἐμπρέποντας αἰθέρι*, that the poet of the *Iliad* shows most poignantly the splendour of his genius and his divergence from the quality of the poet of the *Odyssey* with his love for 'flat bits' and a background of sea. The passage in the eighth book of the *Iliad* translated by Tennyson:—*ὥς δ' ὅτ' ἐν οὐρανῷ ἄστρα φαεινὴν ἀμφὶ σελήνην | φαίνεται ἀριπρεπέα, ὅτε τ' ἐπλετο νηνεμὸς αἰθήρ κ.τ.λ.* conveys that sense of great mysterious beauty that overwhelms us and makes us breathless before the loveliness and the awfulness of the stars themselves. The exquisite passage in which Hector's babe is said to be fair as a star, the comparison of Diomed to the star of summer, the simile of *Iliad* XI. 62, where the star emerges in brightness from the clouds, and is again hid in their darkness, will occur to everyone, together with other splendid passages. The poet of the *Odyssey* has the word *ἀστήρ* but twice. Once in a line repeated from *Iliad*, V. 294, we have the short simile *ἀστήρ δ' ὥς ἀπέλαμπε* of a *πέπλος*. In *Odyssey*, XIII. 93, to mark the time of the boat's reaching the island, it is said that at that moment the star most bright arose, which comes to herald the light of early dawn. The passage in which the constellations represented on the shield are enumerated (*Iliad*, XVIII. 483-89) is copied in part in the *Odyssey*. 'The verses in the *Iliad*,' as Miss Clerke⁴ well says, 'have the strong spontaneous ring of originality, while the Odyssean lines betray excision and interpolation.'

The epithet *starry* for the heaven occurs four times in the *Odyssey* and nine times in the *Iliad*. The moon, *σελήνη*, appears four times in the *Odyssey*—three times in a brief stereotyped simile, and again (IX. 144) in a statement that the moon was not shining on a certain dark night (*Odyssey*, IX. 144). In the *Iliad* besides the wonderful passage in Book VIII., there is the magnificent line

¹ *Iliad*, XIII. 754.

² *Odyssey*, VI. 44; XIV. 476; XIX. 204.

³ *Iliad*, XVI. 765-69.

⁴ *Studies in Homer*, p. 45.

ἡέλιόν τ' ἀκάμαντα σελήνην τε πλήθουσιν, another reference to σελήνη and two to μῆνη. The *Iliad* has also a meteor in IV. 75-79, where Pallas Athene comes to earth in the form of 'a star, a portent for mariners or a wide host of soldiery, and many sparks are scattered from it.'

The poet of the *Odyssey* took 'ready-made'¹ similes from the 'lion' passages of the *Iliad*, but comparisons to stars, lightning, meteor, floods, hail, mist, and driving snow do not appeal to him. Cloud, νέφος, appears three times as often in the *Iliad* as in the *Odyssey*, and νεφέλη twice as often. The cloud simile in *Iliad* V. 523 sqq. is of especial beauty. Fondness for shadows both poems show. The *Iliad* set the fashion with its lovely οὔρεα σκιάοντα and νέφεα σκιάοντα. The words expressing brightness are much more frequent in the *Iliad*. In the *Odyssey* λαμπρός occurs but once, and forms of λάμπω but four times. These are characteristic *Iliad* words. The *Iliad* uses φαεινός five times as often as the *Odyssey*. True, we have the gleaming of Olympus in the sixth book of the *Odyssey*, but that is an unearthly splendour of an enchanted spot, not, as in the *Iliad*, the living splendour of the very stars of heaven.

'The counsellor and cloud-compeller of classical Athens was the wizard and rain-maker of earlier times.'² The Zeus of the *Iliad* and his daughter Athene are nearer that earlier stage in which the phenomena of the heavens seen on their semantic heights revealed them to mortals. And the poet of the *Iliad* sees the splendour of the phenomena of nature caused by Zeus with awe and marvelling. No other Greek poet save Aeschylus gives such a sense of the glory of them. 'ὦ δῖος αἰθήρ!' the cry of Aeschylus' great hero, expresses the spirit of the *Iliad*. There is no such thrill of awe and worship in the poet of the *Odyssey* before the grandeur of the elements. So we have in his poem only a jest at the Rainbow Goddess, a Zeus who lives in a shining heaven, not ἐν αἰθέρι καὶ νεφέλῃσι on the stormy top of an ὄρος σημαντικόν, and barely a glimpse of the stars.

With all the fresh light on Greek origins that has come with the recognition of the fact that Zeus² is the patriarchal mountain-god of the invading Northmen, the following passage in Ruskin has a meaning for the Homeric poems which he himself did not know:

'How different must the thought about nature have been of the noble who lived among the bright marble porticos of the Greek groups of temple or palace—in the midst of a plain covered with corn and olives, and by the shore of a sparkling and freighted sea—from those of the master of some mountain promontory in the green recesses of Northern Europe, watching night by night, from amongst his heaps of storm-broken stone, rounded into towers, the lightning of the lonely sea flash round the sands of Harlech, or the mists changing their shapes for ever among the changeless pines that fringe the crests of Jura.'

The *Iliad* is essentially a Northern, the *Odyssey* a Mediterranean poem.

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¹ Murray, *Rise of the Greek Epic*, p. 215.

² Murray, *Four Stages of Greek Religion*, p. 68.