

In what ways is the telemachy important to the odyssey as a whole



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In what ways is the Telemachy important to the *Odyssey* as a whole? What would the poem lose if these first four books were removed? Homer's *Odyssey* is the epic tale of Odysseus' return home from the battle of Troy, yet we do not truly get to the hero in action until after we are drawn through the story of his son's life in the absence of his father in Ithaca. In the first four books, we see how Telemachos, Odysseus' son, matures and through his eyes Homer shows us the unrest and troubles of Ithaca without Odysseus' presence.

The Telemachy proves its importance to *Odyssey* showing the audience the characters and setting the scene for the Odysseus' tale whilst foreshadowing the events in order to heighten the audience's expectations. But is it possible that the *Odyssey* would still be as powerful without the first four books. The Telemachy's most obvious role is as an introduction. The Telemachy proves its importance by being performing many roles. Perhaps one of the most important is the setup for the Hero, Odysseus, first of we are shown Odysseus's Character.

In Book One Odysseus is talked about by Homer, 'They perished through their own arrogant folly'. Here Homer shows Odysseus in a good light by absolving him of the blame for the loss of his men. This tied in with the epithets that Homer uses, 'Noble' and 'Godlike' these begin to build up an image of Odysseus in the listener's mind as a great hero. Telemachos' travels also build up Odysseus' heroic character as the great kings Nestor and Menelaus speak of Odysseus' achievements and clearly view him with great respect. I feel that this is important because it creates a fuller character for Odysseus and really pulls the audience in.

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This build up of Odysseus as a great person and hero is also important as he must contrast with the suitors, so that the audience feels more empathy towards Odysseus' cause. Although it is justifiable to say that Odysseus gains the readers acknowledge meant more through his adventures where he truly gets to showcase his talents and respectable qualities. It is not only his character which is set up but also his cause, we really see the need for Odysseus' return as his house comes under the rule of the Suitors and Penelope weeps for him ' the husband I have lost and long for'.

The audience not only see more of the character of Odysseus in a positive light but also their empathy for his cause is greatly increased. The Telemachy also shows us the characters of Telemachos and Penelope. We see Telemachos maturing, and becoming the man he needs to be by calling an assembly in Book Two and rebuking the suitors, also Penelope is characterized not only as the woman weeping for her lost husband but also as a suitable match for Odysseus through her cunning with the stitching of Laertes funeral shroud to trick the suitors.

The Telemachy is not only important for the set up for the characters of The Odyssey also to set-up the entire epic. Through Telemachos we are shown the horrific things that are happening to Odysseus' home of Ithaka, this generates sympathy for Odysseus and makes the suitors more villainous in our eyes. This is done in many ways; Homer gives the audience many references to use as judge of character such as the laws of Xenia. Homer creates a benchmark by using the laws of hospitality to show the good from the bad.

Telemachus for instance follows the laws of Xenia perfectly whilst the suitors totally ignore these laws, making them sacrilegious, which in Ancient Greece was huge flaw. Their lack of respect for the Gods mirrors their selfish personalities making the audience dislike them and empathise more with Odysseus. This ideal is drilled into the audiences mind throughout the Telemachy through Telemachos' journeys, Nestor and Menelaus both give good examples of Xenia and they are greatly respected figures in this epic.

This Benchmark of Xenia is a running theme throughout the Odyssey with the audience using it as a moral benchmark, we see it with Polythemus, the Phaecian and it is always a reflection of character. This Benchmark would not have been set up if it was not for the Telemachy so again I feel this stresses its importance. A lot of the anger towards the suitors is manufactured in the first four books; we see them abuse Odysseus' home and their treatment of Telemachos and Penelope. This is a necessity to The Odyssey as Odysseus' actions at the end need to be justifiable.

He horrifically kills all the suitors, and it can be argued that they did not truly deserve this fate, Ithaka needed a new ruler after Odysseus' twenty year absence and their behaviour could be a reaction to Penelope leading them on as Antinoos argues. The Telemachy tries to get the audience behind Odysseus and feel that the death of the suitors has to happen, not only by creating animosity towards the suitors but by also imposing the idea that this is the right thing to do. Homer uses the story of Orestes, Agamemnon's son, who gets revenge for his father.

Both Nestor and Menelaus tell Telemachos of Agamemnon's fate and it is clear that it was essential that Aegisthus be killed; this tells Telemachos that action must be taken. At the end of Telemachy this idea is justified when we see the suitors planning to ambush Telemachos upon his return, and it is clear how evil these characters are. I fear that without the Telemachy creating and reinforcing these views into the audiences head, their feelings towards the characters wouldn't be as vibrant and may even be completely different.

As we do not return to Ithaka until Book thirteen, and by now we have seen Odysseus' flaws and perhaps would not feel as strongly about his triumphant return home and his disposal of the suitors. The Telemachy is more than just a tool to set up for Odysseus' Nostos; I feel that is actually a great piece of entertainment and a show of Homers literary skills. Few ancient works are still intact or recorded and I believe that Homers work is kept because of how outstandingly good it was a piece of art. The Telemachy brings a great deal of drama but it also allows Homer to meddle with the timeline of his epic.

A very interesting idea and we cannot forget that this would have said for entertainment purposes. By beginning with the Telemachy Homer also creates the opportunity to set up the entire epic and its hero without meeting him which makes it less the audience judging the characters by their actions, they predisposed to have certain thoughts because of the characters introductions. Also structurally the Telemachy brings a lot by introducing our hero and our villains and really creating tension for the eager audience.

I think that these literary techniques Homer uses to create the Telemachy, aid in not only The Odysseys claim as one of the best pieces of ancient work but its survival as well. I have stressed the Telemachys importance to the Odyssey through its setup of characters and to setup the entire epic, so I would like to say that without the Telemachy The Odyssey, would loose a lot of depth in its characters and that the audiences emotions throughout would be lessened. Although it is argued that the Telemachy was a later addition this is plausible as Odysseus' tale doesn't need this introduction.

The entirety of Telemachos' travels and the events of Ithaka could easily be removed to just focus upon the hero's journey home. There is argument that it could not have been an addition because it has the mention of the muse in its opening lines a necessity in Greek epics. But personally I think that without the Telemachy, this epic would greatly suffer and would lose what can be seen as another dimension to the story making it a richer therefore more entertaining and endearing tale. So in conclusion I feel that the Telemachy is an extremely important part to the Odyssey on many levels.

It draws the audience into the epic, and creates powerful emotions about the characters involved, imposing themes which are used throughout the epic and structurally it also strings The Odyssey together superbly. Even though the Telemachy should not take too much credit as it is more of an introduction to the Odysseus' epic journey home. Yet without the Telemachy I fear that The Odyssey would not be the groundbreaking piece of art we view it as today. Bibliography Homer, The Odyssey, tr, M. Hammond (London 2000) J. B. Hainsworth, A. Huebeck, S.

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