

Free literature review on the role and meaning of telemachia in odyssey

[Family](#), [Father](#)



The aim of this essay is to present you with the questions risen by the reading of the first four books of Odyssey (rhapsodies a –d). Odyssey is one of the two epics by Homer, worldwide acknowledged for their power in talking to people’s hearts no matter their era, causing feelings of great admiration and movement. In Odyssey, Homer narrates the adventures of Odysseus, the king of Ithaca, an island of Ionian Sea, who took ten whole years to manage and reach his homeland. The main theme of the epic poem is ‘ nostos’ which is the Greek word standing for ‘ the desire to come back home’. The Trojan War lasted ten years but now it has finished and almost every warrior has come back home. But ten years have passed after the end of the war and no sing of Odysseus has been heard. His wife, Penelope, has been waiting for his return along with his young son Telemachus who was a baby when his father left. Odysseus sacrificed everything in the name of his destination, which was the only source of his strength, helping him to endure the tortures during those ten years of his adventures. And through the narration of Odysseus’ adventures Homer finds the opportunity not to talk only about the power of a desire and the extent to which it can work as a strong motivation in one’s life. Homer draws the picture of his main hero while at the same time approaches other issues of human life, of equivalent value and concern. Listeners and forthcoming readers of Odyssey learn about the ethical values not only of the 12th century B. C. but of Homer’s era as well- since Odysseus supposedly lived somewhere in the 12th century when the Trojan War took place but Homer lived in the 8th century B. C. Readers are taught the significance of faith and belief, of one staying faithful to his goals or his feelings. They also witness important values of people of

Ancient Greece concerning their beliefs in the power and role of Gods and Goddesses in their lives, their mentality concerning their own responsibility for their misfortunes and the freedom they are entitled to as far as drawing the path of their lives is concerned. Odysseus acted wrong, showing disrespect to Poseidon, the God of Sea, so now he has to pay. His fate is decided on behalf of the Gods and when Homer decides to begin the narration of Odysseus' life, he asks the Muse to inspire him ' Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story / of that man skilled in all ways of contending, / the wanderer, harried for years on end, / after he plundered the stronghold / on the proud height of Troy'. Homer begins narrating his story in the middle of the plot. He doesn't begin from the beginning of the story and this is a writing technique first applied by Homer and adopted afterwards by a number of writers of all kinds as a way to intrigue their readers by not following the expected order of events and by bringing them at once to the peak, to the climax of their plot. This is what happens with Odyssey and this technique has been known as ' in media res' (meaning in the middle of things). Listeners and future readers learn in the first four books of Odyssey which are called ' Telemachia' the two basic colons upon which the plot of the story is to be built. The first colon is the visit of Hermes, the messenger of Gods, to Calypso, the goddess who keeps Odysseus in her island. Hermes is to announce her the decision of Gods. Odysseus must be led free to return home. The second colon is the visit of goddess Athena to Telemachus, the son of Odyssey, in Ithaca. The situation in Ithaca is very dangerous since the suitors (the men established in his palace who press Penelope to choose one among them as her husband who is to take his

throne) have gone out of control and Telemachus seems incapable of dealing with them. Athena is to present herself to Telemachus having taken the appearance of a man who is supposed to be his father's friend and encourage him to go and ask for information on his father's fortune to other kings of other cities, Sparta and Pylos. This second colon of the plot is where Homer begins his story from. So at the beginning of *Odyssey* the first person readers meet is *Odyssey's* son, Telemachus. This is the reason why the first four rhapsodies of *Odyssey* are called *Telemachia*. This essay is to present you with an analysis of Athena's reassuring Telemachus that his father is alive and he ought to find the strength to stand upon his feet, fulfilling the responsibility of his origins.

The essay will present you with the nature of Athena's advice, the change of Telemachus after his dialogue with Athena, the development of Telemachus' personality and maturity as well as the reason justifying Homer's choice to have put so much emphasis on this part of his plot.

1. Athena's visit and dialogue with Telemachus

As soon as the meeting of Gods reaches its end and their decision on helping *Odyssey* to return to Ithaca has been taken, Athena disappears and appears again in Ithaca meeting Telemachus, having taken the appearance of Mentos, king of the race of Taphians, a supposed to be friend of his father. When Telemachus meets Mentos-Athena he insists, according to the ethics of his time, on offering his guest with a meal. This is the typical of hospitality in Ancient Greece. Every guest is offered with a meal before he is to reveal the reason of his visit. As soon as the meal is over and the feast in the palace begins, the stereotypical questions involved in the ethics of hospitality are

addressed to Mentos by Telemachus. Questions on his identity, whether he knows his father, if he has any news of him, and the reason of his visit. Athena –Mentos says that he is on a trip of trade and that his father was a best friend of Odysseus' father. He says that he carries iron which he wants to sell and exchange with copper. Athena – Mentos says that he is not a prophet but he believes that it is the gods who delay the return of Odysseus. It is upon that moment that the question addressed to Telemachus comes, whether or not he is the son of Odysseus. ' My mother says that I am his child; but I know not, for never yet did any man of himself know his own parentage.' is the answer of Telemachus. After that Athena-Mentos asks Telemachus what the feast is about and thus Telemachus is given by Homer the chance to express his own way of perceiving the situation regarding the suitors. Telemachus answer shows total weakness on his behalf to deal with the status-quo of his home. He presents the suitors as an evil which has fallen upon his home while he himself feels totally incapable of managing to kick them out. Telemachus seems to stay only on complaining without showing any power of taking control of the situation. So Athena-Mentos tells him what his father would do if he were there right now. He would take revenge. Athena advises Telemachus to call an assembly the following morning and with the help of Ithaca's nobles and people ask the suitors to stop behaving so wrongly. Then she advises him that he should take a ship with 20 trusted men and sail to Sparta and Pylos where he can ask the kings of those cities, Menelaos and Nestor on information regarding his father's fortune. Athena tells him that he should stand upon the responsibility of his origin, of his father's name. " You know, few sons turn out to be like their

fathers; /Most turn out worse, a few better. /No, you don't have it in you to be a fool or a coward, /and you've got something of Odysseus's brains" (p. 349). Athena-Mentes goes on giving him advice on the outcome of his trip. If the news is good then he need not worry. His father will come and they will deal with the suitors. But even if the news is bad, Telemachus ought to act accordingly. He should keep in mind the example set by Orestes who killed Aegisthus, the man dishonoring his father's memory. Telemachus could kill the suitors himself and make a name for himself. When her advice is told, Athena leaves just as quickly as she had appeared. But Telemachus is not the same boy any more. He has turned into a man. He has gained confidence in himself since he was reminded of his honorable origins. He knows now that he is the one responsible for his kingdom. Enough with the grudging on the evil torturing him and his mum. It is time he took control of things and he found the courage to act accordingly to a noble man, fulfilling his role. Homer presents us with a scene of great mastery. He seems to lead his readers witness the beneficial effect of a word of advice to a person of young age. The experience Telemachus is about to gain from his trip is what will contribute to the realization on his behalf of his own change. It will be the first time he will go away and he is to be responsible for his own actions and for the safety of himself and his companions. Telemachus is given the chance to get rid of the idea of being an immature young grown-up child who is treated by all, including his mother as a weak, badly hit by the fate, young man. He will find his own identity. He will meet with his traits of his real personality through the difficulties he will encounter in his trip. Like Odysseus, his father found catharsis for his disrespect towards Poseidon

through the tortures of his adventures, so will Telemachus find his real self. There comes a time in young people's lives when they meet their destiny. And Telemachus' destiny is the one of a noble man, who wants to build the strength of his name. Telemachus is the son of famous Odysseus and he ought to behave like that. A man's character is built upon the foundations of his experiences, his efforts to fight for what he believes, for the goals he sets. Besides Odysseus turned into a symbol of the man fighting for his beliefs endlessly, till he can finally fulfill them. Homer is once more admired because he prepares, from the very beginning of his plot, his readers with the new Telemachus they will meet just a while before the end of his narration. Telemachus will have turned into a mature man who will be more than capable to stand by the side of his father and help him kill the suitors. Telemachus turns into a mature, brave man from the fearful, full of oppressed rage boy he was. His role in the evolution of the plot is crucial and it is this first revulsion of Telemachus' feelings, mentality and way of looking at things and dealing with them, that proves Homer's mastery in shedding light to the most isolated parts of a person's innate character, hidden in the dark traits and characteristics of his true identity. Notice should be taken of Homer's knowledge as far as the important contribution of a spiritual leader's advice to one's empowerment of character is concerned. It is the advice by Athena - Mentos which set the engine for Telemachus journey to the inner part of his real self.

References

Homer, *Odyssey*, Book 1 of the *Odyssey*, translated by A. T. Murray

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