

# Disguise in the "odyssey": character development and athena's impact

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All through the Homer's *Odyssey*, disguise has been adopted by different characters to complicate or facilitate their or another character's passage across the world. Some characters assume multiple disguises throughout the plot.

Athena, the goddess, for example, goes through no less than three transformations. It is not only the goddess who puts on a camouflage, though; Odysseus also pulls off the disguise power to progress his goals and objectives. Odysseus was the king of Ithaca at the time when Palamedes sent him to the Trojan War, which lasted for ten years.

The story begins when Odysseus with his crew journey back to Ithaca, his homeland, as a Trojan War's valiant hero. He sets sail for Ithaca but in the face of fate wonders for a decade when his ships were instantly drifted to Thrace by a violent storm.

It was the beginning of an expedition. Throughout the *The Odyssey*, disguise helped the main character, Odysseus, develop through humility and understanding, which eventually led the character back to Ithaca. This journey was made with the aid of the goddess Athena, who disguised Odysseus

Odysseus faces many challenges and tragedies during this adventure. During his travel back home, he was put to trial on different occasions by the monstrosity that nearly destroyed him. His intelligence and sly behavior made him pull through the various dangerous situations he met.

Ultimately, he succeeded in getting back home, and this, he owes to Athena, the goddess, who always supported him throughout his travel. Athena incessantly favored Odysseus, as witnessed in *The Odyssey*, when Zeus, on Athena's behalf, had ordered him to be released from the island of Calypso where he had been held captive for seven years.

Unfortunately, Poseidon noticed him floating in the waters and was compelled to make him drown, had it not been for goddess Ino who saved him. Later, Odysseus reached Phaeacia city, where he encountered Athena camouflaged as King Alcinous's daughter. The following excerpt supports that, indeed, the goddess Athena disguised Odysseus to help him. (Homer and Johnston 111).

"Straight to his house, the clear-eyed Pallas went, full of plans for great Odysseus' journey home. She made her way to the gaily painted room where a young girl lay asleep: Nausicaa, the daughter of generous King Alcinous. The goddess drifted through like a breath of fresh air in face and form like the shimpans Dymas' daughter. Disguised, the bright-eyed goddess chided..." (117).

Athena also had to pour a sea fog around Odysseus to protect him, and then she assumed the shape of a little girl and showed him the way to the palace (Homer and Johnston 111-112). Athena again used this tactic when Odysseus had safely reached his homeland. The goddess did not want the people to notice his return until he had taken revenge upon the suitors of his wife.

Zeus' daughter Athena had made it a foggy day, so that people might not know of his arrival, and that she might tell him everything without either his wife or his fellow citizens and friends recognizing him until he had taken his revenge upon the wicked suitors(185).

Back in his homeland way before the Trojan War, Odysseus was a king. He had a wife and a son whom he had left an infant when he had to leave for Troy. Being transformed into a stranger, Odysseus had managed to convince Alcinous to bring him back to his homeland. He had to put away his pride to get the much-needed help in reaching home.

" And there Odysseus stood, gazing at all this bounty, a man who had borne so much...Once, he had had his fill of marveling it all." (141). Athena disguised Odysseus as a beggar to get revenge against the suitors. With this, he had to cast away again his pride (Homer and Johnston 148). Athena explains to him:

" First, I will transform you-no one must know you. I will shrivel the supple skin on your lithe limbs, strip the russet curls from your head, and deck you out in rags you'd hate to see some other mortals wear; I'll dim the fire in your eyes, so shinning once..." (253)

Once again, Odysseus displays much loss of pride when he comes across a goat herder who mocks and kicks him but was capable of rationalizing the situation. That signaled maturity in his part has been a man of inordinate self-esteem. Later on, he was able to put aside his identity and egoism even when in concealment (Homer and Johnston 235).

The use of disguise in The Odyssey was helpful as it allowed Odysseus to survey his palace and identify those who had remained loyal and those who had not. Eumaeus was one of such great men who displayed loyalty to his king even in his long absence.

This is noted when he says: " Not even my parents at home, where I was born and bred. I miss them less than I do him..." (354). He displays further loyalty by showing a feeling of disgust toward the suitors, which moves Odysseus.

Another example of loyalty is shown by his dog, Argos, who was merely a puppy at the time when Odysseus left and was at the point of an old dog. The dog recognized his old master, wagged his tail then died. The fact that his wife, Penelope, did not remarry despite the many suitors who courted her, shows a great height of loyalty.

Other loyal people were his son Telemachus, and Eurykleia, his old nurse. The opposite case is with the suitors and, more especially, Antinous, who rudely hurled a chair at him when in disguise had announced that Odysseus would return (Homer and Johnston 367-389).

Boiling over Antinous gave him a scathing look and let fly. ' Now, you will not get out the hall unscarred; I swear not after such a filthy string of insults!' With that, he seized the stool and hurtled it-Square in the back it struck Odysseus... (369).

Eventually, Odysseus successfully vanquished the suitors and was able to reclaim his castle.

Upon bringing back Odysseus adventures from his battle with the monsters though his landing home to his reclaiming the palace, it is noted that his wit and guise aided him to put through his hardships, of course, with the help of Athena who revealed it to him after he had landed in Ithaca. Sure enough, the role of disguise helped Odysseus' character develop through humility and understanding, which eventually led the character back to Ithaca, with the aid of the goddess Athena.

Odysseus' journey was much of a self-discovery. It served as a realization of what it takes to be a leader, thus, enhanced his maturity. In conclusion, the importance of disguise in the Odyssey was not only that of practical purposes (to help Odysseus on his journey back home to Ithaca), it also psychologically impacted Odysseus for the better, which helped him complete his hero-cycle.

Homer. *Odyssey*. Trans. Ian C. Johnston. New York: Richer Resources Publications, 2007. Print