

Role of the gods in the odyssey

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Religion has always been an important part of culture, in present times and even dating back to the times of the Trojan War and before. No matter what religion a person practices or believes in the role of the certain gods believed in has always been important. In three separate pieces we have read we have seen the importance of the gods, or God, play a key role in the development of the literature. In Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*, the gods are key in Odysseus' return to Ithaca after twenty years. Whether it is helping Odysseus or delaying him, they play a major role in the development of the story.

In Psalm 139, the scripture passage taken from the Bible, God is a very obvious factor. Even in the poem by William Owen " *Dulce et Decorum Est*" God again plays a major role once we dive deeper than the words are saying. The role of the gods, or singular God in Catholicism, plays a key role, sometimes unspoken, part. In *The Odyssey* we see in the first book three major gods that make an immediate impact on Odysseus' journey home. Zeus, Athena, and Poseidon all are important in their own way in either helping Odysseus or trying to stop him.

Zeus, king of the gods, is characterized as a mediator between Athena and Poseidon, the former helping Odysseus and the latter trying to stop him from reaching home. Athena does all she can to help out the mortal Odysseus, even appearing to him and his son Telemachus in disguise to point them in the right direction. Poseidon, however, hates Odysseus for blinding his son and tries his hardest on multiple occasions to kill Odysseus and his men. Zeus, for being king of the gods, does not have the most important religious role in this epic poem.

He is mostly seen as a babysitter between Athena and Poseidon, allowing Athena to help Odysseus but at the same time punishing the people who help out Odysseus. At one point, after Poseidon voiced his anger, he turns a Phaeacian ship to stone right when it returns because they helped Odysseus return home. His only involvement with Odysseus seems to be when he is trying to please both Athena and Zeus. Athena is a very key character in this poem. She takes a liking to the human Odysseus because of the intelligence and cunning that he naturally has. She personally gets involved in the lives of Telemachus and Odysseus by coming to them in disguise and helping them throughout their separate journeys. The grey-eyed goddess, as she is referred to many times, is responsible for setting Telemachus on the path to find out more about his father, and gives him the courage to stand up to the suitors who have invaded his father's house. The goddess is seen helping Odysseus in almost every book, most notably the last four where she gives him strength when fighting the suitors, helping Odysseus and Telemachus reach Laertes' house peacefully, and even makes the suitor's parents forget about their children's deaths and restores peace to Ithaca.

Athena makes the homecoming of Odysseus a happy one, helping him and his family time and time again so that they are reunited. Poseidon, god of the sea, holds a nasty grudge against Odysseus throughout the story. Odysseus, after the famous "Nobody" trick, foolishly tells the Cyclopes Polyphemus his name as he is sailing away after blinding him. Poseidon, who is Polyphemus' father, is outraged that a mortal blinded his son, and takes it upon himself to make sure Odysseus never gets back home. Poseidon causes storms to

break Odysseus' boats and kill his men, while wrecking havoc on Odysseus just about every chance he gets.

He goes so far that he asks Zeus to sink the Phaeacians ship, a race of people who adore Poseidon. Poseidon holds a major grudge against Odysseus, however he cannot stop him from reaching home. In the Christian scripture passage Psalm 139; taken from the Bible, we see that God has many of the same characteristics on the gods in The Odyssey. It is described in the scripture passage that God has a perfect knowledge of all of us, which draws the comparison to the gods of Ancient Greece. God knows everything there is to know about us and what we are doing; he is all seeing and all powerful.

Much like the gods of Ancient Greece sitting high above everyone on Mount Olympus, they see everything that is happening below them. Another powerful comparison is the unseen god factor. God always sees us, as humans though we never see him, much like when Odysseus and Telemachus see Athena; she is always disguised, never showing her true form. Zeus never appears, he sends his messages in forms of eagles, as signs to be interrupted by humans, much like God uses miracles to show his presence and existence. We are presented with two separate pieces of literature that have very similar comparisons in religion.

Wilfred Owen's famous poem "Dulce et Decorum Est" actually makes no mention of religion in it, but it is obvious to see that whatever god you pray to has no part in wars and stopping the death and violence. It brings us to ask ourselves the question of why would any god let these atrocities happen? British citizens not fighting in World War 1 thought that these men were

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dying heroic deaths, but Owen gives us an insight into how badly these men suffered when they went off to war. The gruesome deaths, the never ending violence and having to watch a comrade die are just a few of the horrible things that are seen in this poem.

It leads us to believe that war is not worth it, in any sense, and that a sensible god would not allow it. Odysseus, after ten years of fighting the Trojans and seeing many of his close friends die, then had to suffer for an additional ten years. The men in World War 1 signed up for their own premature deaths, and there was no religious power to stop these cruel actions. All three of these pieces give us significant insight on our Common Core questions. However, it ties in most importantly to our understanding of what it means to be human.

Most obvious in all three pieces we see the “ human” aspects of our lives, the fact that we can die while gods or God cannot. We are not as powerful as gods or God, we cannot control our fate, and it is already written out for us by whomever we pray to in each respective religion. We must make the most of the time and life we are given because we do not have a long time on this planet. To be human means that we must be able to recognize our own abilities, our own strengths and weaknesses, and know that there is a higher power controlling our fate.