

Role of telemachus in "the odyssey" essay sample

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



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Introduction

“ The Odyssey” is one of the most famous epic poems of Ancient Greece which promotes the ideals of heroism, glorification of war and the power of the cunning over physical strengths. The poem introduces many characters which perform specific roles. Telemachus is the son of Odysseus and his role in the poem is very important. Through the character of Telemachus the author shows differences between ‘ beginning heroism’ and ‘ transcendent heroism’. Moreover, Telemachus symbolizes the changeability of human nature and human character – Telemachus grows to maturity throughout novel progression showing that everyone has strength to become either a hero or mature personality. Telemachus is not Odysseus, but he manages to overcome many obstacles: absence of his father and presence of suitors. Telemachus is the only person who can defend his beloved mother from suitors. Telemachus has active mind and stout heart and he is on the way to match his father’s skills and cunning.

The Importance of Telemachus

From the beginning of the epic novel it may seem that Telemachus plays central role as Odysseus doesn’t appear till Telemachus realizes his responsibilities before his palace and his mother. Telemachus struggles with suitors in order to take control of the situation and to defend father’s palace from suitors. Despite the fact that he isn’t provided with strengths, wit, agility and other heroic qualities as his father, Telemachus proves that he is

mature and strong enough to control the situation and defend citizens.

Telemachus is growing significantly throughout the poem showing symbolically that one should never give up even the desperate situation.

Therefore, I think that Telemachus plays important role as he inspires others to struggle, he helps father to kill suitors and, what is more important, he becomes mature personality. "The Odyssey" is written primarily about Odysseus' adventures, but one shouldn't ignore Telemachus' contribution, especially in the final scenes - Telemachus develops and matures from a weak and powerless adolescent to a strong and wit person who defeats tormentors and sees the happiness of re-unification of his mother and father.

In the beginning of the epic poem we see that Telemachus is not mature and he seems to lack self-confidence and abilities to defend himself and his mother from suitors who devours his family palace, food and wine.

Telemachus feels disappointed and worthless: "I wish at least I had some happy man / as father, growing old in his own house, / but unknown death and silence are the fate / of him that, since you ask, they call my father". (I, 261-264) Telemachus realizes that his father's palace and lands are overrun with men who are stronger and older than he and, therefore, Telemachus feels powerless and weak. Instead of being defiant, Telemachus tends to complain quietly. Summing up, in the beginning of the novel Telemachus is helpless and immature personality, but with poem progression he develops inner strengths allowing us to define him as the son of the hero.

Nevertheless, I think that it is the divine influence of Athena that gives Telemachus abilities to strengthen his character and to become self-

confident. Athena asks Telemachus not to remain in the shadow of his heroic father and to realize that he is able to bring justice to the suitors. However, instead of become firm of purpose, Telemachus merely says: " If he [Odysseus] returned, if these men ever saw him, / faster legs they'd pray for, to a man, / and not more wealth in handsome robes or gold". (I, 202-204) Telemachus seems to realize the problem, but he is still immature dreamer waiting for mystical appearance of his father.

However, Athena gradually builds up Telemachus' confidence and he seems to ready to rebel against suitors and to bring changes. It is symbolical representation of Telemachus' inner changes and growing to maturity. Telemachus continues to listen to Athena's advice and suggestion. The crucial moment for Telemachus is when Athena says that " a sensible man would blush to be among them" and that he needs " not bear this insolence of theirs, / you are a child no longer" (I, 243-44) Goddess' words play significant role in maturation of Telemachus who realizes that he is a man now and he feels able to put everything in order till his father returns. It is fair to say that Athena's words have magic influence on Telemachus as he suddenly becomes assertive and firm of purpose to save his mother and to kill all suitors. Telemachus starts scolding suitors, though firstly he not very successful in his attempts because suitors don't consider him seriously. They are still unaware of his awakening strengths and wit. It is necessary to underline that Telemachus doesn't understand fully his responsibilities, but feel urgency to make great things to match his father and to show that he may be proud of his son.

When Telemachus is ready for his journey, we see that becomes a real man, not immature boy. Telemachus is able to communicate with suitors and it is the first step in the long process of his self-development and self-discovery. I think that Telemachus is also a heroic character, but his heroism is shown in his abilities to develop inner strengths, not heroic deeds. For example, in the fourth book Telemachus gets acquainted with Menelaos and his wife. This meeting makes the reader aware of differences between the heroic personality of Odysseus and Telemachus. When Menelaos discovers the parentage of Telemachus, he says: " My dear, I see the likeness as well as you do, / Odysseus' hands and feet were like this boy's; / This head and hair, and the glinting of his eyes" (IV, 159-61) Telemachus is important in this scene as readers are allowed to see the difference between ' beginning heroism' and ' transcendent heroism'.

Conclusion of the epic poem provides two key moments which show the importance of Telemachus' maturation and self-development:

- Firstly, when Telemachus sees that his mother is shocked meeting his father, he tells her to fall at his feet: " Mother, cruel mother, do you feel nothing. / drawing yourself apart this way from father? / Will you not with him and talk and question him? ... Your heart is hard as flint and never changes" (XXIII. 221-224) This moment shows that Telemachus has changed as he seems thoughtful and mindful. I think he really wants his mother to be happy and he wants his family to reunite. Nevertheless, by this point Telemachus realizes that his mother is not perfect as he used to think and he doesn't look blindly at her.

This event plays important role in the poem as Telemachus takes the position of " a man of the house".

- Secondly, Telemachus helps his heroic father to kill suitors and save family palace. I think that when Telemachus kills Eurymachus he shows maturation and development as he appears to be able to take control over a man who has been one of the most powerful sources of frustration. Killing Eurymachus is a turning point as Telemachus is able to revenge people who haven't taken him seriously before his journey. It is necessary to underline that this even can be considered Telemachus' personal conclusion as the author doesn't discuss him any more.

Conclusion

Summing up, the character of Telemachus is far from being heroic as he can't match his heroic father in physical strength, wit and cunning.

Nevertheless, Telemachus can be considered hero for himself as he has fully developed as personality in the end of the poem. Telemachus has deeper understanding of who he was and who he is. Despite the fact that Telemachus may never approach his father in heroism, Telemachus is a ' secondary hero' of the poem. The character of Telemachus is rather important for poem progression as he shows others that one should find strengths not to give up. Telemachus has fulfilled the role he was entailed with: he has developed to mature and strong personality and he has managed to kill suitors saving his mother and family palace.

References

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