

The journey of odysseus and telemachos



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In The Odyssey written by Homer and translated by Richard Lattimore, several themes are made evident, conceived by the nature of the time period, and customs of the Greek people. These molded and shaped the actual flow of events and outcomes of the poem. Beliefs of this characteristic were represented by the sheer reverence towards the gods and the humanities the Greek society exhibited, and are both deeply rooted within the story.

In the intricate and well-developed plot of The Odyssey, Homer harmonized several subjects. One of these, was the quest of Telemachos, (titled " Telemachy") in correlation with the journey of his father. In this, he is developed from a childish, passive, and untested boy, to a young man preparing to stand by his fathers side. This is directly connected to the voyage of Odysseus, in that they both lead to the same finale, and are both stepping stones towards wisdom, manhood, and scholarship. Through these voyages certain parallels are drawn concerning Odysseus and Telemachos: the physical journeys, the mental preparations they have produced, and what their emotional status has resulted in. These all partake a immense role in the way the story is set up, stemming from the purpose of each characters journey, their personal challenges, and the difficulties that surround them.

The story commences when Odysseus, a valiant hero of the Trojan war, journeys back home. Together with his courageous comrades, and a several vessels, he set sail for his homeland Ithaca. Fated to wander for a full ten years, Odysseuss ships were immediately blown to Thrace by a powerful storm. The expedition had begun.

Upon this misfortune, he and his men started a raid on the land of the Cicones. However, this only provided them with temporary success. The Cicones had struck back and defeated a vast majority of Odysseus's crew. This was their first of many disastrous experiences to come.

Storms then blew his ships to Libya and the land of the Lotus-eaters, where the crew was given Lotus fruit from which most lost their entire memories from home. Odysseus, and the others who had not tasted it, recovered the sailors by force, and set sail again, westward, this time to the island of the Cyclops, a wild race of one-eyed giants. Leaving most of his men in a sheltered cove, Odysseus then entered the island with one crew only. They wandered around, encountering, and foolishly entering an immense cave, awaiting the owner. Moments later, a Cyclops named Polyphemos, son of Poseidon, entered and pushed a huge boulder covering the entrance to the cave. Upon this, he immediately ate two sailors, and promised to eat the others in due time. The morning came, and Polyphemos had promptly eaten two more seamen, against the will

of Zeus. Odysseus, soon realized that killing him asleep would do no good since the mouth of the cave was still inescapable. The captain had then devised a new plan. When Polyphemos returned that evening, Odysseus showered the monster with wine until he had fallen under a drunken spell. Then, with the help of his companions took a sharp pole and rammed it into his large eye, blinding him instantaneously. As the crew sailed away into the vast dimensions of the sea, Odysseus had unwisely revealed his name in taunting the poor beast, boasting his excessive pride. Polyphemos

then made a prayer to his father, asking to punish the man who had caused him this harm.

Several days later Odysseus and his men arrived at the island of Aeolus, keeper of the winds. There, they stayed for about one month, and departed, in sight of the long-awaited Ithaca. However, before they left, Odysseus was presented with a container of winds, carrying each but the needed West wind. As Ithaca approached, the crew not knowing the contents of the "skin", opened it up and released all of the winds, depositing the ships back at the island of Aeolus, who refused to help them any further.

Setting sail once again, the group headed back west, where they had come across the Island of the Laesrtygonians, a savage race of cannibals. Everyone, but Odysseus, lined their ships at the harbor, covered with rocks. The entire party was attacked and eaten by the Laestrygonians, who had bombarded them with giant boulders. Having but one vessel left, Odysseus sailed his ship to the Island of Dawn, inhabited by the sorceress Circe.

A group of men were sent to explore the island, who were then lured, feasted, and then turned to swine by Circe. Knowing this Odysseus went after her, and on his way encountered Hermes who gave him a potion to withstand the spell. Circe tried, and then she failed. Odysseus had then requested for his crew to be turned back to normal. She complied, and eventually housed Odysseus and his shipmates long enough for him to father three children. Homesick and distraught, Odysseus was then advised by Circe to search the underworld for Teiresias, to tell him his fortune,

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and how to appease Poseidon.

Odysseus agreed and made a trip to the underworld, where he discovered many of his dead companions from Troy, and most importantly, Teiresias. With his new knowledge, he returned to Circe, which had provided him with just the information he needed to pass the Sirens. They then departed from the island and continued on their journey, ears filled with wax.

What Odysseus was about to encounter next would be a very difficult task. He needed to direct his ship through a straight, between two cliffs, on one side the whirlpool Charybdis, on the other, a monster Scylla. Trying hard to avoid Charybdis Odysseus came too close to Scylla, and six members of his ship suffered the consequences. As the journey continued the Island of Helios stood in path. Helios was the sun-god, and nurturer of the cattle of the gods. Knowing this, but at the same time extraordinarily hungry, Odysseus waited for his sea-mates to fall asleep and slaughtered several of the cattle. This was much considered a lack of respect not only to Helios, but to the rest of the gods as well.

Zeus, angered by his gesture, struck his ship with thunder, destroying the entire thing and killing the rest of the crew except for Odysseus, which floated off to the Island of Ogygia, where he would there spend the next seven years, made a lover, by the sea nymph Calypso. Upon Poseidon's departure to Ethiopia, Zeus had then ordered that Calypso release Odysseus, who gave him an ax. With this, he constructed a float, and continued his expedition. Back from his trip, Poseidon, saw Odysseus floating in the ocean and felt compelled to drown him, which he almost

did, if it was not for the goddess Ino, who had spared him a magic veil. He tied this to his waist, and swam to a beach where he immediately fell asleep.

The next morning he was awoken by maidens playing ball after doing the wash. There he saw Nausikaa, daughter of king Alkinoos. Odysseus gently supplicated to the princess. She first took him to the inhabitants of the island, the Phaiakians, and then Alkinoos, the king. There he listened to Odysseus's stories, and presented him with lavish gifts and a furnished ship back to Ithaca. Resenting this fact, Poseidon turned the new crew into stone for their generosity.

This is the time, nearly twenty years after his father's departure, Athene wisely advises the worried, and still immature Telemachos to go in search of his father. Telemachos agrees with her orders, and before his departure he makes it clear to the suitors (robbing his home and proposing marriage to his mother Penelope) that he wants them all out of his house.

He then requested a ship and twenty men, and sailed off to the Island of Pylos. There he was immediately greeted by Nestor, in the middle of offering 81 bulls to Poseidon. Peisistratos, son of Nestor, then offered some intestines to Telemachos and Athene as far as sacrificing it in hopes of a safe journey. This was ironic since in reality, Athene was controlling his journey, and on the other hand, moments ago, Poseidon, was in fact destroying the journey of his father. Nestor, once seeing that his guests were finished feasting, asked of

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their identities. Once he was recognized, Telemachos asked Nestor about his father. Nestor rambled on and said nothing of real importance to Telemachos. At this point Telemachos became pessimistic, and Athene reassured him with an analogy of Agamemnon's short journey, and its consequences. Still emotionally unstable, Telemachos used this opportunity to speak of Menelaus, Agamemnon's brother.

Nestor agreed that Menelaus may be more knowledgeable than he, and kindly provided him with a chariot, so that he could travel to Sparta to speak with him, accompanied by Peisistratos. He arrived at Sparta two days later, sleeping in the house of Diocles the first night, and arriving by nightfall the second day. He reached the island just in the middle of a double marriage ceremony of Menelaus's daughter and son. At this point, Homer cleverly compared Menelaus to Odysseus in the reader's mind by suggesting the similarities between the both in background, and "undoubtedly" survival. He also used this scene to emphasize Telemachos's emotional instability as he burst out crying at the mention of his father's name. The night ended and Telemachos was finally noticed to be Odysseus's son by Helen, Menelaus's wife. Once this took place, he conclusively mentioned his purpose in visiting: To find information about his father. Menelaus answered Telemachos by speaking of his journey from Troy, and reassuring Telemachos of his father's wit and cleverness, and almost certain survival.

After the men finished talking, Menaleus showered him with complements and gifts (one refused, one accepted), and then Telemachos left, feeling good about himself once again.

After this event, the scene changes back to Ithaca where the suitors were planning their ambush on the young prince. Telemachos went back home, only to find out that his father had already arrived before him. This sets Odysseus (disguised as a beggar) and Telemachos up for the big scene against the suitors, where father and son, side by side, rid Ithaca of its cancerous cells, and reunite the "royal" family. Odysseus then appeased and sacrificed to the god Poseidon in the name of his misbehavior.

As Homer makes it apparent, there are other underlying themes embedded in the story that would just confuse the reader if they were not there. An example of this is the emotional aspects of both characters. If one does not understand this key element, there is no way that the sequence of events would cohere. "Why didn't Telemachos look for his father earlier? Why did Penelope wait twenty years to consider remarrying? How did this affect Odysseus in his journey?". These are questions that would go unanswered unless the reader reaches within the emotions of the character.

In the case of Telemachos, his emotions shaped his well being. For example, had it not been for Athene giving him confidence, by no means would he ever have thought of taking such a voyage, hence, Telemachos would have never participated in his "final test" against the suitors

either. His sorrow and anger from the loss of his father and his mother constantly being attacked and proposed to by piranha-like suitors were also driving forces towards his journey. Some of these are brought out in different situations, both positive and negative, such as Menelaus's mention of his father, which caused a sudden out-burst of tears, and the proud and accomplished feeling he received from leaving Sparta..

Odysseus's situation was only slightly different. He, like

Telemachos had his worries about family-life, and his kingdom at stake, but also had concerns about his wife, possibly triggered by the mention of Agamemnon's by Proteus, who was killed by the hands of his own wife.

These factors probably had taken their toll on Odysseus. At the same time he had the wrath of Poseidon to contend with. Another factor which could have also led to this distress could have been his visit to the underworld, and in his entire journey, losing friends and comrades regularly.

The last object of these journeys and possibly the most important to the reader, is comprehending how these travels actually led to the final test: The battle against the suitors. This is considered the poem's mental perspective. Odysseus had many things to overcome before he would be ready to take on this responsibility. His journey prepared him for that. For one, if he had not have perfected his tolerance abroad and finely tuned his hubris problems there would have been no possible way for him to undertake a role such as the beggar, where he must be constantly enduring both verbal and physical attacks. There is also no

way that Odysseus could have sacrificed and begged forgiveness to the sea-god Poseidon if he had not learned his lesson about respect from Polyphemos and Zeus (eating Helios's cattle). These factors play an immense role in the outcome of the poem. If it had not been for these events, the story could never have taken place.

The same circumstances applied for Telemachos as well. His goal was to reach a level of adulthood and to stand by his father's side, to mature into a man, and most importantly to gain respect, and to withhold and protect family *kleos*. This happened when at first Athene inspired him to go in search of his father. At that stage he was an inactive, and boyish young prince. When the challenges rose, however (assisted by Athene), Telemachos rose to meet those challenges. His first items of business were to set the suitors straight at home. Although he was not completely effective, he surprised them a great deal with his authority, and even his own mother in later books. That proved that Telemachos was gaining a new awareness, not only about his father, but about the kingdom, his mother, and the role he needed to partake. By the end of his long emotional journey, Telemachos realized what it took to be a man, which could not have been possible without his escapades to Pylos and Sparta.

In *The Odyssey*, Homer created a parallel for readers, between Odysseus and Telemachos, father and son. Telemachos was supposedly learning the role of his father, the king of Ithaca, to follow in the footsteps. The two are compared in the poem from every aspect. However, in analyzing *The Odyssey*, one may also presume that Homer had not

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intended for the Telemachos to be as great a hero as his father. This may be due to the fact that, for example, he never had a Trojan War to fight, his setting is in a time of peace unlike his fathers, and more notably- although matured, Telemachus never really learned true leadership or chivalry as did his father. Homer has presented the world with poetry so unique and classic, so outstanding and awesome, that generations to come will challenge themselves interpreting them until the end of time. Words

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