

Rites of passage essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Rites of Passage Robert Fitzgerald's translation of Homer's classic, *The Odyssey*, is an enchanting tale, which can be examined using the Gaines novel *A Lesson Before Dying*, and "On The Rainy River".

There are many similarities between these three books but the transformation to adulthood is a theme that reigns supreme in all three works. In *The Odyssey* Telemakhos' transition from a boy to a man can be marked by the following events; a separation, trials of strength, a metaphorical death, guidance from a wise individual, and the full transformation into a man. In the beginning of *The Odyssey*, there is a separation between Telemakhos, Prince of Ithaca, and his kingdom, which is evident when he sits separate from the suitors. This separation is parallel to the character Grant's situation, in *A Lesson Before Dying*, when he, an educated individual, is separated from his uneducated community. The two both know that their life as it is, is not their destiny and they are determined to do what is needed to do to complete themselves.

That is when, I believe, they begin the process of their transformation: when they know there is a change that needs to take place. Tim, the character in "On The Rainy River", also knows he is above what is destined for him and goes on to say "I felt isolated; I spent a lot of time alone," which describes the same separated feeling possessed by Grant and Telemakhos. When Telemakhos sits unhappy among the suitors wishing his father would come and drive them away it shows he knows he must find answers about his father to save his kingdom from the suitors when. He accepts what he must do and makes plans to embark on a sailing to find news of Odysseus. To be courageous enough to take responsibility for what must be done shows great

maturity in my eyes and is a big step towards manhood on the part of Telemakhos. Again, this can be compared to A Lesson Before Dying when Grant first accepts he will visit with Jefferson.

Equally courageous, Telemakhos stands up in front of the crowd of suitors and tells them they are insolent bums that need to return home and linger in his hall no longer. He goes on to say " I beg Zeus you shall get what you deserve: a slaughter here and nothing paid for it," Which portrays that he feels it his responsibility to protect his kingdom. He later holds a conference among the people where the suitors complain about Penelope's weaving and unweaving of the shroud. The unweaving of the shroud can signify Telemakhos doubting himself after the meeting. The fighting eagles can also represent his opposing emotions after the parlay is broken.

He further doubts his abilities when he hangs back at Pylos and says, " Mentor how can I do it. " Telemakhos' confusion also comparably evident in " On The Rainy River" when Tim says, " I was a moral split, I couldn't make up my mind. I feared war, yes, but I also feared exile. Telemakhos quest can be compared to Tim's war, in that it was something he had to do for the sake of his people. Tim's Exile can be compared to Telemakhos staying in Ithaca and to continue living separated among his community.

The decisions are important in that accepting their responsibility is a trait possessed by mature beings. Their decisions are different in that Tim chooses to live exiled and takes off to Canada, and telemakhos chose to follow the advice of Athena. The situational difference greatly affects their decision. If Tim was to go to war and he died, his death would be a very

small factor in the war. If Telemakhos were to die on his journey from Ithaca his kingdom would be taken over by the suitors and his mother and people would be at their mercy. When Telemakhos leaves his home to find news of his father it serves as a metaphorical death because he is leaving his familiar homeland for a dark and cruel world that he has never seen.

His mother and his nurse also mourn for him, which is similar behavior when someone dies. Tim also leaves his familiar home of Minnesota to Canada, which is parallel to Telepaths. Jefferson, although we know that he will die, dies metaphorically when he is locked in his cell and so the three stories are very similar. Telemakhos journey, which can be seen as a death, is not really a death but just another stage of his growth. His time at sea is comparable to a caterpillar in his silk cocoon, in which he grows.

In this case Telemakhos grows not physically but mentally and emotionally. He gains confidence in himself, which is evident through his speech when he is addressing Nestor. In each of the three works we see that the main character is guided by a person, either human or god. In the Odyssey, the god of war Athena guides Telemakhos. She helps Telemakhos with both her supernatural powers and her wisdom.

Athena is the one who convinced Telemakhos to set out and look for news of his father. It also seems to me that Athena serves as a father figure to Telemakhos. Telemakhos has been without a father all his life and although she is a woman she appears to him in the form of a man. He receives advice from Athena on how to lead and how to present himself, all things that

fathers teach to their sons. Also, there seems to be closeness between that two.

They are comfortable speaking to each other and Telemakhos is not intimidated by her divinity. In *On The Rainy River*, the grounds keeper at the Tip Top Lodge guides Tim. Although their relationship is not a strong one, he helps push Tim to make a decision. The same is also true in *A Lesson Before Dying*; Grant helps Jefferson to become a man by teaching him the things it takes to be a man. Grant is also guided by his girlfriend Vivian and on numerous occasions turns to her for guidance and comfort. To complete the transition from a boy to a man, there must be a metaphoric rebirth.

Telemakhos has a metaphorical rebirth when the princess baths him. He comes out with his linen on and they describe him as a godlike figure. Tim's rebirth occurred when he chose to stay and returned to his home. The *Odyssey* shows a great example of the transformation from a boy to a man, through Telemakhos' rite of passage, which shares many similarities with characters from " *On The Rainy River*" and, *A Lesson Before Dying*.

Telemakhos was separated from his kingdom and endured the suitors, who constantly testing his strength. Athena, The Greek god of war, guided him through his journey and into manhood.