

Alison Sanchez

Dr. Ramos

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Literary Analysis: Odysseus' Need for Another Odyssey

It is one's trials, journeys, and experiences that allows an individual to arrive at a moment of clarity and understanding. In the case of **Homer's** *The Odyssey*, Odysseus faces a twenty year journey, including ten years at war and ten years on his journey back to Ithaca, in which he faced many adversaries. Throughout their voyage home, Odysseus and his men faced Polyphemus, a giant Cyclops; Circe, who had turned Odysseus' men into pigs; a trip to literally hell and back; and a voyage through a series of monsters, vengeful gods, and Sirens. Eventually, all of his men were killed and Odysseus was left alone, stranded at sea until he ends up trapped on an island with the nymph Calypso for seven years. Eventually, Athena convinces Zeus to free Odysseus so that he could return back home. Through these experiences, there is no question that Odysseus has learned and evolved in some way. However, the question remains: Did Odysseus really change enough to show that he is a better king, or does he still have much to learn? **The events at the end of *The Odyssey*, including the killing of the suitors, the killing of the maids, and his willing preparedness to go to war with the suitors' families, prove that Odysseus in fact has a long way to go in order to become a great king.**

First of all, when Odysseus ends up killing every suitor at the end of *The Odyssey*, he shows that he gained no mercy or remorse throughout his journey. The reader is lured into a false sense of hope of transformation when Odysseus washes ashore Phacelia and is found by Nausicäa and is supposedly "reborn" as he appears to be both humble and cautious. He also appears to have

changed when he returns to the kingdom as a beggar and allows the suitors to torment him. However, just after Odysseus is reunited with his son, Telemachus, the first item of business is to kill the suitors who have taken over his home and have sought to marry his wife, Penelope. It comes down to the point that after he kills the lead suitor and every other suitor that fought against him, there were some suitors that begged for him not to kill them. With the exception of one man in which Telemachus asked him to spare, every other suitor was trapped and killed in a vulgar and sadistic manner. The way that **Homer** describes the killings is quite graphic. He writes, “As they smashed their heads in, dreadful groans arose, and the whole floor was awash in blood.” In turn, a great king would have made an example of the lead suitor and had mercy on the others which would have prevented any further bloodshed.

Secondly, the killing of the maids who had intermingled with the suitors was completely unnecessary for Odysseus to do and shows a complete lack of compassion. The idea of killing women in general in such a vile way is concerning, no matter what they have done wrong. The fault these twelve female servants made in disrespecting the queen and sleeping with the suitors was paid for with their lives. The way in which the maids were murdered is horrifying in its own right. Not only were these the women forced to carry the suitors’ corpses out and clean the bloody mess, but they also suffered as they hung from nooses until their feet “stopped twitching” (**Homer**). A great king would have more understanding of human faults and be compassionate towards those who have made the mistake of disrespecting the royal family by simply associating with the wrong group of men.

Finally, it seems that Odysseus’ thirst for vengeance could not just end at the suitors and the maids, as he reverts to preparing for war and suiting up for a battle against the suitors’ family. At this point, Odysseus has regressed back to the warrior he was before and has almost come full

circle to an apparent point of no return. It is safe to assume, especially in the ancient Greek era, that the families of the country's most eligible and noble men would seek to avenge their deaths. As his pride and emotions took over, Odysseus clearly had lost control and was not thinking of the repercussions and the final outcome of what would happen after killing the suitors. When the families had arrived to fight Odysseus, he was prepared to continue his killing spree. **Homer** writes about Odysseus and the men fighting with him, "They'd have killed them all, cut them down so none of them returned, had not Athena, daughter of aegis-bearing Zeus, cried out." Only an intervention from the gods was able to stop Odysseus from creating yet another blood bath. An exemplary king tries to avoid war at all costs to protect his people, unless it is absolutely necessary. By preparing to go to war, it shows that Odysseus was not thinking of what is best for his people, but only regressing back to his vengeful ways, an attribute that is unfit for a king.

While Odysseus may have become more god-like, vengeful, and powerful, a true king is fair, just, and does the right thing for his people, even if it may not be in his favor. Odysseus proved at the end of *The Odyssey* that he showed no mercy by killing all of the suitors, no compassion when he murdered the female servants who had relations with the suitors, and did not care what was best for the people when he prepared to kill the families of the suitors. It is possible that Odysseus is the kind of man that may be too hard hearted and ultra-masculine to change his ways. Perhaps Odysseus needs another odyssey in order to bring him back to his more gracious and humble state and be the king that his people need him to be.

Work Cited

Homer. *The Odyssey Abridged*. Translated by Ian Johnston. Ian Johnston, 2017,
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