

Discuss the importance of hospitality as a theme in the Odyssey

In the Odyssey there are many examples of how hospitality is shown, in many different ways, some good and some not so pleasing. In this essay I will hopefully cover all these points and explain all of these in detail. Greeks believed that any person who turns up at your door should feed, clothe and bathe them without even needing to know their name assuming they are in need of help. This is called reciprocal hospitality; this means that you look after the person who turns up at your door in need, so that when you are in need the person whose door you turn up at will accept you in the same way. This is what Homer the "writer" of this book is trying to portray; a Greece a few hundred years back where everyone was friendly and great adventures happened with great heroes like Odysseus. In this way Homer used a lot of hospitality to persuade people to return to the way things were back in the day of heroes and adventure.

The first instance of hospitality we find is when Odysseus washes up on the island of Calypso and before anytime at all she washes him and gives him food and clean clothes, this shows that a demigoddess shows hospitality just as all humans do. As we find out though even Calypso can be looked down upon, we know this because Hermes turns up to bring news from Zeus and is shocked when Calypso starts asking him question after question before she has even offered him food and rest. Hermes has to point this out to Calypso and this is frowned upon greatly even by the gods. Homer is using this example to further persuade people to do hospitality saying that if the gods do hospitality it is the greatest honour to bestow upon someone.

Next Odysseus turns up at the Cyclopes' island and Odysseus goes to his cave to explore. The Cyclops gets angry instead of offering hospitality which is another technique by Homer saying that people nowadays do not offer hospitality and just start wondering why these people are at their doors. Also Homer is trying to say that if you do not offer hospitality to your guests then you are no better than the savage, uneducated Cyclops himself. Finally the Cyclops does offer hospitality but all he offers is to eat Odysseus last which is a very beastly thing to do and shows that the Cyclops is uneducated. Very much in the same way Odysseus receives no hospitality from the Laestrygonians and this shows is relating again the savage and uneducated ways of the beasts to the people of Homer's day.

Odysseus next receives hospitality from Circe who is another demigoddess; she turns all of Odysseus' men into pigs but still offers him hospitality. This shows that she offers hospitality to the most noble of all the men, Homer is trying to say that noble people give and receive hospitality and that everyone can be noble and good like the older days if they just act like the people did back then. Another hospitality like this was the swine herder when Odysseus tries to say he has returned to Ithaca the swine herder does

not believe him at all and is quite angry at Odysseus but he still offers who he thinks is a total stranger free food and nice clothes and a bath.

The most important and largest hospitality of all was at the island of the Phaeacians where Odysseus appears to the king from a cloud of smoke or fog and does not tell the Phaeacians his name at all or where he comes from but the king bathes and clothes and feeds Odysseus without a question and when he does find out that it is the Great Odysseus he offers even more hospitality. In hospitality you are only supposed to feed and clothe and bathe your guest but the Phaeacians take this a stage further by taking him back to his homeland and sending him away with more gold than he left Troy with. This shows that if you make a name for yourself that adventures can be their own reward with hospitality. A good example of hospitality is before he even knew Odysseus' name he said to Odysseus that he should not sit on the floor but on a throne and told the maids to bring him his finest clothes for the man.

Hospitality is a major theme throughout the book as Homer is trying to persuade people to return to the adventure days with heroes. The theme of hospitality is explored throughout this book as everywhere Odysseus goes he receives hospitality, be it good hospitality or bad hospitality. Showing that hospitality is a big part of a Greeks everyday life and that it is very important.