

End of module test.

The Odyssey

*Is Odysseus made more or less of a hero by the fact that Athene helps him in various ways?*

It seems that most of the examples of Odysseus's heroic deeds have some type of divine intervention. It is often said that the gods inspire him, and Athene, as Odysseus's patron goddess, appears frequently.

However, this does not necessarily show Odysseus to be less of a hero. It could be argued that the gods would not pay so much attention and help him so much if he was not a hero. His piety pleases the gods, and earns him assistance; he therefore deserves it, for being a hero in the first place. He is also of course, hounded by Poseidon, and even a hero cannot come out on top, against a god.

The most obvious time that Athene helps Odysseus is when he returns to Ithaca. She advises him, disguises him, and is continually in the background leading him. Of course, in theory, a hero can rush in and defeat his enemies. However, there are over a hundred of them. Before in *The Odyssey*, Odysseus has been thoughtless and rushed into things, but here, Athene encourages him to think things through. Is it not partly the gods' fault however, that he has been delayed for so long, and is so eager to get home to his wife and son? During the poem, we are often reminded of the story of Agamemnon. He returned, but was too eager, and unlike Odysseus, went home straight away and was murdered by Clytemnestra's lover. He was killed in a very unheroic fashion, but still has a heroic reputation. Athene is obviously fond of

Odysseus, and does not want him to go the same way as Agamemnon. Also, Agamemnon had one man to contend with, Odysseus has one hundred and eight!

The Greek heroic code does not say that a hero is flawless. Odysseus' sense of adventure has got him into a lot of trouble, for instance, he was asking for trouble in the land of the Laestrygonians. But a hero should be brave and adventurous, and by saying he's been there, and survived the Laestrygonians himself, he gains reputation. Neither can he receive gifts and earn guest friends if he does not try to make new friends on his way home. This contradiction in the code has led him into trouble, and occasionally he needs Athene's help.

Odysseus, as one of the great heroes, has to travel to the Underworld. In book eleven he does this, and without help from Athene. He does this all by himself. Therefore, the hardest task for a hero is accomplished by him alone, clear evidence of his heroism.

In book thirteen, we learn how similar Athene and Odysseus are. They both display many of the same attributes. Therefore, it could be argued, that Athene only helps him to the extent he could help himself. He is so worn and battered that he is not himself, he can not be expected, after twenty years of hardships to be thinking straight. He has of course, displayed a great amount of endurance, and is heroic in that sense, as well as throughout the book, displaying the attributes of any great hero. Even though Odysseus has his faults, he has saved himself by showing his worth to the gods beforehand, in prayer, sacrifice, and law-obiding.