

The Antagonist

The Odyssey is an epic depicting the journey of Odysseus' homecoming; it is concerned with the result and the consequences of the Trojan War. Homer wrote *The Odyssey* approximately in between the years of 700 B.C – 500 B.C. In the epic, Odysseus is returning from the Trojan War but is cursed by the God, Poseidon, after he blinded his son Polyphemus. He is exiled to wander the Aegean Sea aimlessly for ten years before returning to his kingdom; during this time suitors from all over the Greece came to live in Odysseus' hall to seek his wife's hand, Penelope for marriage. In the epic, *The Odyssey*, there is no primary antagonist although there are many antagonists. Antinoos is one of the major antagonists, he is the leader of the suitors who are waiting to marry Odysseus' wife, Penelope. Greek culture is one that is the core of all Western and Latin civilization. It is one that respects kindness, honor and hospitality towards strangers. The Greek culture is an old one lasting more than 2,000 years. Antinoos is the most arrogant out of all the leaders; he represents the characteristics, which are scorned by the Greeks, in addition Homer never portrays him sympathetically.

Antinoos is one of the supporting characters in the story shown as an evil character to give contrast against the determination of Odysseus. He is the leader of all the suitors and he openly plans to assassinate Telemakhos, Odysseus' son. He sees Telemakhos as his main obstacle to clear in order to win Penelope's heart. Although he seeks to marry Penelope he does not mind receiving attention and advances from Penelope's maids "But the women giggled / glancing back and forth laughing in his face... / ... Her bold voice rang now in Odysseus' ears" (XVIII.395-404). He is a very treacherous man, and comes up with the plan to send Telemakhos in a wild goose chase. He convinces Telemakhos to set sail to foreign lands in search of his father. During

Telemakhos' journey he hopes Telemakhos would come to a perilous end. He is a villainous man who justifies his evil behavior by distorting the good intentions of other people. He is always constantly harassing Telemakhos and Penelope; he can be deemed as a major antagonist because it is only he that is the enemy of Odysseus, Penelope and Telemakhos. He symbolizes foolishness, brashness, and an aura of extreme arrogance. During the Assembly initiated by Telemakhos "The call sang out and the men came streaming in; / and when they filled the assembly ground, he entered." (II.9-10). In this assembly Telemakhos demands that the suitors leave Odysseus' estate soon and in good manner so there would be no need of bloodshed. Although Antinoos is so stubborn that he rebukes Telemakhos and incurs the wrath of Athena. During this Assembly a pair of eagles appeared in the sky and started to fight. The soothsayer Halitherses interprets this sign as a sign that Odysseus is returning to his homeland and will slay all the suitors, "Now Zeus who views the wide world sent a sign to him, / launching a pair of eagles... and in havoc / dropped on the heads of the crowd a deathly omen." (II.155-160), he advises them that they should leave without any bloodshed now. Antinoos does not take the soothsayer seriously telling him to go away and speak to children in book II "Old man go tell the omens for your children / at home and try keep them out of trouble..." (II.188-189). this is a sign of his foolishness and arrogance. He condemns Penelope for seducing them although does not choose to marry either one of them "Here is an instance of her trickery / ...she makes a name for herself, / but you can feel the loss it means for you." (II.100-134), a sign of his arrogance.

Antinoos' relationship with Odysseus is somewhat quaint. Odysseus does not find out about the suitors until nearly the end of the epic, although we have a sense that that Odysseus dislikes Antinoos the most because he is the first of the suitors to be killed by Odysseus, as stated above Antinoos is never viewed sympathetically unlike some of the other suitors. The suitors and Antinoos are about as close an antagonist as the book has although for Odysseus to meet them at such a late time of the poem suggests that Homer meant to portray them only as a challenge that Odysseus has to overcome. Antinoos is more closely related to Telemakhos. The suitors especially Antinoos tries to subdue Telemakhos and steal his right to the throne of Ithica, they insult and try to lower

his defiance towards them. They want to create a sense of helplessness in Telemakhos' heart, in which they nearly succeed; Telemakhos did cry at the assembly when he feels extremely powerless and helpless.

Antinoos has little influence on Odysseus. The challenges Odysseus faced during his twenty years of exile has had more success transforming him from the seemingly peaceful and wise man into a bloodthirsty killer. Although Antinoos has a stronger influence over Telemakhos; he manages to mock Telemakhos into making a journey to seek out news concerning the whereabouts of Odysseus "Telemakhos has a mind to murder us... / he can get poison there, and bring it home, / doctor the wine jar and dispatch us all." (II.343-347). the suitors hope that Telemakhos' first journey out of the island will bring about his death. Telemakhos surprises the suitors by recruiting his own crew and acquiring his own ship. Antinoos wants to get rid of Telemakhos although he does not wish to stain his hands with Telemakhos' blood. At this point Antinoos realizes that Telemakhos is no longer a child and is a threat to be reckoned with. At Odysseus' homecoming he does not change his personality at all until it is already too late. Antinoos is oblivious to the fact that the new beggar is Odysseus therefore he exerts his power and authority on the beggar. Antinoos commonly mistreats Odysseus and in one instance provokes a fight between Odysseus and a common beggar with the words "What farce heaven has brought this house / the stranger / and Iros had words and now they brag of boxing! / Into the ring they go, and no more talk!" (XVIII.44-50). He also shows insincerity when he throws a stool against Odysseus. Throwing a stool against another person is I noted is an insincere act among the Greeks. Telemakhos points out, "A poor show that hitting this famished tramp / bad business, if he happened to be a god.../ looking like strangers.../ in towns and settlements to keep an eye / on manners, good or bad." He is implying that their gods sometimes disguise themselves as beggars to witness the behaviors of mortals. The encouragement of the fight and throwing of the stool further proves that Antinoos is represents the dark side of Greek culture.

In conclusion Homer portrays Antinoos as a villainous character who is arrogant, foolish and nefarious character. He is never portrayed with sympathy as other suitors are.

Antinoos is the first suitor slain by Odysseus in the battle at the great hall. This further demonstrates Odysseus' hatred for Antinoos. He represents the despised aspects of the Greek culture such as cruelty and arrogance. We can also say that he is a static character in the story because he remains an obnoxious and unfavorable character throughout the epic. He remains a static character throughout the epic because his personality was that of a vicious and immoral character.

List of Sources:

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