

*The Odyssey*

Entry #11

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*The Odyssey*, by Homer, describes the journey of Odysseus returning to his home after serving in the Trojan War. While attempting to sail to Ithaca, Odysseus is greatly influenced by several gods and goddesses. Three such influential gods are Calypso, Athena, and Poseidon. This intervention of the gods is a recurring pattern and stylistic technique that Homer utilizes in his Greek epic, *The Odyssey*.

Whereas Athena and Calypso aid Odysseus with his homecoming, Poseidon creates trouble and disaster for Odysseus at every opportunity. The main source of Poseidon's discontent with Odysseus is a result of Odysseus blinding a Cyclops by the name of Polyphemos, a son of Poseidon. Polyphemos then prays to his father, asking for Odysseus to return home late, in misery, with the loss of all companions, and with tribulations at home. As the god of the sea, Poseidon grants his son's requests and creates large waves and winds during Odysseus' voyage to the land of the Phaeacians. He causes another storm that sinks Odysseus' ship and drowns all of Odysseus' remaining crew; only Odysseus survives and is cared for by Calypso.

At first glance, a reader may suspect the intentions of the goddess Calypso to be unfavorable to Odysseus. She has kept Odysseus on her island for seven years before Athena asks Zeus to send Hermes to demand his release. After keeping Odysseus with her for seven years, she likes him and does not want to lose him. She is very selfish, not considering that Odysseus has a family and a home. Although Odysseus could have reached his home several years before if Calypso had not detained him on her island, Calypso is generous and helpful to Odysseus upon his departure. She aids in the construction of his wooden raft, she gives him food

and other provisions to take along, and she advises him to sail with the Bear constellation on his left. Although Odysseus is fearful that Calypso may work some secret mischief, his fears are soon relieved when he arrives at the island of Scheria and the kind Phaeacians.

Athena, a daughter of Zeus, is a goddess who helps Odysseus and his son, Telemachos. As the goddess of wisdom and battle, Athena is naturally favoring of Odysseus, a courageous and intelligent war hero. In book five, Athena persuades Zeus to send Hermes down to Calypso's island and declare his unchangeable will to release Odysseus from the island and allow him to sail homeward to Ithaca. Odysseus is released from Calypso but has many unpleasant experiences before reaching home. Athena aids Odysseus once again during the battle with the suitors in book 22. She encourages Odysseus to defeat the suitors even as he is against unfavorable odds. Athena does not immediately participate in the battle but chooses to admire Odysseus' own strength and stamina. Athena eventually joins the battle, which then ends quickly.

Athena also influences the young Telemachos. She comes to Telemachos in the form of Mentos, a family friend. When she becomes aware of Telemachos' unhappiness with the suitors, she encourages him to go on a journey to learn more about his courageous father. She advises him to leave the house for a while so he can avoid making a decision for his mother. If he stays, he would have to choose a husband for his mother against her wishes. Telemachos travels to Pylos and Sparta, and he returns home as a stronger man, aware and proud of his father's prestige.

Gods and goddesses certainly played a significant role in *The Odyssey*. Homer creatively used these gods to show the immortal interference that was believed to be present in everyday Greek society. Many were helpful, but Poseidon's wrath kept Odysseus from easily returning

home after the Trojan War. However, each of the gods contributed in testing Odysseus' strength, courage, and determination to return to his family.

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