

Odysseus

In "The Odyssey", Odysseus is the main character. After the Trojan War, Odysseus never made it home. When we first heard of Odysseus' whereabouts the powerful goddess, the Nymph Calypso, was holding him captive on the island of Ogygia. The only god who disliked Odysseus was Poseidon, "who pursued the heroic Odysseus with relentless malice." (6.1/l.20). "The Odyssey" is about Odysseus' journey home. I will look at his character in the first six books.

The characters in a novel are attributed certain characteristics by the author. The opinions one might form of a character are based on these; therefore, the characteristics suggested by an author are intrinsic to the reader having a complete and subjective understanding of a work. Characteristics are often displayed through a character's actions, in what is said about them, and what they themselves say, others often speak of Odysseus, in The Odyssey of Homer, but their own words are telling, as certain emotions and traits can be seen. Traits of a character can often be masked or distorted by favourable or unfavourable descriptions by others, but their own speech, often clearly shows character flaws and attributes that one might not come across otherwise. Strict narration often polarizes a character, casting them as black or white, good or evil. However, in most writings, and certainly in The Odyssey, the speech of a character allows us to see the various shades of grey, thus portraying the character more fairly.

Odysseus was a powerful man, lordling over his own small kingdom. Odysseus shares the same love of his homeland, his people, and his wife. He says that it is his "never-failing wish" to see the "happy day of (his) return" (6.5/l.221). Although not clearly laid out for all to see, it is no less evident that he feels a certain respect, perhaps even servitude, to his country from which he has been absent so long. Our hero professes this duty, devotion, and patriotism, on an individual and on a larger scale. However, humility is a trait one would be hard-pressed to find in this ruler. A devotion of one's self to family and country is a part of his character. He is able to uphold his dignity, essentially maintaining that which is central to his character. This also speaks to the strength of the character in the face of adversity, a test that Odysseus passes. Although Odysseus' physical characteristics are impressive, his character is far more appealing. He is described as a luckless man, but also as kind, wise, brave, and fearless. With Odysseus' physical strengths he could choose to be fierce and controlling, but instead he chooses to be kind and fair. His emotional stability creates a likable heroic character.

The first time we meet Odysseus is in book five, previous to this we have only heard about him, from the gods, his family, and his friends. Athene described him as "the wise and unlucky Odysseus," (b.1/l.48). We also heard from his friend Menelaus, of how astonishing he was; "it was Odysseus who strove..." (b.4/l.107), "...all the daring feats of dauntless Odysseus." (b.4/l.240). From the amazing remarks, when we do see him, we are expecting an amazing, strong soldier, who never wishes to give up hope. Instead what we encountered was "...him sitting on the shore. His eyes were wet with weeping..." (b.5/l.151). Instead of seeing the strong survivor we had come to expect, we found a man crying. Immediately I have noticed that there are two sides to his character, which can imply that his attitudes, opinions or actions cannot be predicted.

Through out this book there is one major emotional theme, which is love. Odysseus and Penelope's lasting relationship is an obvious representation of love in the Odyssey. Although Odysseus is gone for twenty years he never forgets his faithful wife in Ithaca. This love almost seems to help him persevere through the many hardships that he encounters on his journey home. On the other hand, Penelope also exemplifies this same kind of love for Odysseus. At home in Ithaca, she stays loyal to Odysseus by unravelling his shroud and delaying her marriage to the suitors that are courting her. She always keeps the hope that her love, Odysseus, will return. Odysseus and Penelope's marriage clearly illustrates the theme of love. There are also many other bonds formed in life that show great love and guidance. One of the most emphasized in the Odyssey is the father - son relationship. These relationships clearly support the issue of love in the Odyssey. The father - son relationship between Odysseus and Telemachos is a little awkward because they both never really got to know each other but they still care for each other's well being. Telemachos on the contrary also displays a lot of love for his father. Telemachos leaves Ithaca, inexperienced, to try and find any knowledge of his father in hope that he's still alive. Telemachos through out most of his life has lacked a father figure and desperately needs that special help and guidance from Odysseus, as he becomes a man. Their relationship seems to show how love can give you the strength to carry on. However, occasionally it seems to slip Odysseus' mind that he has a loving wife back home, when he persistently flirts with women that he encounters on his travels. Firstly it was with the Nymph Calypso, when she "smiled and stroked him..." (b.5/l.180). And then later saying how his wife didn't measure up to her at all,

"I too know well enough that my wise Penelope's
looks and stature are insignificant compared with yours."

He then later flirts with a woman he has just met, after he has left Ogygia, Nausicaa. "Princeness, I am at knees...the Daughter of almighty Zeus, that your beauty, grace and stature most remind me." (b.6/l.149). Nevertheless I do

believe that he does this in good reason, he just wishes to be kind and wants some help from these women to return home, enabling him to see his wife and home again. I imagine that anyone else in his position would do exactly the same for some food, clothes and assistance.

In "The Odyssey", the relationship between the Goddess, Athene and the hero, Odysseus is symbiotic; that is, what Odysseus lacks, Athena provides in order for his quest to be accomplished. Athene helped Odysseus numerous ways physically and mentally by aiding him, Telemachus, and Penelope. In book one, Athene urged Telemachus to give up boyhood, act like a man, present his case to search for his father to the assembly, and take stronger steps to search for his father. After Telemachus presented his case to the assembly and no action was taken on his request for a ship to enable him to search for his father, Athene assisted in getting a ship and crew for Telemachus. Athene put the idea into Odysseus' head to cling onto the rock, when he reached land from being out at sea. Athene also helped Odysseus by putting courage into Nausicaa, when they first met by the water, so she would listen to him and help him. So if it was not for Athene, it is doubtful that Odysseus would be the man that he is.

Odysseus' most important quality as an epic hero is his 'metis', a Greek word meaning artifice, stratagem, or plan. Homer even associates Odysseus as 'polymetis', or a man of 'many turns'. Odysseus was more than just an everlasting hero, he was human, a family man, a patient and compassionate man, and was definitely capable of human weaknesses. In the Odyssey, Odysseus was very patient and compassionate. However, a hero is "a man noted for his special achievements" according to the dictionary, but if you ask most people what a hero is, you will get the same general response. They will probably say "someone who does something for other people out of the goodness of his heart." Odysseus, who is the main character of the book "The Odyssey" written by Homer, would fit the dictionary's definition of a hero; but if you go deeper, looking at what people feel a hero is, he doesn't even come close. In the book, Odysseus does nothing out of the kindness of his heart. A true hero is a person who does something great and does not expect to be given any thing in return. A hero thinks more of others than he or she thinks of him or her self. Odysseus is an epic hero. Odysseus is a strong and brave man, but I think he lacks one of the major characteristics of a hero. I think he thinks of himself more than he thinks of others. Odysseus is a brave man that did great things.

So far I do like the character of Odysseus, I think that he is a brave man but has been out of normal civilisation for so long, it is natural that he is going to miss certain things, people, and interact in different ways. He is bound to be suspicious of people, and try to keep on the right side of them as much as possible.

