

Joshlin Espinoza

Dr. Ramos

ENGL-1301-49190

6 February 2020

Narration with Process Explanation: The Personal Growth of Odysseus

Returning from Troy may have been fairly simple for most ancient Greek war heroes, but for Odysseus of Ithaca, it proved to be an extremely daunting task, as seen in **Homer's *The Odyssey***. It's safe to say Odysseus has been through quite a lot throughout his twenty-year journey home. He's witnessed his entire crew die in various gruesome ways, among which include being eaten by Cyclops, snatched by a six-headed monster, being hit by a thunderbolt, and then being immediately ravaged by the sea. To make things even more complicated, most of these events occurred solely as a result of his own arrogance and excessive pride. As these things happen to him, however, he begins to actively reflect on himself as well as his actions and learns to grow from them. Questions such as "What have I done to deserve this?" and "Where have I gone wrong?" routinely plague his mind during his absence from home. **By the time Odysseus has returned to Ithaca, he has demonstrated substantial personal growth by acknowledging that he has several flaws that have made his journey home way more difficult than needed, and by recognizing the fact that he is truly human.**

Towards the beginning of his journey home, Odysseus and his crew arrive at the island of the Cyclops. After a bit of investigating, they discover a cave belonging to Polyphemus, one of the inhabitants of the island. Odysseus' men simply suggest they steal the cheese and sheep inside of the cave and return to the sea. Odysseus, on the other hand, refuses the notion, and instead insists on waiting on the cyclops to return home. This of course, was not the best course

of action. Once Polyphemus comes back to his cave, he plucks up a couple of Odysseus' crewmen and eats them, thoroughly traumatizing the men from Ithaca. To avoid getting his whole crew eaten, Odysseus quickly devises a plan to incapacitate and blind the Cyclops. After successfully stabbing Polyphemus in his eye, Odysseus and his remaining men escape to sea. Once far away enough from land, He quickly begins taunting the cyclops, demanding that Polyphemus "say [his] eye was burned out by Odysseus," and even goes as far as to tell where he and his men have come from (Homer 9.529). This is one of the most striking examples of recklessness and hubris in Odysseus' journey, as he says it simply because he cannot keep his "warrior spirit" under control (Homer 9.526). Not only does it end up delaying his voyage home, but it also endangers the lives of everyone on Odysseus' ship. This is very similar to the scene where Odysseus and his crew arrive on the land of the Laestrygonians, a race of man-eating giants. Although he is a bit more cautious this time due to his experience with Polyphemus, Odysseus still sends a group of his men to be welcomed by the Laestrygonians. He expects to be greeted with at least some sort of hospitality, but instead, the giants do what they do best: eat his men.

After resting for a year with Circe and losing more men along the way, Odysseus and his crew arrive in Thrinakia, an island where the sun god, Helios, keeps his cattle. Heeding the warning given by Circe, Odysseus is against stopping at first, but finally agrees once his men promise not to eat the cattle of the sun. He and his men survive off of food and supplies given by Circe, but of course, after having been stranded on the island for a month and reaching a shortage of necessities, the men slaughter and eat the sacred cattle. Once Odysseus learns of this, he flies into a rage but accepts that there isn't much he can do. He also takes a moment to accept the fact that his friends and crewmates have doomed themselves to be ravaged by the sea. Everyone

except Odysseus feasts for the six days it takes for sailing conditions to become fair enough to set sail again. Obviously, this upsets Helios, and he takes his complaints to Zeus, who promises divine retribution. When the men are at sea once more, they get struck upon by a thunderbolt from the heavens. The lightning completely decimates Odysseus' ship and men, and he watches in horror as his men are torn apart in the dark waters. Having just lost everything, Odysseus begins to truly realize his humanity. He subsequently drifts onto Calypso's Island, where he more-or-less becomes a submissive captive for seven years. These years are what continue to humble him, as he spends every second on Ogygia with "countless thoughts of death," and wishing to see family (Homer 5.247).

After Calypso releases Odysseus, he heads out on his journey home. Poseidon's wrath still burns strongly, so while Odysseus is at sea, his hand-made raft gets destroyed during a storm conjured up by the god. He ends up washing up on the shoreline of Phaeacia where Nausicaa, princess of the nation, finds him. Before going to greet her, however, he questions the safety of the land he has arrived in. Odysseus quickly determines that he is not in any danger in Phaeacia and allows Nausicaa to lead him towards her home. She advises him to follow her from a distance. He is not as eager to rush ahead of Nausicaa as he would've been at the beginning of his journey home, so he listens to her advice and carefully heads to tell his story to her parents, Alcinous and Aretes. Once he reveals himself to the noble family as Odysseus, he begins to recount the events of his strenuous journey. During this time, Odysseus admits to making several mistakes along the way and acknowledges that he has learned from his hardships. This shows how much he has grown as a person, as the former Odysseus would be too prideful to admit to any sort of wrongdoing. If he were still the same person as he was at the beginning of his

journey, he most likely wouldn't have even waited for Nausicaa to find him at all. He would've gone forth without her and just expected to be helped by the Phaeacians.

Compared to the man he was twenty years before his return to Ithaca, Odysseus has become much less brash, reckless, and prideful. After ten years of bloodshed on the battlefield and ten more just trying to get home, he fully realizes his humanity. Odysseus has finally humbled himself enough to learn from the mistakes he endured on his journey back to Ithaca, and to grow into a better, more refined version of himself.

Works Cited

Homer. *The Odyssey Abridged*. Translated by Ian Johnson, Ian Johnston, 2019, johnstoniatexts.x10host.com/homer/odysseyabridgedhtml.html