

**The Portrayal of Odysseus as a True Epic Hero in *Odyssey***

Student Name

University

Course

Professor Name

Date

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In *Odyssey*, Homer portrays Odysseus, the king of Ithaca, as the true epic hero. The depiction of Odysseus is thoughtfully knitted together with the themes of love and loyalty that further magnify it, painting a holistic picture of a long 10-year journey home. Although it can be argued that some of Odysseus's personality traits he displays cannot be applied to a true hero, he is still depicted following a very specific heroic archetype.

#### **Odysseus as an Epic Hero**

The depiction of Odysseus follows the parameters of the epic hero archetype that is widely present in ancient Greek poetry. His character is an instance of wisdom, loyalty, and extraordinary bravery, which are some of the key qualities of a hero. Liang (2017) suggests that bravery is not defined by the absence of fear, but, instead, "... it is the courage to overcome fear, which distinguishes a hero from the crowd ..." (p. 43). It is crucial for the hero to be distinguished from the crowd, as the true hero is never part of it. Instead, a hero is not a mere follower - he is a leader. A hero is someone with his own journey that others would not be able to take on due to the lack of qualities that make the essential psychological core of a hero, for example bravery.

At the same time, however, it can be argued that Odysseus is not a typical hero of ancient Greek writings; some of his character traits cannot be applied to the idealized version of a hero. In spite of his bravery, Odysseus often sheds tears, which is considered as a sign of weakness. For example, upon hearing Demodocus's song in Book 8, Odysseus is unable to control his emotions. He starts crying: "sea-blue cape / in both powerful hands, drew it over his head / and buried his handsome face, / ashamed his hosts might see him shedding tears" (Homer, 1996, p.

119). Here, Homer accentuates Odysseus's struggle that he experiences while attempting to hide tear shedding, which is essentially seen as a weak behavior, even by the protagonist himself.

Although crying is a sign of weakness and it is not characteristically heroic, Homer still manages to present Odysseus as an epic hero. Homer does not paint an idealized picture of the protagonist. Instead, he depicts Odysseus as a human, not a God, and as any other human Odysseus is not perfect – he has feelings and emotions. Only a human can be a true hero, therefore, he, similarly to other humans, has to have weaknesses. According to Liang (2017), “his weaknesses make his strengths even more conspicuous” (p. 43). The author further suggests that tears are a sign of fear, and, being a human, the true hero has to be afraid “because he is not the most powerful” (Liang, 2017, p. 43). Therefore, it is evident that Odysseus does not have to align with the idealized version of a hero in order to perform as such in the poem.

### **Conclusion**

With the use of particular symbols and themes, Homer creates an image of an epic hero, Odysseus, and assigns him humane qualities, for example, weaknesses that are typical of humans. However, this only further emphasizes his qualities of a hero, whom only a human can be. This is also supported by a large contrast between the Gods and Odysseus himself, who is taking a journey in their world full of dangers but still makes it home to his family.

### References

Homer. (1996). *The Odyssey*. (R. Fagles & B. Knox, Trans.) Penguin Books.

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