Odysseus: A Mere Mortal, But Purely Moral Essay, Research Paper

ODYSSEUS: A MERE MORTAL, BUT PURELY MORAL

In Homer’s Odyssey, he uses the stories of Calypso and Circe to give a reader a glimpse at Greek values. Odysseus is a ?perfectly? moral man by Greek standards. In the Calypso episode, Odysseus demonstrates the value of faithfulness, and in the Circe episode, he illustrates Greek values in general. While both goddesses seek Odysseus to be their husband, Odysseus responds as a perfect Greek hero. During the Calypso episode, Homer teachers that one must remain faithful in their hearts. The Circe episode shows the loyalty between a commander and his troops, burial rights, hospitality, and the relationship between host and guest. The Calypso episode explains how a man must be faithful to his wife in his heart.

The Calypso scene opens with a description of how beautiful her island of meadows and flowers is and how ?even a deathless god who came upon that place would gaze in wonder, heart entranced with pleasure? (154). The story proceeds to describe the goddess as having a ?breathtaking voice? (154) and being ?lustrous? (155). Yet, when the story describes Odysseus, he is ?wrenching his heart with sobs and groans and anguish? (156). Even though, Odysseus resides on a beautiful island with a goddess who takes care of him, he still wishes to be at home. Odysseus recognizes that fact that the island is beautiful, but he still longs to be at home. Additionally, Odysseus remains faithful to Penelope, not by modern day standards, but he chooses Penelope over the goddess. When Calypso questions Odysseus, he recognizes that fact that Calypso is more beautiful. Odysseus even mentions that Penelope ?falls far short? (159) of Calypso, but yet, Odysseus?s heart is with Penelope. Next, Odysseus must build a raft himself. Yet, he finds this labor minimal since he is given a chance to return home. He even realizes that he may become shipwrecked or die on the voyage, but he is willing to take these risks to return home.

The final temping offer to make Odysseus turn away from his home and his wife is when Calypso offers him immortality to stay with her. Again, Odysseus chooses his land and his wife. In modern times, sleeping with a goddess would be considered unfaithful, but Greek values allow this if and only if the man still wishes to return home and return to his wife. Thus, one of the highest values for a Greek was to be faithful to their home and their wives in their hearts. The stories involving Circe describe several values. The stories describe hospitality, the loyalty between a commander and his troops, the relationship between host and guest, and burial rights.

When the story begins with an analysis on how guests ought to be treated. Circe is an enchantress who welcomes some of Odysseus?s troops into her home for food and drink. Then, she made a potion that would clear their memories so that when she struck them with her magic wand, they turned into pigs. Zeus or Hermes must have witnessed this episode because Hermes came to Odysseus with a ?potent drug? (239) that would counteract Circe?s potion. Since Zeus is the god of hospitality, Circe was in the wrong by harming her guests as she did. So, Odysseus went to Circe with the drug, and when she attempted to do the same thing, Odysseus was able to triumph over trickery. Thus, another important Greek value is to be kind to strangers, treat them as guests, and follow the hospitality etiquette. The next event demonstrates that the commander must be loyal to his troops. Circe offers Odysseus marvelous food with ?appetizers aplenty too, lavish with her bounty? (242), but her refuses the food saying that ?any man in his right mind? (242) could not accept food ?before he?d freed his comrades-in-arms and looked them in the eyes? (242). So, Greek soldiers must be loyal to each other. This is further demonstrated when Circe sends for Odysseus?s ship to come closer to shore.

Eurylochus hesitates and is mutinous against Odysseus?s order to bring the ship about. Odysseus, though, still remains loyal to him. Even though he ?had half a mind to draw the sharp sword from beside my hip and slice his head off?But comrades check me, each man trying to calm me? (244). This event offers another important value: the soldiers must be loyal to their commander and heed every order. So, Homer demonstrates how troops and commanders ought to be extremely loyal to each other. While the troops and Odysseus are at Circe?s palace, they each respect each other as hostess and guest. Circe tries to make them comfortable and joyful as she says, ?no more tears now, calm these tides of sorrow? (244). She hosts Odysseus and his troops for a year. Odysseus graciously accepts Circe?s kindness and is good to her. When Odysseus requests to leave, Circe grants him his desire, and she even helps him. Here, Homer demonstrates that it is necessary to give the host warning when planning to leave and even ask the host for leaving rights. Circe tells him to visit Tiresias in the Kingdom of the Dead for advice on how to get home safely.

Then, on their final departing from Aeaea, Circe gives them food and drink to take on their voyage as well as a swift wind. She gives them several gifts as expected by a hostess when her guest leaves. Therefore, while host must be gracious and giving to guests, the guests are expected to be respectful of their host.

Finally, Homer tells how the dead are to be given their rights. Before departing Aeaea again, the troops must mourn the Elpenor, give him a funeral, and bury his body. The fact that Odysseus and his troops returned all the way back to Aeaea shows that the burial right of the dead is extremely important. Therefore, the Greeks held the right of services and burial to be a significant value. Homer portrays Odysseus as a nearly perfect man with nearly perfect Greek values. Hence, the reader is able to get a glimpse of Greek values by using Odysseus?s decisions and action as a guideline. The Calypso story shows that Greek values require a man to be faithful to his land and to his wife no matter what the temptation is. The Circe episode shows the loyalty between a commander and his troops, burial rights, hospitality, and the relationship between host and guest.