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Individual Responsibility as Explained in the *Odyssey*

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Abstract of the Thesis

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This thesis attempts to explain the relevance of teaching the *Odyssey* in the contemporary classroom. Although it is arguable that the rift between today's world and the world of the ancient Greeks is too great, accessible connections can be made. A close reading of the text reveals that one of the major themes in the *Odyssey* pertains to the concept of individual responsibility and how the individual plays a vital role to the wellbeing of a healthy society. Through the depiction of various societies that range from hyper-civilized to savage, the reader can begin to form a solid idea of what it means to be an individual in light of the greater whole.

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Introduction

It is the imminent threat of death that gives life its very essence. Homer must have understood this when he constructed the *Odyssey*, which begins where the *Iliad* ends. The latter is a story about the destruction of civilization and the acceptance of death while the *Odyssey* is a story about the rebuilding/maintaining of civilization and the struggle to live. In many ways the two epics are very different, but it is arguable that the focal point of the *Iliad*, the concept of war, serves as a metaphor for a major theme in the *Odyssey*. War is paradoxical in nature: on one level it is about the individual and his struggle to stay alive; on another level, it is about the acceptance of death and the sacrifice of oneself for the greater good of the whole. The *Odyssey*, like the *Iliad*, examines the individual's responsibility to both himself and to the larger group to which he belongs. The actions of the individual are not mute; they loudly echo through the invisible barrier that simultaneously separates the individual and connects him to his fellow man.

The *Odyssey* begins in an environment that has been destroyed by war for the purpose of examining the effect that war has on the individual, the family, and the larger society. In the *Iliad*, various heroes accept death as their fate; they understand that death is simply a part of the natural cycle, and that one must perish when it is time. In the *Odyssey*, the singular hero, Odysseus, does not accept death; he fights to live. As Odysseus journeys farther away from the devastation of war-torn Troy and makes his way home, he must re-establish what it means to be alive. His physical journey home unfolds into a psychological journey in which he must restore his identity and his understanding of the world around him in order to be the father and leader necessary to

rebuild the crumbling family and civilization he left behind. In a sense, the man he was, the family he left, and the world he knew are no longer intact. After ten years of war and ten years of reconstruction, the devastation of the Trojan War still looms over the poem. The memory of war serves as a reminder that even during times of peace, hostility lays dormant and can erupt at any time. The *Odyssey* is essentially a story about what it means to remain civilized in an unpredictable and imperfect world. It addresses this issue through an examination of the importance of individual responsibility in the context of the greater society.

For many English teachers, the challenge of making a classic such as the *Odyssey* accessible and relevant for the contemporary high school student is a struggle. Students might dismiss the text after they determine that the language of the poem is too difficult. In addition, they might find that the world Homer depicts is too foreign, and therefore, impossible to relate to. After examining several translations of the *Odyssey* and conducting research, I propose that the aforementioned challenges are not great enough to justify the dismissal of the text. With an age appropriate translation, and a focus on themes that the students can relate to, the teacher can make the text both challenging and interesting for the students.

This past fall, I read Robert Fagles's translation with my ninth grade Regents level classes. Although the sheer thickness of the text immediately intimidated many of the students, their fears were assuaged after discovering that both the language and the themes of the text are accessible. The *Odyssey* is a poem about the value of life and the importance of preservation, a subject upon which all can relate. As Odysseus transitions from a world of killing to a world of peace, he moves from a place where laws and

traditions are suspended to a series of societies whose depictions suggest that civility rests at the heart of civilization. The *Odyssey* illustrates the importance of individual responsibility to maintain the systems that promote civility and thus the preservation of life. For the most part, the students understand how this relates to them, for they too live in a “civilized” world, and upon consideration, realize that their instinct to preserve life is what dictates their daily actions. They begin to think about the society they live in as a carefully constructed system of social codes and laws that are designed to keep them safe. Most importantly, they begin to understand that they are each an important element of this system; on a daily basis, they make individual decisions that either work to promote the good of the whole or serve to hurt it, even if it is only on a small scale. Although not all of the students felt a connection with the text, there was a general acceptance of its value, for after reading the first twelve books, the students became alert to various allusions to the classic in pop culture. If nothing else, they felt smart.

The theme of individual responsibility is most clearly conveyed in the first three tetrads of the text. The following study focuses on a close reading of nine specific books that depict the importance of the individual against the backdrop of a series of societies that run the spectrum from hyper-civilized to barbaric. The study is divided into three main sections: Proem, Telemachus, and Odysseus. First, I will begin with an analysis of the proem, which immediately identifies that the subject of the poem is the individual. Next, I will examine the Telemachy which focuses on Telemachus’s journey out into the world to discover his identity and the social systems that exist to promote a healthy civilization. Through his visits with his father’s war comrades, Nestor and Menelaus, Telemachus secures his identity as the son of a hero and gains an understanding of his

responsibility to live up to his lineage. The succeeding section is a close reading of Odysseus's adventures as he reestablishes his identity on his journey towards home. His seven year stay with Calypso serves to convey the significance of life, while his visits with both the hyper-civilized Phaeacians and the barbaric Cyclopians serve to reinforce the idea that although the world he comes from is not perfect, it is real.

I. Proem

In Fagles's translation of the *Odyssey*, the first line of the proem reads, "Sing to me of the man, Muse, the man of twists and turns." This first half of this line is significant for two reasons: first, it indicates that the subject of this poem is the individual, the "man," second, it does not immediately identify a specific man, and thus it is a poem about all men. This idea is reinforced in the original Greek version in which "man" is actually the first word in the poem. In the second half of Fagles's translated line, the reader is given a specific man to examine, Odysseus. Odysseus is described as a man of "many twists and turns." This description may have several interpretations: 1) Odysseus has travelled far, 2) Odysseus has had many experiences, and/or 3) Odysseus is deceptive. Although all three interpretations are applicable, the most plausible is "deceptive." In Greek the verb *to odysseus* (odyssasthai) is usually said to mean "be wroth against," "hate." In the *Odyssey* it essentially means "to cause pain and to be willing to do so" (Dimock 55). When viewed in conjunction with the Greek origins of the word "Odyssey," it is clear that Odysseus is a hero because of his ability to deceive and to "cause pain." His deceptive, yet heroic act of creating the Trojan Horse and using it to

win the Trojan War has a dual effect in that it demonstrates his ability to deceive as well as his ability to “willingly” inflict pain.

In the *Odyssey*, the proem has a threefold function. In the length of twelve lines, it simultaneously provides the reader with background information while at the same time, it foreshadows events to come; however, its most important function is moral. The proem states, “The recklessness of their own ways destroyed them all” (Fagles 1.8). This line refers to the episode in which Odysseus’s men ignore the warning not to eat Helios’s cattle and suffer the consequences. Odysseus is relieved of responsibility; it was their own “recklessness” that killed them. With this line, the poem immediately launches into a major theme in the text: men are responsible for their own actions. This idea is repeated several stanzas later when Zeus states the following at the assembly of the gods:

Ah how shameless—the way these mortals blame the gods.
From us alone, they say, come all their miseries, yes,
but they themselves, with their own reckless ways,
compound their pains beyond their proper share.
Look at Aegisthus now...
Above and beyond his share he stole Astrides’ wife,
he murdered the warlord coming home from Troy
though he knew it meant his own total ruin.
Far in advance we told him so ourselves,
dispatching the guide, the giant-killer Hermes.
‘Don’t murder the man,’ he said, ‘don’t court his wife.
Beware, revenge will come from Orestes, Agamemnon’s
son,
that day he comes of age and longs for his native land.’
(1. 33-49)

This passage serves to reinforce the previously stated theme that men are responsible for their own actions. In addition, it establishes a key point in the relationship between the mortals and immortals. As ancient Greek mythology reveals, mortals are often subjected to the whim of the gods; however, according to Zeus, the gods do not predispose humans

to do wrong; men have free will and are responsible for their own actions. Zeus uses the story of Aegisthus to illustrate his point. Hermes warned Aegisthus not to murder Agamemnon; he told him there would be consequences. Despite the warning, Aegisthus was irresponsible; he allowed his personal desire to consume his sense of right. He disregarded an important law of civilization which dictates that individuals must not harm one another without justification. This passage is important because, early in the text, it establishes the paradigm between right and wrong; there is a clear code throughout the poem of what is right and what is wrong. This passage is also important for a second reason: the introduction of Orestes and his revenge launches into the idea that sons of heroes must grow up to be worthy of their fathers, and thus segues into Telemachus's character.

II. Telemachus

Ithaca

Although the title of the poem is given to its hero, Odysseus, he is not present for the first four books of the epic. Homer may have chosen this structure in order to build the reader's interest as Odysseus's character is constructed through stories of his heroic deeds. However, it is more likely that he created this absence in order to illustrate the effect that one man can have on the larger society. Through the concurrent absence of Odysseus and the ineffective presence of his son, Telemachus, there is a lack of leadership in Ithaca. The lingering effects of war have led to a complete disregard for social systems, and the kingdom is falling apart. In this sense the *Odyssey* is about

individual responsibility in conjunction with the importance of sustaining systems. Throughout the course of the Telemachy, Homer illustrates the significance of social systems and how they serve to hold civilization together.

One of the most important social systems in ancient Greece involves the concept of *xenia*, which is often translated as “guest-friendship.” It deals with the relationship between the guest and host and dictates that there is a set of precepts that must be obliged by both parties. The host is obligated to invite a guest into his home and tend to his needs before making an inquiry into identity and purpose. In turn, the guest must be gracious and not over extend his welcome. As noted later in the text, “Every stranger and beggar / comes from Zeus, and whatever scrap we give him /he’ll be glad to get” (Fagles 6.227-228). When Athena first meets Telemachus, she finds him in a situation where *xenia* is clearly being ignored. She observes Telemachus “sitting among the suitors, heart obsessed with grief” (Fagles 1.133). He is surrounded by a group of unruly men who have taken over his home in an attempt to rule it. He is in “grief” because he is unable to evict them. Each of the men would like to marry Penelope, Odysseus faithful wife, and take the place of Odysseus. The fact that they lack a confirmation for Odysseus’s death signifies the absence of their respect for their king. Further, the suitors do not respect the laws of *xenia*. Athena notes:

What’s this banqueting, this crowd carousing here?
And what part do you play yourself? Some wedding feast,
some festival? Hardly a potluck supper, I would say,
how obscenely they lounge and swagger here, look
gorging in your house. Why, any man of sense
who chanced among them would be outraged,
seeing such behavior. (1.261-267)

It is significant that the setting of the first scene in Ithaca is during dinner time because it highlights the important ritual of feasting and how it is intertwined with *xenia*. According to Sherratt, “Feasting appears as arguably the single most frequent activity in the *Odyssey*... Homeric feasting takes place as a matter of course every day... Feasting is ubiquitous and constant” (Sherratt 301-302). Sherratt further points out that, to the modern reader, it may seem odd that so much of the text is devoted to elaborately detailed scenes of feasting. Often a feast will begin immediately upon the arrival of a guest before the guest’s identity and purpose for visit are identified. After several such episodes, it becomes clear that the distinctive features of feasting include the consumption of meat and wine and the “inclusion of the gods by a ritual ‘sacrifice’ and libation” (Sherratt 301). In contrast, Athena’s observation of the suitors during feasting is that they “obscenely” lounge as they are “gorging.” Her description does not imply that the men are practicing *xenia*; they do not include the gods through sacrifice nor do they respect their host. As reinforcement for the lack of *xenia* on the suitor’s part, Telemachus states, “Look at them over there. Not a care in the world, / just lyres and tunes! It is easy for them, all right, / they feed on another’s goods and go scot-free-” (Fagles 1.184-186). Despite the fact that Telemachus lacks a father figure/mentor to teach him proper social systems, he inherently understands that the suitors’ behavior is wrong. According to Jones, “The theme of *xenia* runs through the *Odyssey* (it is sanctioned by Zeus). Here [Book I], Telemachos shows that he knows how to entertain Athene-Mentes properly, unlike the suitors who completely ignore her” (Jones 8). Telemachus is “mortified” when he first notices Athena, unattended at the door. He immediately moves to correct the wrong:

...he escorted her to a high, elaborate chair of honor,
over it draped a cloth, and here he placed his guest
with a stool to rest her feet. But for himself
he drew up a low reclining chair beside her,
richly painted, clear of the press of suitors,
concerned his guest, offended by their uproar,
might shrink from food in the midst of such a mob.
(Fagles 1.152-58)

Although Telemachus is technically the head of the house, he gives Athena the seat of honor and places himself in a lower position, signifying that she is above him. It is important to note that Athena arrives in Ithaca in disguise; she is not revealed as a goddess but as an old man. Despite Telemachus's lack of knowledge with regard to Athena's true identity, he honors her as he would any guest who presented himself at his door.

Book I highlights the idea that civilization is held together by mutual respect among individuals. In this particular case, the suitors are not abiding by the laws of *xenia*; therefore, Ithaca is a broken civilization. They do not respect the systems that hold the society together, thus this society is crumbling. The idea that Telemachus understands the concept of *xenia* and respect lends hope to the situation, but his inability to remove the suitors from his home makes his knowledge obsolete. Although Telemachus clearly disapproves of the suitors' behavior, he does nothing to stop them; he simply accepts the situation. Telemachus's original physical position amongst the suitors signifies that he is not openly against them. He does not yet understand his role as the son of a great hero. It becomes immediately clear that the story of Aegisthus and Orestes contrasts with the story of the suitors and Telemachus. Telemachus, unlike Orestes, cannot take action to

avenge his father and correct the situation. Athena's presence signifies that it is time for Telemachus to take responsibility. She states:

You must not cling to your boyhood any longer-
it's time you were a man. Haven't you heard
what glory Prince Orestes won throughout the world
when he killed that cunning, murderous Aegisthus,
who'd killed his famous father. (1. 341-45)

Despite the fact that Athena knows the status of Odysseus, she sends Telemachus on a journey to discover the whereabouts of his father. Telemachus's journey, like Odysseus's, functions on both a physical and psychological level: the physical journey is to find news of his father; the psychological journey is in search of his identity. Tracy writes:

In Telemachus' search for knowledge of his father, the journey also soon becomes a metaphor for the search for identity. Telemachus begins by seeking news of his father, whether he is alive or not, but ends by gaining understanding of his father. Since to the Greeks one's father in particular determines one's identity – their very habit of name-giving reveals how ingrained in their psyche this thought pattern was – knowledge of one's father becomes ultimately self-knowledge; by knowing his father Telemachus will know himself. (Tracy 3-4)

Although Odysseus and Telemachus are travelling in the opposite direction, they are essentially on the same journey. Both men must secure their identity for the purpose of restoring their civilization to a healthy state. Telemachus must venture out into the world to see how other civilizations are structured and gain experience. In order to move forward in the world, he must also discover who his father is and develop the confidence befitting the son of a hero. Without a sense of who he is, he is powerless to take his father's place in the kingdom. Telemachus's journey begins in Pylos where he experiences a model of civilization that is healthy and begins to construct his identity.

Pylos

When Telemachus and Athena arrive in Pylos, there is a feasting ritual in the process:

...the ship pulled into Pylos, Neleus' storied citadel,
where the people lined the beaches,
sacrificing sleek black bulls to Poseidon...
They sat in nine divisions, each five hundred strong,
each division offering up nine bulls, and while the people
tasted the innards, burned the thighbones for the god,
the craft and crew came heading straight to shore.
(Fagles 3.4-11)

Once again an arrival is set against the backdrop of a feast. However, this time the feast is conducted properly with inclusion of the gods through sacrifice. Unlike the unruly feast in Ithaca at which, according to Telemachus, the suitors, "...butcher our cattle, our sheep, our fat goats, / feasting themselves sick, swilling our glowing wine / as if there's no tomorrow – all of it, squandered" (Fagles 2.59-62), there is a detailed description of an orderly sacrifice to the gods that is conducted on a large scale. The suitors' feast is void of any indication that there is a sacrifice on any scale, thus implying that one is absent. The comparison is important because it highlights the difference between a healthy civilization and one in chaos.

In addition to witnessing a properly conducted feast, Telemachus is subject to the ritual of *xenia*, "As soon as they saw the strangers, all came crowding down, / waving them on in welcome, urging them to sit. / ...sat them down at the feast / ...gave them a share of innards, poured some wine" (3.38-44). It is important to note that Telemachus and his men are welcomed to the feast and seated to eat and drink before an inquiry is made as to their identity and reason for travel. Nestor reinforces the importance of welcoming the guest and attending to his needs before the inquiry begins when he states,

“Now’s the time, now they’ve enjoyed their meal, / to probe our guests and find out who they are. / Strangers-friends, who are you?” (3.77-79). Through this episode, Telemachus is able to see how a stable civilization is maintained through the upholding of traditional social structures and respect for the gods. Nestor’s kingdom is in stark contrast with Ithaca’s. Pylos is a well functioning kingdom; the king is in place and the people respect social traditions and the gods. Simultaneously, Homer is preparing the audience for a contrast to come later in the text when Odysseus travels to various civilizations or anti-civilizations. In a sense, Telemachus, Odysseus and the reader are all on the same journey to discover the importance of the individual’s role in society as well as to come to a conclusion of what an archetypical civilization should look like. According to Jones, “The rituals of *xenia* ensure that there were a number of points of comparison between their adventures abroad, but the challenges which confront Odysseus are far more complex than those which Telemachos faces in what are friendly and welcoming settings” (Jones 27).

Telemachus travels to Pylos under the guise that he is to inquire if Nestor, his father’s comrade, has any information with regard to Odysseus; however, Nestor knows nothing of Odysseus’s current state. The only information he can give Telemachus pertains to memories of the war, the war heroes, and the heroic deeds of Telemachus’s father. This highlights Homer’s real intention in sending Telemachus to Pylos: to help him solidify his identity as the son of a hero and begin to make the transition from a boy to a man. Jones writes, “For the first time Telemachos comes into contact with a world quite unlike that of Ithaka. It is a world of heroes who have returned from the Trojan War; it is a world where the gods are fully honoured and their designs understood; a

world where the right of *xenoi* are acknowledged. In these three respects it is a very different world from the one he has just left” (27). This episode is important in laying a foundation upon which Telemachus can build. He is beginning to understand his lineage and the social systems that are respected in society. He is further educated when Nestor repeats the story of Orestes’s revenge for Telemachus to hear. This story, coupled with Nestor’s memories of the war and its heroes, allows Telemachus to see a paradigm of behavior. Nestor states, “Ah how fine it is, when a man is brought down, / to leave a son behind! Orestes took revenge... / -be brave, you too, / so men to come will sing your praises down the years” (Fagles 3.222-227). In addition to pointing out that the sons of heroes must grow up to be worthy of their fathers, Nestor alludes to the importance of *kleos*, which means “fame on the lips of men.” In Greek culture, a man’s reputation is everything. Telemachus learns that it is shameful to live a life of ineffectiveness; his lack of action holds consequences. Although he is not embroiled in a war in the same sense that his father was, he is engaged in a battle at home, and he must fight. This lesson is reinforced as Telemachus’s journey continues.

Sparta

Many of the social systems Telemachus witnesses in Pylos are repeated in Sparta, thus strengthening the significance of such systems in a healthy civilization. A parallel can be made between Books III and IV when Telemachus arrives in Sparta and immediately discovers that the people are engaged in a celebration feast. Although the

structure of the feast deviates from the one outlined in Pylos, the essence is still the same.

Sherratt claims that within the framework of feasting, there are different variations:

At one end of the spectrum are feasts whose primary stated purpose is to propitiate gods... for which the bulk of the description is devoted to the elaborate ritual surrounding the slaughter, dismembering, and cooking of the animal. At the other end are primarily secular feasts where this ritual aspect is either omitted from the description or reduced to the odd word or line – just enough to suggest that the animal is still hallowed (‘sacrificed’) before slaughter, and the gods received their share of the meat and the wine by burning and libation... (Sherratt 302)

Whereas Pylos satisfied the former description of feasting with the inclusion of the gods through sacrifice, Sparta caters to the latter. Upon arrival, Telemachus, without the divine guidance of Athena, once again finds himself in the midst of a feast. However, this time an elaborate description of the sacrifice is omitted; the focus is on the social ritual of marriage and the celebration that accompanies it. Menelaus, the king of Sparta is conducting a “double wedding-feast” for his son and daughter in which “...the gods were sealing firm the marriage” (Fagles 4.9), thus indicating the inclusion of the gods. The beginning of this book is clearly designed to parallel the beginning of Book III through the immediate show of xenia that Telemachus and his men receive. However, a mistake is made. An aide approaches Menelaus with the news of the arrival of strangers. The aide asks, “Tell me, should we unhitch their team for them / or send them to someone free to host them well?” (4.33-34). Menelaus immediately scolds the aide for not abiding by the rules of xenia which dictate that a stranger must be welcomed without question:

...now I see you’re babbling like a child!
Just think of all the hospitality we enjoyed
at the hands of other men before we made it home,
and god save us from such hard treks in years to come.

Quick, unhitch their team. And bring them in,
strangers, guests, to share our flowing feast.
(4.37-42)

Menelaus corrects the wrong by inviting the guests to feast. Like Nestor, he does not intend to make any inquiries with regard to the identity of his guests and their purpose until they have finished with the feast. He states, “Help yourselves to food, and welcome! Once you’ve dined / we’ll ask you who you are” (4.68-69). Although an inquiry proves to be unnecessary, the infamous Helen, Menelaus unfaithful wife, immediately identifies the lineage of their guest:

...I’m amazed at the sight.
To the life he’s like the son of great Odysseus,
surely he’s Telemachus! The boy that hero left
a babe in arms at home when all you Achaeans
fought at Troy, launching your headlong battles
just for my sake, shameless whore that I was.
(4.157-162)

Helen’s immediate recognition serves to secure Telemachus’s identity as the son of a hero. In addition, at the beginning of the book, Telemachus arrives in Sparta without the guidance of Athena which signifies that he is beginning to be able to function on his own; however, he is still accompanied by Nestor’s son, Pisistratus. At the end of Book IV, Telemachus meets with Menelaus alone; he is not accompanied by a guardian. This serves to show that the boy who once stated, “How can I greet him, Mentor, even approach the king? / I’m hardly adept at subtle conversation. / Someone my age *might* feel shy, what’s more, / interrogating an older man” (Fagles 3.24-27), has now moved beyond the status of a boy and into the realm of the adult world.

Telemachus’s meeting with Menelaus is important because it outlines the consequences of not being loyal to one’s kin. Early in their meeting, Menelaus states that

he rules his wealthy kingdom with “no great joy.” He suffers from the consequences of betrayal, for it was Helen’s unfaithfulness that led to the Trojan War and the loss of his comrades. In addition, he tells Telemachus the story of Orestes, thus this is the fourth time the story has been repeated in the poem and the third time that Telemachus is hearing it. For Menelaus the story is especially potent because Agamemnon was his brother. Both men suffered as a result of a wife’s unfaithfulness. Homer’s intention with the repetition of Orestes’s heroic story from Menelaus’s perspective has a two-fold purpose. Once again, the concept of individual responsibility is reinforced through a definition of what it means to be the son of a hero and the weight that position carries. In addition, the importance of loyalty to one’s kin is demonstrated through the unfaithfulness of a wife. Through this episode, a direct comparison can be made between Helen and Penelope. Unlike Helen, Penelope has not wavered in her loyalty. It serves as an example to Telemachus of the individual’s responsibility to his fellow man, especially in the family unit. In a sense, the family unit is the foundation upon which a civilization is built. Good order in the household advances good order in the larger society simply because the family is the seed from which the society grows. The family could be considered microcosm of the larger political institution. If the family unit is weak, the society does not have a strong foundation to stand on and thus the civilization will crumble. Helen’s disloyalty resulted in the destruction of civilization; Penelope’s steadfast loyalty is preventing the complete ruin of the kingdom Odysseus left behind.

It is interesting to note that the book that deals with destruction of marriage and its consequences begins with the marriage ritual. Homer may have structured the book in this fashion to suggest that people, and thus societies, are imperfect; imperfection is a

quality of life. It is the constant struggle for perfection that makes life worth living. Penelope is striving to maintain the bond of loyalty that she vowed to Odysseus upon their marriage. She is fulfilling her responsibility to her family and society. However, her loyalty means nothing if it is not reciprocated by her partner. At this point in the text, it is clear that the three pivotal characters of the poem, Telemachus, Penelope and Odysseus, each have the individual responsibility to remain loyal to their family unit. Telemachus must avenge the wrong that has been committed against his father at the hands of the suitors; Penelope must remain faithful to her husband in order to avoid the ruin of her kingdom, and Odysseus must find his way home despite the temptation that comes with offers of a simpler more perfect life.

III. Odysseus

Ogygia

In Greek the verb *Kalypsato* or *Kaluptein* means “to bury” which makes “Calypso” a fitting name for the nymph of Ogygia who has kept Odysseus buried in her isolated world far from civilization. Tracy writes, “Calypso has other important associations with death. Her very name is derived from the verb *Kalypto*, which is a common word in Greek for burying, and her island is located most strikingly ‘where the navel of the sea is.’ For the Greeks the navel marked the entrance to the underworld...” (Tracy 33). When the reader first meets Odysseus, he is weeping:

...his eyes never dry, his sweet life flowing away
with the tears he wept for his foiled journey home...
all his days he'd sit on the rocks and beaches,

wrenching his heart with sobs and groans and anguish,
gazing out over the barren sea through blinding tears.
(Fagles 5.168-175)

The actual introduction to Odysseus is unexpected; the great war hero is in tears. The passage serves to immediately inform the reader of Odysseus' emotional state and signify that his ten year absence has not been satisfying. Odysseus is mourning the loss of his life; he is not yet aware that he is on the verge of ending his seven year "living death" with Calypso as her unwilling lover. Although she offers him immortality and an existence of infinite love and pleasure far from the stresses of ordinary society, Odysseus longs for the realities of life and the family he left behind in Ithaca. According to Mendelson and Seidel, "We sympathize immediately with Odysseus's nostalgia for we are left with the curious sense that it is the immortal nymph who is somehow ephemeral, that happiness on her terms would soon mean ennui for a man" (Mendelson and Seidel 37). If Homer's purpose is to argue the importance of life in the civilized world, Book V is pivotal in building this argument.

Upon Hermes's arrival, Calypso seats her guest on a "glistening, polished chair" and immediately questions him as to the purpose of his visit:

God of the golden wand, why have you come?
A beloved, honored friend,
but it's been so long, your visits much too rare.
Tell me what's on your mind. I'm eager to do it,
whatever I can do... whatever can be done.
(Fagles 5. 98-102)

It is important to note that although Calypso is warm with her welcome, she immediately investigates the purpose of her guest's visit. It is the social custom of the Greeks to feed and comfort the guest before the investigation begins. Although Calypso's welcome is

not entirely conventional, she does not press the issue of purpose until she has made her guest comfortable and seen to his immediate needs. Thus it is fair to claim that Calypso practices *xenia* and to an extent does follow the law of hospitality; however, it is important to note that Calypso's home does not offer the ordinary comforts of civilization. It is a simple, non-complex dwelling both literally and figuratively. On the literal level, it is primitive in physical structure. On the figurative level it is lacking in the emotional ties that make a home comfortable. It is the antithesis of a home in the civilized world that is dependent upon architectural mastery and familial bonds. Calypso dwells in a cave that is void of life.

Homer makes it clear from the onset that Calypso's home and way of life are not to be desired. Although he introduces the reader to an earthly paradise, he juxtaposes the natural beauty of the environment with the darkness of Calypso's dwelling:

Why, even a deathless god
who came upon that place would gaze in wonder,
heart entranced with pleasure. Hermes the guide,
the mighty giant-killer, stood there, spellbound...
But once he'd had his fill of marveling at it all
he briskly entered the deep vaulted cavern.
(Fagles 5. 81-86)

The contrast between the wonder of the environment and the darkness of Calypso's abode suggest that Ogygia may appear to be desirable on the surface, but once inside, it is nothing more than a dark cave. The environment is only physically appealing on the outside. To live with Calypso in her cave, is to live in a shroud of darkness.

Once Homer establishes that Calypso's home is not physically desirable, he taps into the emotional void such an environment creates for the individual. Calypso lives alone on an isolated island; she is not surrounded by family nor are there any neighboring

communities. In addition, the typical characteristics of a civilization, such as worshipping the gods, are absent. The traditional relationship between man and the gods is non-existent here. As Hermes states, he unenthusiastically roamed across a “salty waste so vast, / so endless... no city of men in sight, and not a soul / to offer the gods a sacrifice and burn the fattest victims” (5.112-115). Hermes’s declaration that his visit was not made by choice but forced by the hand of Zeus allows the reader to understand that Ogygia is not a desired location. It is isolated and far from civilization, far from others, thus it is not painted in good light.

In addition, Calypso is immortal; she is not a creature of the mortal, civilized world. She offers Odysseus immortality, which he rejects. Homer must have his hero reject immortality in order to promote the significance of a life that must fear death.

Tracy writes:

In giving his hero the option of becoming immortal, the poet has depicted as emphatically as possible Odysseus’ renewed commitment to his given lot. He is a mortal, a human being, whose fate it is to die. Immortality is not for him, nor, Homeric poetry suggests, for any man. The trials and tribulations of the gods are trivial precisely because they live forever. By a harsh paradox, it is death, the fact that one will not always be alive, which makes life important. In the course of his seven-year stay with Calypso, Odysseus has found, despite the real temptation, that the idyllic round of pleasure that she offers holds no meaning. At best, it represents a vegetable existence. By the time we first encounter him, therefore, he has come to reject her offer of immortality and has committed himself to living life with all its suffering to the fullest. (Tracy 33)

Tracy’s commentary points to the significance of the Calypso episode: it highlights what it means to be human. In order for one’s existence to have any meaning there must be the pairing between the good and the bad; one cannot exist without the other. In order for life

to have any poignancy, there must be the fear that it can be taken away at any moment. In a sense, Odysseus' seven year stay with Calypso has been a sort of living death. Although the concept of living an immortal existence on an earthly paradise free from the strains of life may seem appealing, such an existence robs the individual of the very essence that gives life its significance- the fear that it could all end at any given moment. In addition, if Odysseus were to remain with Calypso, he would have to relinquish his kleos. For the ancient Greeks, a hero without kleos is nothing. According to Jones, "...it is only out in the open, performing glorious deeds in the eyes of his peers, that a Homeric hero can prove his status. Odysseus himself admits that death at sea is an ignominious end – because none will know of it or be able to celebrate it – [he] wishes he had died at Troy and received full measure of glory there" (Jones 46). As Hermes points out to Calypso, she lives far away from the "cities of men." If Odysseus was to stay with Calypso, far away from men, he would not be able to achieve kleos. He would suffer a loss of identity and plunge into death, the living death that Calypso offers.

The idea that Odysseus, a man, is not meant to live outside the realm of civilization as an immortal, more importantly, as a god, is conveyed through the notion that he has been suspended in "death" for the last seven years with Calypso. Homer reinforces the concept of this living death when he has Odysseus take to the ocean in an attempt to make his way back to Ithaca. Zeus has decreed that Odysseus will in fact return home; however, he will not be given a ship and a crew; he must build his own raft and suffer the sea alone. Zeus states,

The exile must return.
But not in the convoy of the gods or mortal men.
No, on a lashed, makeshift raft and wrung with pains.

on the twentieth day he will make his landfall, fertile
Scheria,
the lands of Phaeacians, close kin to the gods themselves.
(Fagles 5.35-39)

Although Zeus's decree allows Odysseus the opportunity to show his skills in building a craft, it is unclear at this point in the text as to why Zeus does not grant Odysseus a safe and immediate return. Instead, Odysseus is once again forced to face the wrath of Poseidon with the uncertainty of whether or not he will survive the raging waves. The full force of Poseidon's anger is heaved upon Odysseus as he struggles to reach land alive, "...he rammed the clouds together... / churned the waves into chaos, whipping / all the gales from every quarter, shrouding over in thunderheads / the earth and sea at once" (5.311-324). The description of Odysseus's struggle to reach land suggests a symbolic rebirth. Just after Odysseus claims he is about to die a "wretched death," Leucothea, who lives in the depths of the sea, takes pity on him. With the claim that he "seemed no fool," she gives him instructions to strip off his clothes, abandon his raft, and swim for the shore. In addition, she gives him an immortal scarf to tie around his waist. She instructs him to untie the scarf when he reaches land and throw it into the sea. The allusion to birth is made clear with the insertion of the immortal scarf which can be seen as an umbilical cord that is to be cut once Odysseus is born into the next stage of his life. The water in itself signifies a sort of cleansing or rebirth. In addition, Odysseus enters into this next phase naked and stripped of all he once had. When Odysseus leaves his living death with Calypso, he is reborn again into civilization. This rebirth theory is further supported with the epic simile used to express Odysseus's feelings when he sees the shore close in the distance:

Joy...warm as the joy that children feel
when they see their father's life dawn again,
one who's lain on a sickbed racked with torment,
wasting away, slowly, under some angry power's onslaught
then what joy when the gods deliver him from his pains!
So warm, Odysseus' joy when he saw that shore, those
trees,
as he swam on, anxious to plant his feet on solid ground
again. (Fagles 5.436-442)

The simile not only serves to convey the joy Odysseus feels at seeing land and a safe haven from the wrath of Poseidon, but it also directly expresses a father's chance at a second life after the torment of a near death experience, which is essentially what Odysseus has just emerged from and is about to receive.

Scheria

The rebirth theory is further strengthened with Odysseus' physical journey into the city of Phaeacia at which point he goes through the typical stages of a young man in search of his identity as he transitions from childhood into adulthood. Upon a close reading it is revealed that Odysseus's journey in Books VI-VIII directly parallels Telemachus's earlier journey in Books I-IV: both journeys are aided by the guidance of Athena in disguise; Athena encourages both Telemachus and Odysseus to "be bold" as they engage in their purpose; when the two men arrive at the respective cities, they marvel at the sight of such splendor and each uses the same simile to describe what they see, "A radiance strong as the moon or rising sun came flooding;" both men attend an assembly for the purpose of securing a ship to travel; and both Telemachus and Odysseus hear stories of the great Trojan War hero, Odysseus, and weep (Tracy 46).

In Book I, Athena appears to Telemachus to send him on a journey out into the world to seek information about his lost father. It seems strange that Athena should send Telemachus on a journey to discover if his father is dead or alive when she already knows the answer. Telemachus' physical journey is really a guise for the mental journey he must take to discover his identity. In Books VI-VIII, Odysseus is also on a mental journey with regard to his identity. Whereas Telemachus must travel away from home to discover and learn his identity, Odysseus must travel towards home in order to reclaim his identity, his *kleos*. The journeys differ in the sense that Telemachus is visiting model societies that contain friendly hosts, whereas Odysseus visits the societies of strangers that range from hyper-civilized to barbaric. The tone of danger that is absent on Telemachus's travels is ever present for Odysseus.

Odysseus's arrival in Phaeacia immediately differs from Telemachus's various arrivals in the sense that Odysseus is not greeted by a community in the midst of a feast nor is he accompanied by a guide. He lands in Phaeacia alone without any indication of life on the island. Although this observation may be important, the episode in Phaeacia is significant for other reasons. First, Phaeacia serves as the setting for which Odysseus will eventually narrate his adventures and fill in the missing gap of time that has not been explained. Second, Phaeacia provides the reader with a model of another society. According to Mendelson and Seidel:

Odysseus's experience among the Phaeacians is more than an epic interlude providing the hero with an occasion to rehearse his adventures. It is a period of extraordinary repose which transfigures the overriding image of the journey and in which, while the voyage is interrupted, the hero and the reader seem momentarily to have escaped from the tides of time. It is a memorable dramatization of a

civilization enjoying the fruits of leisure, where life is shaped by art. (Mendleson and Seidel 38)

After reading further into the episode, the reader becomes aware that Phaeacia is a civilization that values leisure and art; this world is very different from the one Odysseus left behind.

The juxtaposition between the turbulent storm in which Odysseus is almost drowned and the calm, paradise like environment of Scheria in which Odysseus wakes serves to highlight the utopian nature of the Phaeacian's world. Like a newborn baby, Odysseus wakes and emerges from the protective enclosure of leaves to find that he is in an earthly paradise. He is "unburied" at last and free from the dangers of Calypso. Unfortunately, Odysseus knows enough of deception to realize that an attractive veneer does not guarantee kindness and safety. As he awakes to the sound of Nausicaa and her maidens playing, he asks, "What are they here – violent, savage, lawless? / or friendly to strangers, god-fearing men?" (Fagles 6.132-133). Odysseus is aware that he is not entirely free from danger. As demonstrated in the Calypso episode, the appearance of an earthly paradise does not ensure a safe haven. Despite the beauty and innocence conveyed in the first book of the Phaeacia episode, something less than desirable lurks beneath the attractiveness of the landscape.

Homer begins his introduction of the Phaeacians by immediately associating them with the Cyclops, "...Years ago / they [Phaeacians] lived in a land of spacious dancing-circles, / Hyperia, all too close to the overbearing Cyclops, / stronger, violent brutes who harried them without end" (Fagles 6.4-7). Although the reader has not yet met the Cyclops, it was made clear earlier in the text that they are the monstrous creatures

responsible for Poseidon's wrath towards Odysseus. Therefore, the Phaeacian's prior connection to the Cyclops simultaneously suggests a sense of foreboding and a commonality between Odysseus and these people. Both have escaped from the dangers of the Cyclops and both are their opposite. As the episode continues, the Phaeacians are further described in association with the divine and are hailed for the beauty of their world. However, despite the distance that the Phaeacians have created between themselves and the Cyclops with regard to both space and lifestyle, they still serve as a danger to Odysseus. Tracy writes:

The Phaeacians, we learn from these lines, used to belong to the fairy-tale world from which Odysseus has narrowly escaped... They are the best seafarers, the most civilized people in the poem, just as the Cyclops are the most uncivilized and do not know seafaring. They represent the other side of the coin; their civility may be as dangerous to Odysseus' homecoming as is the Cyclopes' barbarity. They have potential for harm. The delightful charm of Nausicaa then informs this Phaeacian experience and, for Odysseus, complicates a situation that is already extremely dangerous. (Tracy 37)

The danger in Ogygia rested upon Calypso's refusal to set him free. The danger in Phaeacia lies in the idea that Odysseus may feel reluctant to leave if he allows the charms of Nausicaa and the society to draw him in. The danger begins with Odysseus's first encounter with Nausicaa. Odysseus is naked and lacking an identity when Nausicaa finds him. She immediately demonstrates that she follows the Achaean tradition of *xenia*:

But here's an unlucky wanderer strayed out way
and we must tend him well. Every stranger and beggar
comes from Zeus, and whatever scrap we give him
he'll be glad to get. So, quick, my girls,
give our new found friend some food and drink
and bathe the man in the river,
wherever you find some shelter from the wind.

(Fagles 6.226-232)

Nausicaa tends to the needs of the stranger before she makes in inquiry into his presence and condition. In this sense, her actions mirror those of the hosts Telemachus encounters on his travels. The actions of all three hosts demonstrate that civilization requires a general concern for the well being of others, even strangers.

Upon first sight, Odysseus mistakes her for a goddess, “Are you a goddess or a mortal... / just look at your build, your bearing, your lithe flowing grace...” (Fagles 6.164-167). The virgin daughter of King Alcinous is characterized as a “match for the deathless gods in build and beauty” who is of marriageable age. Homer further conveys her divine qualities by immediately preceding her entrance into the text with an ethereal description of Olympus as Athena makes her way home:

The gods' eternal mansion stands unmoved,
never rocked by gale winds, never drenched by rains,
nor do the drifting snows assail it, no, the clear air
stretches away without a cloud, and a great radiance
plays across that world where the blithe gods
live all their days in bliss. (Fagles 6.47-52)

The reader is left with the sense that Nausicaa exists in a divine sphere that is overcrowded with innocent benevolence. Although Nausicaa demonstrates *xenia* and lacks hesitation in declaring herself an ally to Odysseus, her very essence presents an immediate threat to his homeward bound campaign simply because she is attracted to him:

...the princess gazed in wonder ...
'Listen, my white-armed girls, to what I tell you.
The gods of Olympus can't be all against this man
who's come to mingle among our noble people
at first he seemed appalling, I must say –
now he seems like a god who rules the skies up there!

Ah, if only a man like that were called my husband,
lived right here, pleased to stay forever...'
(6.263-271)

Nausicaa's motivation for helping Odysseus may not spring from pure benevolence. Homer emphasizes her desire to marry a man of Odysseus's character and thus places Odysseus in danger of becoming Nausicaa's husband. To further complicate the scene, Odysseus has not yet identified himself as a married man. He is reluctant to reveal his name and status until he is certain of his safety. He manages to plead his case to Nausicaa without disclosing any substantial information:

...princess, please! You, after all that I have suffered,
you are the first I've come to. I know no one else,
none in your city, no one in your land.
Show me the way to town, give me a rag for cover,
just some cloth, some wrapper you carried with you here.
And may the good gods give you all your heart desires:
husband, and house, and lasting harmony too.
No finer, greater gift in the world than that ...
when man and woman possess their home, two minds,
two hearts that work as one. Despair to their enemies,
a joy to all their friends. Their own best claim to glory.
(Fagles 6.191-203)

Odysseus's chances of returning home depend greatly upon both his sense of loyalty to Penelope as well as his ability to communicate. His devotion must parallel Penelope's constancy or else the familial bond is broken and the civilization of Ithaca will fall in turn. In addition, he must skillfully use rhetoric to win the sympathy and aid of the Phaeacians. According to Jones, "The social world of the *Odyssey* may seem less threatening than the battle-scenes of the *Iliad*, but if Odysseus' return to Ithaca does not depend on his ability to wield a spear in these books, he is still in danger of frustration, even loss of return, if he does not show qualities no less vital for the *Odyssey*'s world

than skill in battle was in the *Iliad* – tact, courtesy, self-awareness, and sensitivity to others’ needs and fears” (Jones 55). In order for Odysseus to secure his passage home, he must simultaneously endear himself to Nausicaa and yet remain emotionally distant. He must win her heart without suggesting she may have his. Tracy writes, “Odysseus, who at this juncture in the story badly needs the protective nurture of home and family, finds himself in just the situation he needs, except that it is not his home and his family. He must take care not to be drawn in too far” (Tracy 36). This episode is important because it not only tests Odysseus’s sense of loyalty to Penelope, it also highlights his sense of responsibility to return home to a family and kingdom that await his return. Once again, he has the opportunity to abandon his responsibilities for a leisurely life, and once again, he rejects it.

Nausicaa’s immediate acceptance of Odysseus serves to heighten the sense of danger she exudes because it is intertwined with her apparent attraction. She reveals her ultimate desire when she lays out the plan to introduce Odysseus to her father and thus secure his passage home. She determines that they must walk into the city separately in order to avoid the “nasty gossip” that Odysseus is her “husband-to-be.” Through this suggestion, she subtly conveys her wish to wed the newcomer. She states that she will introduce Odysseus to “all the best Phaeacians,” but that Phaeacia has its share of “insolent types.” She explains that it is not uncommon for the locals to distrust foreigners since “nobody lives nearby”. They might say, “Good riddance! Let the girl go roving to find herself / a man from foreign parts. She only spurns her own- / countless Phaeacians round about who court her, / nothing but our best” (Fagles 6.309-312). Nausicaa’s concern about the gossip reveals her desire to marry Odysseus; however, her words in

this passage carry a greater significance with regard to insight into these people. First, she reveals that the locals are not accepting of strangers. Although Nausicaa demonstrates xenia when she first encounters Odysseus, she suggests that the commoners of Phaeacia will not engage in the Achaean tradition. This creates a bit of confusion for the reader, for xenia is decreed by Zeus, and the gods appear to be closely linked to the Phaeacians. In Book VII, Alcinous reinforces this idea when he states:

Always up to now, they came to us face-to-face
whenever we'd give them grand, glorious sacrifices –
they always sat beside us here and shared our feasts.
Even when some lonely traveler meets them on the roads,
they never disguise themselves. We're too close kin for
that,
as close as the wild Giants are, the Cyclops too.
(Fagles 6.235-242)

Despite the fact that the Phaeacians do not unanimously practice xenia, a decree of Zeus, the gods seem to favor them. This idea serves to further link the Phaeacians to the monstrous Cyclops. It is later revealed that the Cyclops also disregard the laws of xenia. Although the two societies are very different, they are connected in the sense that they manage to maintain an existence despite their disregard for the Zeus's law. It begins to become clear that these civilizations are not real. Like, Ogygia, they exist in another realm.

The utopian quality of Phaeacia and the gods's partiality to the Phaeacians is conveyed early on when Nausicaa and her maidens first lay eyes on Odysseus:

Stop, my friends! Why do you run when you see a man?
Surely you don't think him an enemy, do you?
There's no one alive, there never will be one,
who'd reach Phaeacian soil and lay it waste.
The immortals love us far too much for that.
We live too far apart, out in the surging sea,

off at that world's end –
no other mortals come to mingle with us.
(Fagles 6.218-225)

Nausicaa's statement is important for two reasons. On one level, she reveals the close relationship that the Phaeacians have with the gods. On a second level, she conveys the utopian nature of the environment. The Phaeacians have no need to protect themselves from invaders because not only would the gods not allow harm to come to them, but Scheria is geographically situated in a position of isolation. Perhaps it is this physical isolation that lends itself to the Phaeacian commoner's lack of *xenia*. Their impudent disposition with regard to strangers may simply be a result of their lack of practice.

Earlier, Nausicaa alludes to the idea that it is not favorable to marry a man from a foreign port. Couple this suggestion with a later passage in Book VII when it is revealed that the royal marriage between Alcinous and Arete is of an incestuous nature, "Arete, she is called, and earns the name: / she answers all our prayers. She comes, in fact / from the same stock that bred our King Alcinous" (Fagles 6.62-64). Foley examines the significance of the incestuous union in a world where royal unions were designed for the purpose of creating alliances between different kingdoms:

In the stable societies of Aeolus and Phaeacia marriages are between familiars (incestuous or endogamous), not between strangers (exogamous). Without war they need not create a complex network of external alliances to protect and reproduce the social order. In Ithaca relations between strangers are of primary importance; marriages are on the same pattern, between strangers. The success of the marriage depends on the consent of the wife to count her husband's interests as her own, and Penelope's creative fidelity is viewed as remarkable. Thus Homer's selection of the contrasting marriage pattern, marriage between familiars, for his utopian society seems appropriate to its isolation from the external world. (Foley 95)

The idea that the Phaeacians have no need to neither fear foreign invasion nor create alliances through the marriage ritual is indicative of their isolation from the rest of civilization. In this sense, they exist in a similar realm with Calypso. Homer may be using the parallels to suggest that Phaeacia is not real; it is surreal. It may appear to be a perfect civilization, yet, like Ogygia, it lacks the qualities of a real civilization or at least the archetypal civilization that Odysseus is bred from. Odysseus's kleos is a result of the real world from which he hails, a world that allows him to triumph in times of war. He is a hero because he exists in a place where people are not perfect. Wars do not occur in utopian societies. Bowra states, "Phaeacians hardly mingle with other peoples and are consciously proud of their singularity; unlike authentic heroes they live not for war but for dance and song" (Bowra in Bloom 55).

Despite the peaceful atmosphere that should be indicative of a utopian society, Homer suggests that Odysseus's journey into the city of Phaeacia is an ominous undertaking. As Odysseus enters the city, Athena shields him from trouble with a mist, "Pallas Athena, harboring kindness for the hero, / drifted a heavy mist around him, shielding him / from any swaggering islander who'd cross his path, / provoke him with taunts and search out who he was" (Fagles 7.16-19). Athena, disguised as a little girl, presents herself to Odysseus as his guide. Her mere presence suggests Odysseus's need for protection. Although it is not uncommon for Homeric scholars to suggest that Odysseus has "reached a haven where uncertainty and hostility are suspended," by referring to the "calm and perfect safety Odysseus finds among the Phaeacians," or that Phaeacia, "the land blessedly remote from all enemies, is a windless paradise..." and the Phaeacians "are charitable to strangers" (Rose 388), a closer reading of the Phaeacian episode,

particularly Odysseus's entrance into the city, suggests otherwise. As Odysseus proceeds forward into the city, Athena orders, "Not a glance at anyone, not a question. / the men here never suffer strangers gladly, / have no love for hosting a man from foreign lands" (7.35-37). To such critics, F.M. Combellack gives the following rebuttal: "He [the critic] must, I suppose, tacitly assume that when Athena, disguised as a Phaeacian girl, says precisely the opposite, she is either ignorant or lying" (Rose 388). Rose further states:

The Phaeacians, then, rather than exemplifying the regular reaction toward strangers by the Greeks of the *Odyssey*, are really an exception, if it is true, as it certainly is, that they begin with "suspicion" and "distrust" and move gradually toward "lavish entertainment." In the tendencies of scholars to regard the Phaeacians either as excellent hosts or as exemplars of the regular Greek attitude toward strangers, a close consideration of many details has been lacking. The entire Phaeacian episode is actually a demonstration of the hero's ability to gain the loyalty of a people who are far from ready to offer "a haven where uncertainty and hostility are suspended. (Rose 389-390)

The disconnect between Nausicaa's show of *xenia* and the predicted lack of hospitality on the part of the Phaeacians creates a rift between Phaeacia and the world Odysseus comes from. Unlike Ithaca, Phaeacia is essentially a perfect civilization: the Phaeacians do not encounter foreigners; therefore, they do not engage in war, nor do they have the need to create alliances with neighboring civilizations. However, as a result, the Phaeacians are not able to boast about their heroic victories, nor may they display and/or share their spoils. According to King Alcinous, they want to be remembered for how they "excel the world in sailing, nimble footwork, dance and song (Fagles 8.286-287). Unfortunately, these qualities cause Phaeacia to be a static, dead society for a hero such as Odysseus. This sort of environment is not concerned with its mortality; it is more

concerned with sport. It does not lend itself to heroism, thus there is no chance of kleos. For Odysseus, living in Phaeacia would be very much like living in Ogygia; he would experience a sort of living death as a man without kleos. Jones states, “It is tempting to label Phaiakian values ‘unheroic’. They are, to the extent that Phaiakians do not feel compelled to seek immortal glory in battle. But even Sarpedon agrees that, under different conditions, he would not fight at all. Note the Phaiakians’ luxurious way of life brings no rebuke for Odysseus’ lips. Their way of life may not be Odysseus’, but Homeric heroes were not puritans” (Jones 68-69).

Ironically, the society that lacks the ability to provide a man with kleos does allow Odysseus to regain his. Book VIII has a double purpose in that it is constructed to simultaneously lead to the revelation of Odysseus’s identity, and also highlight the important role that the story-teller plays in society. Jones writes:

It is important to understand that it is the poet’s art that gives lasting glory, because it ensures the memory of the past is saved: without the poet, there would be no heroic glory because no-one would know what the heroes had achieved. So Demodokos’ function in Book 8 is vital. His songs are not merely entertainment (though they are obviously that): they are the objective ratification of the heroic stature of Odysseus. (Jones 69)

Perhaps in this section of the text, Homer is paying homage to his own profession. In fact, he may have been doing this from the very beginning. In the Telemachy, the reader learns about the heroic deeds of heroes such as Odysseus and Orestes through the art of story-telling. It is made clear early on in the text that the life of a hero is preserved through the art of the narrative. In Book VIII, the intertwining of song and sport signify that Phaeacia, a perfect civilization, values the art of the story. During the feasting,

Demodokos sings three songs which serve to create the atmosphere in which Odysseus reveals his identity. Ironically, the first song is about the Trojan War and the Achaean heroes. The song's central focus is on Odysseus at Troy and his supposed argument with Achilles. This song serves the purpose of reminding the Phaeacians of the war and the heroes who fought in it. The second song is about the adulterous affair between Ares and Aphrodite. Although this song, in conjunction with the actions of Helen, Menelaus' wife, may serve to remind Odysseus of the unfaithfulness of a wife, it may also be viewed in stark contrast with Penelope's faithfulness and thus highlight her unwavering loyalty. In addition, it might remind Odysseus of his responsibility to return home. According to Tracy, "This song, dealing as it does with the story of a man and wife also apparently nurtures a growing realization among the Phaeacians that this hero is married" (Tracy 52). The third song, at Odysseus's request, is a narrative about the Trojan Horse, which is the event that grants Odysseus his kleos. The story serves to reveal Odysseus' identity and thus restore his kleos.

The significance of story-telling is further reinforced when Odysseus takes on the role of the singer and launches into the story of his travels. The narrative shifts into a flashback and Odysseus's adventures begin with the Cyclops episode and how he defeated the common enemy. According to Tracy, "...by promoting his own kleos, the kleos he came dangerously close to losing on the island of Calypso, he guarantees in a sense his life and his return. Moreover, by relating his past adventures, he not only tells us who he is, he establishes his identity for himself as well" (Tracy 58). In a sense the revelation of Odysseus's adventures serves as a sort of therapy to help him regain his sense of self as he reflects upon what he had to do to survive.

Cyclops Episode

Odysseus begins his story of the Cyclops episode with a description that immediately distinguishes this society as the most uncivilized society encountered in the text:

...lawless brutes, who trust so to the everlasting gods
they never plant with their own hands or plow the soil.
Unsown, unplowed, the earth teems with all they need,
wheat, barley and vines, swelled by the rains of Zeus
to yield a big full-bodied wine from clustered grapes.
They have no meeting place for council, no laws either,
no up on the mountain peaks they live in arching caverns-
each a law to himself, ruling his wives and children,
not a care in the world for any neighbor. (Fagles 9.120-128)

Unlike the model civilizations of Pylos and Sparta, the Cyclops' society does not engage in any of the social systems that are the markers of a healthy civilization. The starkest contrast lies in their lack of laws and sense of community. Each individual seems to exist as a separate entity unto himself; a concern for fellow beings is not valued nor deemed necessary. Even with just a quick glance at this barbaric society, the reader can easily see the antithesis to the type of society the Greeks favored.

Upon Odysseus's arrival on the shores of the Cyclops' island, Homer creates the following description:

...through the pitch black night...
with thick fog
swirling around the ships, the moon wrapped in clouds
and not a glimmer stealing through that gloom.
Not one of us glimpsed the island – scanning hard-
or the long combers rolling us slowly toward the coast,
not till our ships had run their keels ashore.
Beaching our vessel smoothly, striking sail,
the crews swung out in the low shelving sand
And there we fell asleep, awaiting Dawn's first light.
(9.158-167)

Their arrival in the “pitch black of the night” combined with the thick fog and envelopment of the moon in the clouds, serves to create an ominous mood with regard to the episode to follow. In addition, Odysseus’s inability to visually see what lies ahead foreshadows his inability to suspect the brutality of his unknown hosts. Odysseus’s arrival on the Cyclops’ island mirrors his arrival in Phaeacia in the sense that it is a chance encounter that is beyond his control. At first he seems to have stumbled upon a utopian environment where the “...level island stretches flat across the harbor... / wild goats breed by the hundreds... / the subsoil’s dark and rich...” (Fagles 9.129-149). However, upon closer examination, this plush environment is a guise for a world of danger. Unlike the society of Phaeacia, the danger does not lie in the desirable qualities of the society, but in the barbaric nature in which the inhabitants live. This plush environment would be beneficial to any society in providing the resources for cultivation and trade. Unfortunately, the Cyclops cannot take advantage of this bountiful environment because they do not practice any crafts. They do not have shipbuilders, sailors, or farmers; they are essentially lazy.

Despite the obvious lack of features that distinguish a civilized society from a savage society, Odysseus announces that he is going to further explore the island to “...probe the natives living over there. / What are they – violent, savage, lawless? / or friendly to strangers, god-fearing men?” (9.194-196). Odysseus equips himself with wine as a gift to present to his host; he is under the impression that he will encounter “some giant clad in power like armor-plate- / a savage deaf to justice, blind to law” (9.239-240). Upon arrival at an inhabitant’s cave, which is stocked full of cheese and livestock, Odysseus’s men beg him to take the goods and return quickly to the ship to avoid trouble,

but Odysseus's desire for gifts overrides his responsibility to protect his men and return to Ithaca. Thus they build a fire in the cave, feast on their unknown host's goods, and wait for the inhabitant of the cave to appear. Upon arrival, Polyphemus, the representative Cyclops, inquires as to the identity and purpose of his guests. He immediately demonstrates a lack of *xenia*. Odysseus replies:

...we're at your knees
in hopes of a warm welcome, even a guest-gift
the sort that hosts give strangers. That's the custom.
Respect the gods, my friend...
Zeus will avenge their rights!" (9.300-305)

Odysseus has an expectation that the Cyclops will follow the social systems that are the hallmark of the civilized world. Through his response, Polyphemus demonstrates that his society does not carry the same values, "...you must be a fool, stranger, or come from nowhere, / telling me to fear the gods or avoid their wrath! / We Cyclops never blink at Zeus and Zeus's shield... / we've got more force by far" (9. 307-311). In this passage Polyphemus reveals his society's lack of respect for the gods through a dismissal of Zeus's rule of reciprocity of hospitality and the announcement that his race has in fact "got more force." He proceeds to ravage Odysseus's crew through acts of cannibalism. Tracy states, "In keeping with his depiction as the most uncivilized character in the poem, not only does Polyphemos not properly entertain his guests with food and drink, he eats them" (Tracy 62). Though the situation looks dismal for Odysseus and his men, Odysseus's strengths in character are revealed when he composes a plan for escape that involves his sense of forethought and cleverness. Once again, the "man of twists and turns" demonstrates his ability to deceive and willingly inflict pain in the famous "Nobody" scene. Odysseus must deny his identity in order to avoid death. When the

attack upon the Cyclops is put into motion, the negative effect of living in a community that promotes isolation and lacks civility is revealed; Polyphemus fails to elicit help from his neighbors. At this point a major distinction is created between a civilized society and a savage society: In a society where the individual does not feel a sense of responsibility towards his fellow man, the individual suffers. Segal addresses both the negative and the contradictory nature of the Cyclops' society within the context of the period:

The Cyclopes make their appearance in an unstable conjunction of opposites. They occupy both a Golden Age paradise where, 'trusting to the gods,' they receive the earth's fruits without toil, and a subhuman condition of dwelling in mountain caves with only a rudimentary social organization and isolated nuclear families. Odysseus' arrival brings out the negative side of their primitive society, for just this 'lack of concern for one another' prevents them from coming to Polyphemos' aid. Eager to get back to sleep in their individual caves, they readily accept his statement about 'Nobody' as an excuse to dismiss his complaint. (Segal 495)

Segal's observation is useful because it highlights not only the Cyclops' lack of social systems, but it also addresses what is particularly problematic about this episode: the idea that the Cyclops are able to live in an earthly paradise and thrive despite their rejection of the values of hospitality, community and the gods. Perhaps Homer is simply trying to convey that the world in which he lived was not necessarily fair, nor just.

Conclusion

The *Odyssey* takes place in a world that was very different from the one in which the contemporary reader lives. Although the seeds of western civilization, as we understand it, were beginning to sprout, it would be a mistake to impose a modern

understanding of the world on the poem. However, through a close analysis of the text, it is clear that some of its major themes are as relevant today as they were in ancient times. The concept of individual responsibility has not wavered in its importance. In order for a society to grow and prosper, the individual must have a sense of responsibility for the greater good.

The role of an English teacher extends beyond simply teaching reading and writing skills, it includes lessons on civility. Much of the literature we teach focuses on the importance of the individual in the larger society and aims to promote the importance of individual responsibility. Homer's text is a good fit for the high school classroom because it works towards this purpose.

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