

The Odyssey: Telemachus And His Development

The Odyssey was a great book in which many characters were brought out and developed. The most significant development that occurred in the epic was the development of Telemachus. Telemachus is a very complex character that Homer develops from beginning to end. From the beginning when he is a mere shadow of his father to near the end in which he is considered just as courageous. Many factors influence Telemachus as he matures into a man.

To begin with his name means "Far from Battle". This was given to him because he was born when the male generations of his parents were going off to the Trojan War. But the name proves to be ironic, for the epic ends with Telemachus taking part in two battles.

Not having any father figures as a child severely affects Telemachus. He becomes a timid, shy and spineless boy who is greatly pampered by his mother. He is not helped by being the son of a world-famous father- a difficult reputation to live up to. This lack of motivation and assertive behavior does not help Telemachus when the suitors start eating away at his estate. Telemachus knows what the suitors are doing is wrong but yet does not do anything about it. Telemachus foolishly hopes that his father will come and clean up the mess that the suitors are to blame for. Telemachus knows that his father would handle the situation with the suitors in a much more aggressive manner than he does. Odysseus would kill all of them for being treacherous beings, while Telemachus does nothing but whine. Telemachus says "how his noble father might come back out of the blue, drive the suitors headlong from the house, and so regain his loyal honors, and reign over his own once more" (The Odyssey, Homer, 1980 Oxford University Press, W. Shewring) (pg. 17)

It is not till Telemachus receives divine attention that he even begins to mature in the least bit. Athene has to come in and has to encourage and give advice to the young, immature Telemachus on what to do. Without this he would have undoubtedly done absolutely nothing about the situation with the suitors and/or any news concerning his father's return. Is it then ok to ask if Telemachus would be a hero at the end of the book without divine intervention? Should we judge Telemachus on what he was before or after the goddess helped him? Telemachus did not have a role model, no father figure. It is probably because of this that we come to have pity for poor Telemachus and condone that a goddess had to help him before he was anybody. In a large way it is unfair to compare Telemachus with his father who also receives divine attention. Odysseus had a chance to prove himself to the gods and earned their attention. However, because Telemachus had no father he never had the chance to prove himself.

During the book it seems that even a goddess, such as Athene, does not know what to do with somebody as incompetent, and inexperienced as Telemachus. Athene toys with some ideas and then finally decides to get Telemachus to go to Sparta. Perhaps it is this journey that finally gives Telemachus a chance to mature and see the world. Through this journey, Telemachus' first, he sees many new sights and encounters new situations. He is humbled when he sees the palace of Menelaos and his most beautiful wife Helen. Telemachus learns how to act tactfully with those that he wants to avoid. This is brought out when he avoids Nestor on his way back from Sparta. Through a series of events he sees what the world is about. He learns of his surroundings and perhaps for the first time in his life interacts with them. The journey to Sparta was very important in developing Telemachus, however it is plausible to argue that the journey back from Sparta was a bigger learning event. He faces his biggest obstacle so far in the book, the suitors

plotting against him. He skillfully avoids a bad fate with some help from Athene.

By the end of this epic a once shy, timid, incompetent boy has matured into a thoughtful and brave man that lives up to the legacy of Odysseus. It becomes evidently clear that Telemachus has really matured when we hear new logic, sensibility, and authority in his words as he speaks to his mother shortly before the death of the suitors. The Odyssey, Homer, 1980 Oxford University Press, W. Shewring) (pg. 260) It is amazing that by the end Odysseus and his son fight side by side against the suitors. It is clear at this point that the old Telemachus is gone and all that is there is a new brave, bold and thoughtful Telemachus.

Homer does a wonderful job in maturing Telemachus during the course of this book. It is delightful to see a young, foolish boy grow into the proud man that he became. Pallas Athene helped get the wheels in motion but it takes true hero to get places and keep the status that he gains. We last see him standing within the accurate order of the clan of Odysseus, when Grandfather Laertes, Odysseus, and Telemachus, all in armor, all defending the ancestral estate receive the blessing of Pallas Athene and of Zeus.
