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Week 5: Reading Questions: The Odyssey: Books 1-9 and Books 18-24

1) Book 1 begins with a common epic trope: The invocation of the muse where in the poet/bard calls on the goddess of music/song for inspiration. What kind of relationship between poets and gods does this common epic start reveal?

A- The Odyssey, like its companion poem, the Iliad, is an epic poem, meaning an exalted story of a warrior-like hero's journey and dealings with the gods, told in a formal poetic structure. Basically, gods and mortals blame each other when things go wrong. Because the Greeks believe that the gods control all aspects of life, they sacrifice food and drinks to the gods. Odysseus knows he must sacrifice to Poseidon. If he does not sacrifice, more trouble will happen in the sea.

2) How is Athena kind of like a muse of our hero Odysseus' son Telemachus? Describe the nature of her interaction with him?

A- Odysseus: Books 1-2 claim that Odysseus's son, Telemachus, an infant when Odysseus left but now is a young man, is helpless to stop them with the consent of Zeus, Athena travels to Ithaca to speak with Telemachus. Odysseus's friend Menelaos, Athena predicts that Odysseus is still alive and that he will soon return to Ithaca. Athena, assuming the form of like Homer with Iliad, the bard sings of the sufferings experienced by the Greeks on their return from Troy, and his song makes the bereaved Penelope more miserable than she already is.

The nature of her interaction with him was that she advises Telemachus to call together the suitors and announces their banishment from his father's estate.

3) In books 9-12, Odysseus himself shares stories of his adventures to the royal court on the Island kingdom of Phaeacian where he has taken refuge after many troubles. Select one significant hardship that Odysseus goes through and summarize in a few precise sentences. Then, discuss what his hardship reveals about Odysseus as a character: Use at least one quote to support your answer.

A- Odysseus faces several challenges on his way home, but the one I select is "a battle with Polyphemus, a cyclops." Odysseus says these lines when Calypso tells him that he is fated to suffer if he leaves her island. The quote is, "Much have I suffered, labored long and hard by now in the waves and wars. Add this to the total---bring the

trial on.” Throughout the poem, Odysseus is willing to endure great hardship. And these lines suggest that he sees his suffering as a “trial,” something he must endure to be worth of his nostos or homecoming.

4) In books 18-24, Odysseus is finally back in his home of Ithaca but returns to find out his kingdom in disorder and his palace full of usurping suitors trying to marry his wife and replace him as king. In disguise, Odysseus infiltrates his own castle and witnesses, firsthand, what is taking place. Who is the first person to see through Odysseus’ disguise? And how does she know it is him?

A- Upon his return, Odysseus found that the suitors are living in his palace, trying to get Penelope to marry them. During his absence, his wife had remained faithful. However, Eurycleia, an old nurse, she recognizes him by a scar on his leg.

5) What “impossible” challenges does Odysseus fulfill that none of the other suitors can?

A- To “fight” their way out or run for it.” And he locked the doors and took away all the weapons.

6) How does Odysseus finally get rid of the suitors? Who helps him?

A. Odysseus steps up to the bow and, with little effort, fires an arrow through all twelve axes. He then turns the bow to the suitors. He and Telemachus assisted with a few faithful servants, kill every suitor. Odysseus reveals himself to the entire, palace and reunites with his loving Penelope.

7) What proves to Penelope that Odysseus is truly Odysseus and not an impostor?

A- To assure herself of Odysseus’s identity, Penelope test him; as he listens, she asks Eurycleia to move the bedstead about of the couple’s chamber and spread it with blankets. The king himself had carved the bed as a young man, shaping it out of a living olive tree that grew in the courtyard of the palace.

8) Identify two themes (messages/opinions/assertions) about one or more topic/subjects that you believe appear in this epic?

One or more controversial sections of the epic is Poseidon who takes his frustration out on the Phaeacians whose only offense is following their tradition of hospitality by sailing Odysseus home.

Vengeance

Poseidon and Odysseus are the most noticeable representatives of the theme of vengeance. To escape from the cave of the Cyclops (Polyphemus), Odysseus blinds the one-eyed giant (Book 9). Unfortunately, the Cyclops is the sea god Poseidon's son; Odysseus has engaged a formidable enemy. Poseidon cannot kill Odysseus because the Fates have determined that he will make it home. However, the sea god can help to fulfill his son's wish that Odysseus should arrive in Ithaca late, broken, and alone, his shipmates lost, and his household in turmoil (9.590-95). In one of the more controversial sections of the epic, Poseidon takes his frustration out on the Phaeacians whose only offense is following their tradition of hospitality by sailing Odysseus home (Book 13; pgs. 214-216).