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Character Analysis Essay

English 4

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The Odyssey: The Will of Man

In Homer's epic, "The Odyssey", the will of man—a curious and, at first glance, abstract concept—is illuminated through concrete demonstrations, from perception and the actions of the main character, Odysseus. However, "will" is the progenitor that only pumps greater importance within the beating heart of a hero and leader.

There are many examples of Odysseus' immense will, and how that constitutes his ability to tackle dangers and the determination to lead himself and others through perilous adventures. One of these is the infamous capture of the cannibalistic cyclops, Polyphemus. "And I spoke to all my companions in words of courage, so none should panic, and back out... then I brought it close up from the fire and my friends about me stood fast. Some great divinity breathed courage into us" (Odysseus). Odysseus is assisted by the grey-eyed goddess, Athene, in many ways later in his life, but his willpower is possibly the only thing that is consistently his and only his. His refusal to lead his men down a fate of certain death shows only a glimpse of this fact. Hardened resolve and cunning strategy propel his success in many predicaments. That being said, there is a more powerful and persistent light of will within Odysseus that is not born from his heroics or his helpful goddess, but his love. "No finer, greater gift than that...when man and woman possess their home, two minds, two hearts that work as one" (Odysseus). A legend is like a gold statue of virtue and immense wealth, but where does that statue stand? Without a firm foundation, a land of worth, that statue is nothing but a misplaced object. Odysseus is a statue

that stands on an unshakable love. His gold may be tarnished and wearied from time of wandering, but he always stands amongst something that cannot change: his duty and commitment to his family. Even when faced with the temptation of immortal life in the hands of a beautiful goddess, he is not moved.

This brings to question, where does this will to keep his values come from? “Hermes did not find great-hearted Odysseus indoors, but he was sitting out on the beach, crying, as before now he had done, breaking his heart in tears, lamentation, and sorrow, as weeping tears he looked out over the barren water” (Homer). Hope. Even as Odysseus’ life falls farther and farther into an endless entropy, he does not stop seeking the horizon of an empty sea for rescue. How can this be asserted? He is still alive and mortal. If Odysseus had given up all hope of going home, he would have taken immortality and lived forever in a new life of luxury and delight. Better yet, the futility of holding on to his raft and drifting aimlessly in the sea after Poseidon's great efforts to destroy him should have led Odysseus to his inevitable death, whether by choice or natural atrophy. Yet, he did not. This can only be caused by one thing: hope. Without it there is no rational need to exercise will. Then, why is Odysseus’ will important and where does it lead his leadership?

A man of great will is nothing without the willingness to sacrifice everything to accomplish his objective. Odysseus is a man of great sacrifice. However, he did not start this way. “Again I started to call to Cyclops, but my friends about me checked me, first one then another speaking, trying to soothe me: ‘Hard one, why are you trying once more to stir up this savage man, who just now threw his missile in the sea, forcing our ship to the land again, and we thought once more we were finished... So they spoke, but could not persuade the great heart in me, but once again in the anger of my heart I cried to him: ‘Cyclops, if any mortal man ever asks

you who inflicted upon your eye this shameful blinding, tell him that you were blinded by Odysseus, sacker of cities” (Odysseus). Through the fires and tsunamis of loss and terrible misfortune from Polyphemos’s responding curse, Odysseus survives. He does this, but only with the knowledge that his selfish actions and cheating spirit threw his companions into the valley of death and within the skeletal hands of Hades. Odysseus’ sacrificial nature is a learned one, an omen to his willingness to change for the purpose of going home. He realized his own life is meaningless and the sole reason for his survival is his wife and son—the only two people he has not yet fought for.

Odysseus does fight. His life consists of a war so that his home can continue on into peacetime. His resistance to letting go of what is important harkens to his placement as a great leader, even hero. He is resourceful and clever and strong, but none of this matters in the face of a world that constantly lures in a weak resolve. Odysseus will always be the golden statue that could not be shaken from his place; a bloodied and beaten heart that could pound the very walls of Olympus with the unforgettable sound of an immortal life becoming a legend not even the gods could ignore.