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An Analysis of Odysseus, Epic Hero

Homer's *Odyssey* is an unrivaled tale of mythical legend, daring escapes, and heroic acts. There are many characters who perform these acts, but none shine more than the epic hero, Odysseus. Odysseus displays a cunning ability to survive through every trial, and in doing so, displays three important traits of an epic hero. The first of said attributes is courage. An epic hero must have ample and unfailing courage in every situation, and Odysseus certainly displays this. Upon landing on the island of the brutish and unforgiving Cyclopes, rather than wait and watch the island, Odysseus says, "I took my twelve best fighters and went ahead...in my bones I knew some towering brute would be upon us soon" (986). The fact that he pressed onward into the inevitable danger, shows that he is a man of no small amount of courage.

Courage alone, however, would not have been enough to get him through the massive voyage. Odysseus also exhibits great leadership capabilities. Not only did he orchestrate the great battles at Troy to win the war, he shows us that he is capable of making the difficult decisions required of a true leader. When he arrives at the fork in the road that is Scylla and Charybdis, Odysseus knows he must choose: lose 7 of his men to Scylla with the certainty of escape, or take a gamble with Charybdis, with big returns but the possibility of losing everyone. Electing to take the route by Scylla, Odysseus tells his men, who know nothing of the beast, "We must obey the orders as I give them...Zeus help us pull away before we founder" (1009). This is a prime example of his leadership at work, because, had he told his men of the dangers that lay ahead "they would have dropped their oars again, in panic, to roll for cover under the decking" (1009).

Odysseus reveals that he is able to face difficult decisions with the best interests of his men, and his kingdom in mind, an example of his great loyalty. Another example of this is when the ships arrive at the land of the Lotus-Eaters. Upon eating the fruit of the Lotus the men “longed to stay forever, browsing on that native bloom, forgetful of their homeland” (985). However, instead of cutting his losses, Odysseus remains loyal to his men, knowing that in their right minds, they wanted to return home, he “drove them, all three wailing, to the ships, tied them down under their rowing benches” (985). Odysseus extends loyalty not just to his men, but to his wife and family. During his 20 years voyage, he had many chances to give up, stay with the beautiful Circe, or Calypso, but he always remained loyal to his wife, eventually voyaging onward toward his home again. Upon arriving, disguised, he gives her further hope by telling her, “You see then, [Odysseus] is alive and well, and headed homeward now, no more to be abroad far from his island, his dear wife and son” (1033).

Odysseus’ journey was long and arduous, full of loss and bloodshed, trial and temptation, and yet, through all that, he was able to return home because of his courage and his leadership, driven by the love and loyalty for his home in his heart.

Bibliography:

Homer. “The Odyssey.” Ed. Pearson Prentice Hall, *Prentice Hall Literature* Gold ed. N.p.: Pearson, n.d. 981-1045. Print.