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Odysseus's Response to Calypso's Last Temptation in Book 5 of Homer's *Odyssey*

Although his rejection of her offer to remain with Calypso on Ogygia and avoid the pain and suffering of returning home may seem to position Odysseus as a virtuous, moral man, we actually learn from his speech that Odysseus is anything but a pillar of steadfastness and integrity. In fact, Odysseus's hypocritical actions and egotism show he has much to learn about humility and loyalty. Cruel and unsympathetic, Odysseus first belittles Penelope, the woman who, albeit unbeknownst to him, remained faithful throughout the many years of his absence, saying that, in terms of beauty, he "knows very well that Penelope...would pale beside [Calypso]" (5.216-7). Intending to show respect to the goddess, Odysseus's callous mockery of his wife's age and beauty shows he's blind to his unfavorable treatment of his wife, something he must later overcome in order to rebuild a relationship with her. To his credit, shortly thereafter, Odysseus expresses his sincere homesickness when he says that his "heart aches for the day [he] returns home" (5.220), what seems an authentic expression of longing and grief; there's, after all, a genuine quality in his articulation of the pain he feels, but there's also, to his discredit, insincerity in his reasoning for going home. For instance, by saying that he'll "weather [some god's storm] like the sea-bitten veteran" he is (5.222), Odysseus seems more to want to prove himself, to push beyond human capability, to set himself apart from others rather than truly desire to return home. For him the *glory* of returning home is a greater reward than home itself. This uber-macho, irresponsible, and arrogant desire seems more like that of a naïve

adolescent, thinking himself invincible, than of an epic's hero. And yet, as if that weren't enough, it's in Odysseus's hypocritical and disrespectful action immediately after his speech to go to a room "deep in the cave" and lay with Calypso "side by side through the night" (5.226-7) that really shows how dishonorable and false Homer's protagonist is at the beginning of the poem. Odysseus's rejection of Calypso's offer of protection and his denunciation of her beauty and appeal were just empty words, for he once again gives into temptation and is unfaithful to Penelope. Odysseus, hypocritical and naïve, hopes, as the old saying goes, to have it both ways—to *appear* as if he's honorable without having to act honorably. A real hero, we'll learn, rejects mere keeping-up-of-appearances and practices what he preaches with integrity.

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Work Cited

Homer, and Stanley Lombardo. *The Essential Odyssey*. Hackett Pub., 2007.