

## Odysseus vs. the Gods: Primary Source of Tension in *The Odyssey*

In Homer's *The Odyssey*, the primary source of tension arises due to the conflict between the gods' will and human actions. The reader comes to learn that Odysseus is fated to return home and to then defeat all of the suitors who had plagued his house during his twenty year absence. Thus, one would expect that despite all of the trials he has to face, the Ithacan ruler will come out victorious. The question, however, is how he will eventually do it, as he must face many testing trials before he returns home. The gods know the end result, but it is not clear if they realize how exactly everything will come to pass, especially since they often take it upon themselves to intervene. For instance, after Odysseus has lived with Calypso for a few years, Zeus sends Hermes to tell the immortal woman to let the hero go, and, in response, she says, "But it is not to be thought of--and no use--for any god to elude the will of Zeus" (484). Even immortal beings must obey the will of the Olympian gods, especially when regarding the fulfillment of a human's destiny. It is important to realize, however, that humans do seem to have some free will. Odysseus's men, for instance, did not have to kill Helios's cattle. They know that doing so would lead to their destruction, but they seal their own fates by choosing to ignore Odysseus's warning. Odysseus himself even admits he and his men were at conflict with the gods: "My return dragged out--my hard adventures, pitting myself against the gods' will" (753). By the end of the epic, however, the tension is resolved when the gods, specifically Athena, aligns with Odysseus to bring about the destruction of the suitors. Once the deed is done, the hero informs Eurycleia: "Destiny and the gods' will vanquished these [the suitors]" (740). At this point in the story, he recognizes that he, a mere mortal, cannot accomplish everything alone.

Only with the help of the almighty gods can Odysseus hope to achieve what mortals would deem the impossible.