

Odysseus the Boy Toy: Sexual Slavery in *Odyssey* 5

Odysseus is often viewed, like other heroes, as the epitome of masculinity. Indeed, the first word of the poem is *ἄνδρα*, and we would expect an exposition on virility. While some readers of the *Odyssey* view his promiscuity as a sign of his masculinity, citing his trysts with Circe and Calypso as evidence, recent scholarship, such as Beye (2012) and Holmberg (2013), has identified a darker side to his sexual escapades with Calypso: rather than occupying the traditional role of sexual conqueror, Odysseus is portrayed as Calypso's sexual servant. Modern scholarship has not explored this aspect of Odysseus' character in detail. Through a close examination of *Odyssey* 5 and later related evidence, the Calypso narrative emerges as an upsetting of the natural order. Odysseus is drained of all heroic vitality while he is on the island, lacking his characteristic will to slip away. By subtly comparing Odysseus to a woman in slavery, Homer shows the man at the lowest possible point a mortal can achieve, and then builds Odysseus back up to a heroic climax. The contrast highlights Odysseus' return to masculinity.

A comparison of another mortal-goddess coupling in the "Homeric Hymn 5: To Aphrodite," explores Anchises fear of being left *ἀμνηνός*, and how excess sexual intercourse could lead to enfeeblement or death (see Foucault 1990: 130–33). In a similar way in the *Odyssey*, those who are *ἀμνηνός* are dead (*Od.* 10.521, 536; 11.29, 49), and men could risk losing all of their *μένος* in a single coupling with a goddess. In Odysseus' relationship with Calypso, the hero is likewise being depleted. As such he loses his heroic nature and is "reduced to the barest common level of humanity" (Clarke 80, 87). This leads to the Homeric simile in Book 8, where Odysseus is compared to a woman who has just lost her husband on the battlefield at makes explicit the imagery of female slavery. By modern standards, Calypso is clearly raping Odysseus, compelling him (*ἀνάγκη*) to sleep with her (*Od.* 5.154; see Homberg

324–25). But even by ancient standards, where the concept of consent is not always developed, sex had a clear power dynamic, in which Odysseus is clearly in the inferior position (Foucault 215–16). His lack of male autonomy and activity reduces his heroic character, which provides contrast for his arrival on Scharia. Homer subsequently provides him with the means of reclaiming his masculinity and heroic nature through oratory and martial prowess, fulfilling the poetic promise of an *ἀνὴρ* from the proem.

Bibliography

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