The Odyssey of Homer: a study based on the fear of the unknown

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Abstract

The Homeric masterpieces are, undoubtedly, the pillars for all literature which has been produced in the West till now. Homer's epic poems are a source of culture, beliefs and scientific knowledge in a variety of fields. Therefore, this paper aims to analyse the Book XI of Odyssey concerning Odysseus on his way down the hill into Hades, Greek Hell. This process is named *katabasis*. The analysis is qualitative and matches to theoretical basis that reflect the Homeric construction of fear.

Key words:

Homeric poem, greek literature, fear of the unknown.

Introduction

This paper aims to point out the way that Homer constructs the feeling of fear in his Book XI of Odyssey. This part of the plot stands for Odysseus, the protagonist, his descent into Hades, the underground world, also known as the Greek representation of Hell, his sacrifice to the dead honour, and his discourses with the ghosts of the deceased heroes. He faces a lot of adventures and memories, talks to the dead and, then, realises he might get lost inside. The conversations made him aware of how life in Hades had no purpose at all and that kind of life was not worth it as in the living world. So that the feeling of fear ecloses stronger.

Results and Discussion

Based on characteristics of setting, plot and the construction of Homer's narrative, it was possible to figure out the concept of fear and how it was presented through some main characters. Basically, in the very beginning, the tone that appears in Book XI is made up of tragedy due to the process of *katabasis* and the discovery of the dangerous world of the dead (Nêkuia). The idea of going down, making sacrifice and carrying blood was driving Odysseus scared. Later, the dialogue between Odysseus and Achilles shows how death has been a process of dishonour in Hades, quite different from how it is seen outside, in the world of the living. Then, it can be drawn that death for the living means such a heroic act while in Hades it means losing everything and not being worth it anymore. That dialogue between Achilles and Odysseus is a great example of losing everything because Achilles says he'd rather work in such poor conditions, being a subordinate, than dominate the world of the dead. According to Boitani (2005), death in Homer's construction is a form of selfishness as it has no real goal and importance. Besides, the talk between Odysseus and his mother touched him deeply, as it made him cry and remember his past. That moment was also an evidence of his human weakness showing that death has no purpose at all. Eventually, surrounded by other spirits, he gets afraid of not leaving Hades. He faces the unglorious sense of not being worth it and also the fear of the unknown.

Conclusions

Finally, it has been possible to demonstrate that death in the Homeric poem is such a synonym of losing the heroic value, seen as an unworthy act. So, the fear of Odysseus may be understood on his way down the hill, moment in which he started to face the feelings of the underground and got scared of getting lost in Hades. Talking to the dead made him aware of the concept of worthless conquers, being life a matter of selfishness and an unknown purpose. That sensation was the fear of the unknown.

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