



Odysseus' Views on Death and Heroism through His Dialogue with the Ghost of Achilles

Ruize Qi^{1*}

¹Living World Shanghai, Shanghai, 201111, China

*Corresponding author. Email: 2338335452@qq.com

Abstract. Odysseus envied Achilles. When he was alive, all Achilles worshiped him as a God. Even in Hades, his spirit had the same status among the dead. And Achilles said, "I would rather be a slave to a poor master in the world than a king in the underworld". His ideas have changed dramatically, he is eager to live, even if there is no honor, he is not willing to die gloriously. The Odyssey offers a different view of heroism and death. Death in the Odyssey plays an important role in narrative and characterization, reflecting a more complex concept of heroism slightly different from that of the Iliad. Different from Achilles in the Iliad, Odysseus avoids death, returns to Ithaca, rebuilds the order of family and society, and then preserves his identity as a hero, which reflects his heroic view different from that of Iliad.

Keywords: Odysseus, Achilles, Views on Death, Views on Heroism, Odyssey

1 Introduction

Achilles and Odysseus are the most representative archetypes of heroes in ancient Greek mythology and Homer's epics based on it. They appear repeatedly in various specific images and faces in later generations, forming a traceable cultural heritage. The dialogue between Odysseus and the ghost of Achilles opens a window for us to see the hero's deep thinking about death and heroism. This dialogue touches on the common views of ancient Greek society on life and death, heroes and glory [1]. Odysseus, a legendary figure in ancient Greek mythology, is known for his wisdom, wit and indomitable spirit. When talking with the ghost of Achilles, we can feel his fear of death, his desire for heroic honor, and his deep thinking about the true meaning of life. In the Odyssey, the ghost of Achilles says to Odysseus, "I would rather be a nameless farmer on earth than a king in the underworld." This sentence reveals Achilles's unique view on the value of life. Even after death, he still longs to live, even if his status is humble. Odysseus was shocked when he heard Achilles' words. This is not only because the ghost of Achilles breaks the myth of heroic immortality, but also because this passage challenges Odysseus's own understanding of heroism. Based on the dialogue between Odysseus and the ghost of Achilles, this paper will focus on Odysseus' views of death (including his cognition of the

inevitability of death, his imagination of the world after death and his attitude towards death) and heroism (including heroes, wisdom and forbearance), as well as the enlightenment of his views of death and heroism to contemporary society.

2 Odysseus' Views on Death

2.1 The Inevitability of Death

Death is one of the eternal themes in literature and philosophy. In the ancient Greek epic *Odyssey*, a dialogue between Odysseus and the ghost of Achilles reveals Odysseus' profound knowledge of death. In this dialogue, Odysseus expresses his views on death as inevitable and the ultimate destination of all life. This concept not only embodies the common understanding of death in ancient Greek culture, but also reflects Odysseus's personal philosophical thinking about the meaning of life [2]. In the *Odyssey*, death is not only the end of life, but also the test of the hero's fate and the reflection of the value of life. Through the description of death, Homer shows the complex feelings and philosophical thinking of the ancient Greeks about death. Death runs through the book and is an important theme. But in the end, only Odysseus managed to return to Ithaca alive. All the others died on the way. In his dialogue with Achilles, Odysseus mentioned that even heroes such as Achilles could not escape the fate of death. He pointed out that even after glory and eternal fame, Achilles still longed to survive, which showed that even the greatest hero could not resist the desire for life. Death, according to Odysseus, is the common destination of all living things, regardless of their accomplishments during life. This understanding of the inevitability of death makes Odysseus cherish life more and face death more bravely when facing the challenges of life. Odysseus's view of death makes him more appreciative of every breath and every reunion with his family in the face of challenges. He knew that although the name of the hero may be passed down through the ages, life itself is short and limited. Therefore, while pursuing glory, he never forgets to enjoy every moment of life and express his love to the people around him.

2.2 Imagination of the World after Death

In ancient Greek culture, the world after death is often depicted as a dark, silent place, distinct from the world of the living. Odysseus' journey, however, offers a more complex and multidimensional perspective. In his description, the world after death is not only a place of stillness and forgetting, but also a field full of activities and emotions. The contrast between Achilles, a hero who enjoyed endless glory in his lifetime, and now a ghost who longs to return to the world, profoundly reveals Odysseus' profound understanding of the value of life. Odysseus' imagination of the world after death is full of reflections on the meaning of life. He realized that although heroes may have endless wealth and glory in life, they can't take it away after death [3]. In his dialogue with Achilles, Odysseus expresses his appreciation of life itself and his detachment from the world after death. He realized that the real value lies not in material possession, but in the experience of life and the emotional

connection between people. In addition, Odysseus' imagination of the world after death also reflects his philosophical thinking about death. In ancient Greece, death was often seen as a transition, not an end. Odysseus's journey seems to suggest that life is a cycle and that death is only one stage in the cycle. This concept made him feel both awe and quiet acceptance when facing death. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus's journey to the afterlife is not only a physical exploration, but also a spiritual exploration [4]. His experience has given him a deeper understanding of life and made his heroic image more three-dimensional and real.

2.3 Attitude Towards Death

In the *Odyssey*, the dialogue between Odysseus and the ghost of Achilles is a profound exploration of the nature of death. In this encounter, Odysseus shows his attitude towards death, which is complex and full of human brilliance. His attitude is not only a simple acceptance of death, but also a profound understanding and reassessment of the value of life. In the face of death, Odysseus shows a realistic and philosophical attitude. He realized that no matter how heroic and illustrious a person is when he is alive, death is the inevitable end for everyone. In his dialogue with Achilles, Odysseus expresses his sympathy for the hero, while revealing his deep understanding of the fragility of life. He realized that even the greatest hero could not escape the shadow of death [5]. However, Odysseus's attitude is not entirely negative. Instead of indulging in the fear of death, he chose to face it bravely. In his eyes, death is not the opposite of life, but a part of life. This attitude enables him to remain calm and firm in the face of difficulties and challenges. He knows that only by accepting the existence of death can he truly live out the value of life. This attitude of Odysseus is also reflected in his value of life. He understands that life is short, so he cherishes every moment of life more. In the narrative of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus constantly pursues the way home, which is not only the desire for family, but also the value of life itself. He is not willing to give up easily anywhere, because he knows that every persistence is an affirmation of life.

3 Odysseus' Views on Heroism

3.1 Courage

In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is portrayed as a brave and fearless hero, and this trait is vividly displayed in his adventure journey. In a conversation with the ghost of Achilles, we get a glimpse of Odysseus' deep understanding of valor and fearlessness, and how this spirit permeated his entire heroic career. In the heroic epics of ancient Greece, bravery and fearlessness are often regarded as the primary qualities of heroes. Odysseus, as the king of Ithaca, is fearless not only in his fearless charge on the battlefield, but also in his determination and bravery in the face of unknown and supernatural forces. His courage is not blind recklessness, but a deliberate choice, a perseverance that can find hope even in despair. In his dialogue with Achilles, Odysseus pays homage to the glory of the deceased hero, but he also expresses his

views on life [6]. Achilles was undoubtedly an invincible warrior on the battlefield in his lifetime, but his early death made Odysseus realize that even the greatest hero could not escape the fate of death. However, Odysseus did not feel depressed because of this. On the contrary, he cherished every moment of his life more and faced every challenge more bravely. Odysseus' valor is also reflected in his mastery of his destiny. In the narrative of the *Odyssey*, he constantly encounters various difficulties and temptations, but he never gives up his desire to go home. His persistence is not only a loyalty to his family, but also a proof of his courage. He knew that only through constant effort and struggle could he realize his desire, and that such courage and determination were the true marks of a hero.

3.2 Wisdom

Resourceful and eloquent, Homer's Odysseus is an important figure in moving the story forward. At the beginning of the story, he sees through the disguise of Achilles by stratagem and promotes his participation in the war. During the ten-year war, he dealt with Agamemnon and the generals, balancing the parties with eloquence and brilliant wisdom, and persuading them to make peace [7]. At the end of the war, he used the Trojan Horse to capture the impregnable Troy. He destroyed other people's homes with his wisdom and brought trouble to himself. He was punished by the gods for blasphemy and had a lot of trouble on his way home. He became a famous "suffering wise man" in the history of literature. Odysseus was such a wise man. His way back home was very dangerous, and he often encountered frightening demons and ghosts. The cruel Cyclops Polyphemus, the man-eating sea monster Scylla, and the sweet but deadly Siren are all dangers he has to face. On this difficult and dangerous way to return home, although there is encouragement and help from the gods, it is their own courage and wisdom that play a decisive role. When he described his escape from the storm disaster in the Alcinous Palace, he attributed his salvation entirely to his own efforts and downplayed the help of the gods. This is reasonable to some extent. When the goddess decided to send him away, he cleverly made a wide-body raft with a big axe. When Poseidon smashed the raft with a huge wave, he fought against the sea with perseverance. After floating on the sea for two days and two nights, he found a gentle bay shore and landed smoothly. Odysseus was not only calm and resourceful, but also resourceful. He is good at using prudence and strategy to help him make choices and realize his wishes. After escaping from danger, despite the good advice of his companions, he laughed at the giant loudly and bravely confessed that he was "Odysseus who attacked the city", demonstrating the unique spirit of human resistance and the brave and proud individual life consciousness.

3.3 Restraint

For Odysseus, the most beautiful thing in life is to regain the happiness that belongs to mortals, and this beauty requires him to strive for it with perseverance. Odysseus's journey back home is a process in which he overcomes difficulties with strong willpower and moves towards happiness. Homer praised his strong vitality and strong

and tolerant personality. Odysseus' endurance is mentioned thirty-seven times in the *Odyssey*. Odysseus and his companions destroyed the castle of Ismaros of the Kikones. The soldiers were carried away by the victory and fought freely. The Kikones brought reinforcements to fight fiercely with them. Finally, Odysseus, they were defeated. About six warriors died. Odysseus' companions were caught eating cheese on the island of the Cyclops, and the giant ate two of his companions, and the next morning he ate two of his companions, and the reason for his death was that he was too presumptuous to control himself and did not consider the reality. When Odysseus and his crew stopped on the island of Trinachia, despite Odysseus' advance warning not to touch the sacred cow, the crew, starving, disobeyed the warnings of Odysseus and Helios [8]. Helios interceded with Zeus, who granted his request. As the crew left the island, Zeus destroyed their ship with a thunderbolt. Most of the crew drowned. Only Odysseus survived. Their deaths were mainly due to their lack of self-control and discipline in violation of the prohibitions of the gods, and Odysseus's fleet was repeatedly subjected to bad weather under the wrath of the gods. Odysseus's rationality and self-restraint are the core elements of his final victory home, and this spiritual strength has brought Odysseus an admirable legendary career.

4 Enlightenment of the Views of Death and Heroism to the Contemporary Society

4.1 Reflections on the Value of Life

Odysseus' view of death reminds us of the fragility and finiteness of life. In modern society, we often ignore the impermanence of life because of the progress of science and technology and the development of medical treatment. However, the story of Odysseus tells us that no matter how hard we try, the end of life is inevitable. This realization is not to make us fall into pessimism, but to make us cherish every moment of life more, and to cherish the time spent with family and friends more. Odysseus's view of death makes us realize that life is short and fragile. His conversation with the ghost of Achilles reveals the truth that no matter how much wealth and glory a person has when he is alive, death is the ultimate equal [9]. This realization has led us to reassess our priorities in life, to stop focusing on material possessions as the only goal to pursue, and to start focusing on those things that can bring peace of mind and contentment, such as family, friendship, love, personal growth, and contribution to society. In modern society, we are often dominated by material pursuits, such as higher wages, bigger houses and better cars, but the material wealth cannot guarantee our happiness and satisfaction. The story of Odysseus reminds us that true happiness and contentment come from a deep understanding of life and a constant search for the value of life. The story of Odysseus encourages us to have a deep understanding of life. His wisdom and courage are not innate, but acquired through the experience of challenges and difficulties, through continuous learning and adaptation to life. In contemporary society, we should also pursue a deep

understanding of life and broaden our horizons and understanding through reading, traveling, communicating with people of different backgrounds and self-reflection.

4.2 Changes in the Definition of Hero

In ancient Greece, heroes were often associated with supernatural strength, valour in battle, and the lineage of the gods. Odysseus's view of heroism offers a different perspective. His heroic image is not defined by muscular strength, but by intelligence, tenacity, and moral courage. In his dialogue with the ghost of Achilles, Odysseus expresses a profound understanding of heroes, who are not only the victors on the battlefield, but also those who show courage and wisdom in life [10]. In contemporary society, our definition of heroes has shifted. Heroes in modern society are no longer limited to warriors or conquerors in the traditional sense, but are extended to those who show remarkable qualities in their daily lives. These heroes may be doctors, teachers, social activists, or even ordinary people around us, who show indomitable spirit and deep concern for others in the face of challenges and difficulties. Odysseus's view of heroes enlightens us that the definition of heroes should be more inclusive and pluralistic. Heroes are not only those who have made brilliant achievements on the public stage, but also those who have paid quietly behind the scenes and shown courage and wisdom in daily life. This shift in heroism reflects contemporary society's emphasis on personal value and social responsibility, as well as our respect for human spirit and moral courage. The growth of heroes is a process of continuous learning and adaptation. In the *Odyssey*, the wisdom and courage of Odysseus are not achieved overnight, but gradually accumulated and honed through constant challenges and difficulties. This shift in heroism encourages us to continue to learn, grow, and transcend ourselves in the face of life's challenges.

4.3 Absorption of Spiritual Strength

Odysseus's view of heroism emphasizes the importance of spiritual strength. In his dialogue with Achilles, Odysseus shows his wisdom and courage, qualities that are the key to his success against all odds. In contemporary society, we are faced with various challenges, ranging from the plight of individual lives to global issues such as climate change and social injustice. Odysseus's story reminds us that in the face of these challenges, we need not only materially resources, but also spiritual strength—including perseverance, innovative thinking and compassion. Odysseus's view of death makes us realize the shortness of life, which urges us to value every moment of life more and draw spiritual strength from it. In modern society, we often neglect the deep experience and perception of life because of our busy life. The story of Odysseus encourages us to slow down and think deeply about the meaning of life, so that we can find strength and inspiration in our daily life. Odysseus' heroic journey is also a process of spiritual growth. His journey is full of unknowns and dangers, but he becomes a true hero through constant learning and adaptation. In contemporary society, we should also view life as an opportunity for spiritual growth, whether through learning new knowledge, overcoming personal weaknesses, or helping others

and participating in social activities. Through these experiences, we can develop stronger spiritual strength. Odysseus's view of death and heroism provides us with rich enlightenment on the absorption of spiritual power. They encourage us to rely not only on material resources, but also on spiritual strength when facing life's challenges. Through continuous learning, growth and reflection, we can find strength and direction in contemporary society and live a richer and more meaningful life.

5 Conclusions

In the *Odyssey*, the dialogue between Odysseus and the ghost of Achilles is not only a profound exploration of heroes and death, but also a profound reflection on the meaning of life. Through the analysis of this dialogue, we can gain insight into Odysseus's deep understanding of the inevitability of death, the imagination of the world after death and the attitude towards death. At the same time, we also see Odysseus's view of heroism, including his emphasis on bravery, wisdom and forbearance. Odysseus's views of death and heroism provide us with a profound insight into the meaning of life and a modern understanding of heroism. They encourage us to live a richer and more meaningful life in the face of life's challenges, relying not only on material resources, but also on spiritual strength.

References

1. Rees W. Home or Away: Homecoming, Glory, and the Good Death in Homer's *Odyssey*[J]. *CounterText*, 2020, 6(1): 102-115.
2. Roberts B G, Toliver C. Defining Divinity by Death and Demise: The Homeric Hierarchy of Divine, Humane, and Dead in the *Odyssey*[J]. 2021.
3. Ziogas I. Life and Death of the Greek Heroine in *Odyssey* 11 and the Hesiodic Catalogue of Women[J]. *Aspects of Death and the Afterlife in Greek Literature*, 2021: 49.
4. Kalamara Z. Odysseus in Aeschylean Drama: Revisiting the Fragments[J]. *CHS Research Bulletin*, 2020, 8: 1-27.
5. Panos C M. The Dangers of Deceit: An Analysis of Odysseus' Lie to Laertes in the *Odyssey* Book 24[J]. *Studies in Mediterranean Antiquity and Classics*, 2023, 7(1): 4.
6. Zieliński K. Odysseus–Trickster and the Issue of the Compatibility of the Image of the Hero with Its Function in the Traditions of the Oral Epic[J]. *Studia Religiológica. Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego*, 2020, 53(3): 181-202.
7. Pratt K E. Monster and hero? Rethinking polyphemos and odysseus in homer's *odyssey*[J]. *Limina: A Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies*, 2023, 28(2): 31-42.
8. Kojoian M E. *Novus Heros: A Narratological Study of Aeneas' Apologoi in Light of Homer's Odyssey*[D]. Tufts University, 2024.
9. Parwaiz A. Odysseus Reborn: Parallelism between Odysseus and The Postmodern Man[J]. *SMART MOVES JOURNAL IJELLH*, 2020, 8(12): 21-40.
10. Hobden F. Travels with Odysseus and the *Odyssey* in Twenty-First-Century Television Documentaries[J]. *Ancient Epic in Film and Television*, 2021: 135-51.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

