Olivia Ernst

Mrs. Tran

English 1H

20 April 2015

Not All Kings Are Heroes

It can be sometimes difficult to distinguish characteristics that make a true hero. In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus is the king of Ithaca and serves in the Trojan War for ten years and also has to endure an additional ten years of finding a way home. Oedipus is the king of Thebes that saved the city from the evil Sphinx but later becomes the reason for the blight on the city because he fulfilled the oracle of killing his father and marrying his mother. Oedipus and Odysseus both somewhat show heroic traits through a 21st century perspective, but do not embody true heroes. A true hero must be cunning, courageous, humble, and a good leader.

To better understand this position, Odysseus does not fit the definition of a hero because he is cowardly and arrogant, but also he displays the heroic traits of being cunning and a good leader. In the epic poem *The Odyssey*, the text states, “But [Hermes] saw nothing of the great Odysseus, who sat apart, as a thousand times before, and racked his own heart groaning, with eyes wet scanning the bare horizon of the sea [...] in his stone seat to seaward- tear on tear brimming his eyes.” (Homer 71-78). In this example, the readers learn that Odysseus is cowardly because he starts crying of homesickness. Crying of homesickness can be seen as cowardly because he is afraid of not returning home and the dangers that await him on the journey. A conclusion that can be drawn is that Odysseus does not fit the definition of a hero because he is cowardly, and not courageous. Odysseus says, “Cyclops, if ever mortal man inquire how you were put to shame and blinded, tell him Odysseus, raider of cities, took your eye: Laertes’ son, whose home’s on Ithaca!” (Homer 502-505). By taking a look at this example, readers learn that Oedipus is prideful to the extent that he will jeopardize his crew’s safety to take credit for something he did. The evidence suggests that Oedipus is arrogant and has hubris, which means that he does not fit the definition of a hero. In ancient Greek society, hubris was seen as admirable but in a modern perspective, it is heroic to be humble because it shows selflessness and concern for others. One more piece of evidence is when the text states, “But I kept thinking how to win the game: death sat there huge; how could we slip away? I drew on all my wits, and ran through tactics, reasoning as a man will for dear life [...] three abreast I tied them silently together, twining cords of willow from the ogre’s bed; then slung a man under each middle one to ride there safely, shielded left and right. So three sheep could convey each man.” (Homer 416-427). This shows how Odysseus figuring out a way to escape from the cyclops without killing him and without getting captured. It is important to note this because it shows that Odysseus is cunning. Odysseus states, “Friends, have we never been in danger before this? More fearsome, is it now, than when the Cyclops penned us in his cave? What power we had! Did I not keep my nerve, and use my wits to find a way out for us?” (Homer 773-777). This piece of text shows the readers how Odysseus is a good leader because he cheered up his crew when sailing towards the sea monsters Scylla and Charybdis. By looking at this text, the evidence shows that Odysseus is a true hero because he can be a strong leader. However, Odysseus is barely a hero because he is not humble or courageous. Even though he has some heroic traits, he does not have all of them and therefore is not a leader.

In the tragedy *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus shows that he is not a hero because he is arrogant, cowardly, and not a good leader, but he shows the heroic trait of being cunning. In the text, Oedipus states, “I will not serve a distant friend’s advantage, but act in my own interest.” (Grene 167-168). By looking at this, readers can learn that Oedipus is arrogant and has hubris because he is only interested in helping himself and not others. It can be assumed that Oedipus is not a true hero because he is arrogant, while a true hero should be humble because it shows concern for others. In another piece of the tragedy, Oedipus states, “I pity you, children. You have come full of longing, but I have known the story before you told it only too well. I know you are sick, yet there is not one of you, sick though you are, that is as sick as myself.” (Grene 66-70). This shows that Oedipus is not a good leader because he talks down to his people as king and is condescending to them. As a result, Oedipus does not fit the definition of a hero because he is not a good leader, and a true hero should be a good leader because it shows that they can be organized, convincing, and protect their people. In addition, Oedipus says, “I do not know with what eyes I could look upon my father when I die and go under the earth, nor yet my wretched mother.” (Grene 1549-1551). By examining this piece of information, readers learn that Oedipus does not want to face his parents in the underworld after he fulfilled his fate. It becomes evident that Oedipus is cowardly, so he does not fit the definition of a hero because heroes are expected to be courageous. Courage is vital to being a true hero because they must be willing to perform a task that others may not want to do in the time of crisis. One last piece of evidence is when the priest says to Oedipus, “You came and by your coming saved our city, freed us from the tribute which we paid of old to the Sphinx, cruel singer.” (Grene 39-41). Readers learn from this example that Oedipus saved the city of Thebes, which required cunning to be able to answer the riddle of the Sphinx. A conclusion that can be drawn is that Oedipus fits the definition of a hero because he is cunning, which is a trait of a true hero. By looking at all the evidence as a whole, Oedipus is not a hero because he is not brave, humble, or a good leader, but he shows the single heroic trait of being cunning.

Oedipus and Odysseus are both somewhat of heroes in the lens of a modern American. Odysseus shows that he is not a hero because he is not humble or courageous, instead he is arrogant and cowardly. However, Odysseus demonstrated some heroic traits, including being cunning and a good leader. Oedipus does not fit the definition of a hero because he does not show the traits of humble, courageous, and a good leader. On the other hand, Oedipus shows the single heroic trait of being cunning. Courageousness is an important trait because it shows that they are willing to perform a daunting or difficult task in a time of crisis. Humbleness is a critical trait because it shows concern for others and selflessness. Cunningness is key to being a true hero because it shows they are knowledgeable and able to get out of sticky situations. A hero must also be a good leader because they need to be able to protect their people in the best way possible, be able to convince them to do what they should, and be organized. Considering all the traits, Oedipus and Odysseus are both not considered a true hero because they must have all the traits. A true hero is someone who is a combination of courageous, humble, cunning, and a strong leader.