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CLAS 220

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Written Assignment

The Coen brother’s movie “O Brother, Where Art Thou”, is a modern day adaptation of the Homeric epic “The Odyssey”. It mirrors, for the most part, major sections of “The Odyssey” and Odysseus’s journey home to Ithaca. The character “Ulysses Everett Mcgill” as portrayed by George Clooney, is a direct mirror for Odysseus. His two companions, Pete Hogwallop and Delmar O’Donnel, are meant to represent Odysseus’s idiotic men. The point of the film and the story of the Odyssey both deal with nostos, or homecoming.

In the poem, Odysseus’s long journey back to Ithaca, and the many adventures that he has, are his *nostos*. In the film, McGill’s *nostos* is his journey back to his wife before she remarries. He convinces the men closest to him in his chain gang to escape so that they can recover a “great treasure” that he has buried. McGill’s lie to his men is a parallel to the famed cunning of Odysseus. The actual reason that McGill wants to return home is that she has divorced him, and is seeking to marry another suitor. This mirrors somewhat the Odyssey’s Penelope, and her situation with the many suitors who are living on Ithaca with her. Penelope, however, remained faithful to Odysseus. Perhaps Penelope never had Odysseus’s cunning used on her the way McGill has used his on Penny.

The journey that the characters undertake in the movie is very similar to the adventures of Odysseus in the poem. Just to name a few:

-McGill’s escape from jail corresponds to Odysseus’s escape from Calpyso’s island.

-The washing women who seduce Mcgill and his men directly relate to the sirens who attempt to derail Odysseus.

- Big Dan the bible salesmen directly corresponds to Polyphemus the Cyclops.

- Penny’s suitor, Vernon T. Waldrip, directly corresponds to the suitors who are attempting to marry Penelope.

“O Brother, Where Art Thou” is a movie set in the Great Depression. The changes made to the journey of Odysseus to take place in McGill’s late 1930s, stay true to the source while updating the story to relate more to a more modern world. The adaptation of the characters into believable versions of themselves set in the 1930’s makes the movie resonate with a more modern audience.

The movie is classified as an “adventure film”, and as such, we the audience expect some form of a hero’s journey. The journey of a hero in a modern sense certainly bears striking resemblances to the tradition set forth in Homeric epic, and the journey of Odysseus is certainly well represented in “O Brother, Where Art Thou”.

