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The Psychological Ruination of Odysseus' Crew

When the crew of Odysseus disobey his admonishment not to kill any of the cattle residing on the island of Hyperion the Sun, Odysseus' ultimate authority over his crew, as well as the contentment of the Gods, is brought to unrest, and the psychological well being of the crew is progressively destroyed. After depleting the food provided by the immortal goddess Circe, the crew finds itself forced to roam the island and scourge for any measly game and vegetation they could find for sustenance. This plight is the primary begetter of social unrest within the crew, as the men ultimately agree to defy their leader Odysseus and kill the cattle on the island for food. Based on Eurylochus' anguished claim during this episode, the psychological well being of the crew can be taken into question: "I would rather gulp down seawater and die once and for all than waste away slowly on a desert island" (Homer 188). This attitude serves as a sharp contrast to the attitude of the crew before running out of food. Odysseus had warned them of the dangers of killing the cattle, and they took heed: "They didn't touch the cattle--life was still worth living" (187). Following countless confrontations with deadly creatures and witnessing the gruesome death of nearly all of their comrades, the crew's morale has reached an unprecedented low. The lack of morale and sense of purpose among them is ultimately what drives them to a state of psychological tumult and desire for death. This sense

of disregard for their own life also reveals an bestial quality of the crew that has been brought about by finding themselves in animal-like situations, that is, without a steady source of food, and with death being commonplace. The actions of the crew harm not only themselves but also the familial unity within the group, with Odysseus being the primary figure they dismember themselves from. Odysseus is a patriarchal figure for his crew, and the crew acting against his orders harms the tie they have to him, with Odysseus' anguish being evident: "You lulled me to sleep... While my men committed this monstrous crime!" (189). Odysseus' distress at the actions of his men are reflected in his anger towards the Gods, as he attempts to blame them for his men's actions because Zeus lulled him to sleep. The actions of his crew work to heighten the heroic nature of Odysseus because of his omniscient nature in comparison with his crew. Odysseus was aware of the perils of the Sun island based on accounts from the Circe herself: "And Circe's too, who gave me strict warnings to shun the island of the warmth-giving Sun" (186). This affiliation with the Gods suggests a godlike nature for himself. In that sense, he is the God watching over his crew and they are the people of Earth committing sins which they eventually pay the price for. While they may have started off as a steadfast and trustworthy group, the psychological collapse of Odysseus' crew eventually led to their downfall and untimely deaths.

Works Cited

Homer. *The Odyssey*. Trans. Stanley Lombardo. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.,
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