



Greek Heroes in Popular Culture Through Time

Odysseus

VOICEOVER:

Welcome to Greek heroes where we look at how the heroes of Greek literature have been represented in popular culture through time.

Tonight's special guest is Odysseus...

ODYSSEUS:

I'd like to think I'm remembered as the original globetrotting hero, I suppose. It all began what - 3000 years ago? - the 8th Century BC with that blind old goat Homer - showing my age there! First there was the Iliad where he had me down as handsome, brave, wise yes, can't argue with that! And then he made muggins here the star of the sequel - The Odyssey - name in the title, you see! But it's the journey people tend to remember - fighting monsters, witches and the odd anthropomorphized weather feature. But, I think I must have come across as a bit of a blank canvas Billy. And ever since people have made what they like out of me - to suit whatever story it is they want to tell. The Romans took sides with Troy - and just saw the worst in me. Because I was a wise old bird... Virgil twisted it to make me crafty and deceitful. And on top of that - they changed my name to Ulysses -Italians eh! If that wasn't bad enough, Ovid got his hands on me and turned me into a notorious womaniser! Honestly dear - I don't know where he could have got that idea from... Now Alfred Lord Tennyson - yes that's what I call a beard. Wrote a marvellous poem about me called Ulysses. This is that naughty old hound Johnny Gielgud really getting to grips with me - Look at the eyes - I might look an old duffer - but you know I'm dying to get back out there on the high seas.

JOHN GIELGUD

"and though we are not now that strength which in the old days
Moved earth and heaven"

ODYSSEUS:

Tenners must have been feeling his age - re-invented me as an old soldier with itchy feet, back at home, bored with the wife I mean, oh you know, not 'bored with the wife'. Oh well you understand. The 20th century rolled around with a new world of technology. Suddenly I was a movie star! George Melies was an absolute whizz with the special effects. And what better way to use them, than my tales of angry gods and six-headed monsters. Though I don't really remember fighting a gigantic head in a cave....?

Oh god - do we have to talk about James Joyce? Took away any sense of the epic - had me wandering around Dublin all day looking for a cheese sandwich. I suppose after the War, Europeans weren't so giddy about foreign travel. More interested in a journey of the soul. And why not? But would it have killed him to throw in the odd sword fight? Kirk Douglas! - that's more like it! Sword and sandals films they called them. All the rage. By the 50s America was ready to take over the world - they wanted proper, old-fashioned heroes. I was a star again! Since then I've become a bit of a staple in Hollywood. Odysseys you see. They love to gab on about heroes and journeys over there. The Coen Brothers had a bit of fun with my story in *O Brother Where Art Thou*. They gave my name to some con artist escaping from a chain gang. Don't know if they actually read the *Odyssey*. But I think they were searching for something mythical in America's past - and my story gave it that gloss. Great sense of irony those chaps. Instead of the Cyclops and the Sirens, he comes up against a one-eyed salesman and a group of saucy washerwomen. Those Sirens really were something! Not much irony in 'Troy'. I don't know why they felt the need to do the Iliad - but another chance to wheel out the special effects I suppose. Sean Bean might be a little gruffer than me - and a lot more Northern - but this is something of a return to the source. At least they show the Trojan Horse was my idea. None of Virgil's craftiness here - just good old-fashioned strategy.

Troy Soldier:

"You've found a way for the sheep to invite the wolves to dinner"

ODYSSEUS:

It's just a shame that they only focussed on The Iliad - just imagine what they could do to The Odyssey with a big budget like that...Oh yes, I can almost see those Sirens now...