

from the Odyssey

Homer

translated by Robert Fitzgerald

Part 2 The Return of Odysseus



BACKGROUND

The Greek concept of hospitality, *xenia*, was very important in Greek culture and plays a role in Odysseus' tale. Some scholars believe that this value is based on Greek religious belief. Since the Greek gods could take multiple earthly forms, there was always the possibility that the stranger at the door was a god in disguise. Thus, Greeks opened their homes to strangers. In Part 2, as Odysseus returns home, it is clear that this cultural practice has created some problems.

SCAN FOR
MULTIMEDIA



"Twenty years gone, and I am back again . . ."

Odysseus has finished telling his story to the Phaeacians. The next day, young Phaeacian noblemen conduct him home by ship. He arrives in Ithaca after an absence of twenty years. The goddess Athena appears and informs him of the situation at home. Numerous suitors, believing Odysseus to be dead, have been continually seeking the hand of his wife, Penelope, in marriage, while overrunning Odysseus' palace and enjoying themselves at Penelope's expense. Moreover, they are plotting to

NOTES

NOTES

1. **Eumaeus** (yoo MEE uhs)

craft (kraft) *n.* activity that requires skill

dissemble (dih SEHM buhl) *v.* put on an appearance or disguise

CLOSE READ

ANNOTATE: Mark the indications of a direct quotation in lines 1004–1015.

QUESTION: Why does Homer choose to provide Athena's direct words in this passage rather than summarize her speech to Odysseus?

CONCLUDE: What does this speech suggest about the relationship between gods and mortals, especially Odysseus?

2. **oblation** (ob LAY shuhn) *n.* offering to a god.

murder Odysseus' son, Telemachus, before he can inherit his father's lands. Telemachus, who, like Penelope, still hopes for his father's return, has journeyed to Pylos and Sparta to learn what he can about his father's fate. Athena disguises Odysseus as a beggar and directs him to the hut of Eumaeus,¹ his old and faithful swineherd. While Odysseus and Eumaeus are eating breakfast, Telemachus arrives. Athena then appears to Odysseus.

... From the air
she walked, taking the form of a tall woman,
handsome and clever at her **craft**, and stood
1000 beyond the gate in plain sight of Odysseus,
unseen, though, by Telemachus, unguessed,
for not to everyone will gods appear.
Odysseus noticed her; so did the dogs,
who cowered whimpering away from her. She only
1005 nodded, signing to him with her brows,
a sign he recognized. Crossing the yard,
he passed out through the gate in the stockade
to face the goddess. There she said to him:
"Son of Laertes and the gods of old,
1010 Odysseus, master of landways and seaways,
dissemble to your son no longer now.
The time has come: tell him how you together
will bring doom on the suitors in the town.
I shall not be far distant then, for I
1015 myself desire battle."

Saying no more,
she tipped her golden wand upon the man,
making his cloak pure white, and the knit tunic
fresh around him. Lithe and young she made him,
ruddy with sun, his jawline clean, the beard
1020 no longer gray upon his chin. And she
withdrew when she had done.

Then Lord Odysseus
reappeared—and his son was thunderstruck.
Fear in his eyes, he looked down and away
As though it were a god, and whispered:

"Stranger,
1025 you are no longer what you were just now!
Your cloak is new; even your skin! You are
one of the gods who rule the sweep of heaven!
Be kind to us, we'll make you fair oblation²
and gifts of hammered gold. Have mercy on us!"

1030 The noble and enduring man replied:

“No god. Why take me for a god? No, no.
I am that father whom your boyhood lacked
and suffered pain for lack of. I am he.”

Held back too long, the tears ran down his cheeks
1035 as he embraced his son.

Only Telemachus,
uncomprehending, wild
with **incredulity** cried out:

“You cannot
be my father Odysseus! Meddling spirits
conceived this trick to twist the knife in me!
1040 No man of woman born could work these wonders
by his own craft, unless a god came into it
with ease to turn him young or old at will.
I swear you were in rags and old,
and here you stand like one of the immortals!”

1045 Odysseus brought his ranging mind to bear
and said:

“This is not princely, to be swept
away by wonder at your father’s presence.
No other Odysseus will ever come,
for he and I are one, the same; his bitter
1050 fortune and his wanderings are mine.
Twenty years gone, and I am back again
on my own island.

As for my change of skin,
that is a charm Athena, Hope of Soldiers,
uses as she will; she has the knack
1055 to make me seem a beggar man sometimes
and sometimes young, with finer clothes about me.
It is no hard things for the gods of heaven
to glorify a man or bring him low.”

When he had spoken, down he sat.

Then, throwing
1060 his arms around this marvel of a father
Telemachus began to weep. Salt tears
rose from the wells of longing in both men,
and cries burst from both as keen and fluttering
as those of the great taloned hawk,
1065 whose nestlings farmers take before they fly.
So helplessly they cried, pouring out tears,
and might have gone on weeping so till sundown,
had not Telemachus said:

NOTES

incredulity (ihn kruh DYOO
luh tee) *n.* doubt

CLOSE READ

ANNOTATE: In lines 1048–
1050, mark words relating
to the concept of identity.

QUESTION: Why do you
think Homer places such
emphasis on the idea of
identity?

CONCLUDE: How do
these words emphasize
Odysseus’ message to his
son?

3. **cutter** *n.* small, swift ship or boat carried aboard a large ship to transport personnel or supplies.

4. **in their prime** in the best or most vigorous stage of their lives.

“Dear father! Tell me

what kind of vessel put you here ashore
1070 on Ithaca? Your sailors, who were they?
I doubt you made it, walking on the sea!”

Then said Odysseus, who had borne the barren sea:

“Only plain truth shall I tell you, child.
Great seafarers, the Phaeacians, gave me passage
1075 as they give other wanderers. By night
over the open ocean, while I slept,
they brought me in their cutter,³ set me down
on Ithaca, with gifts of bronze and gold
and stores of woven things. By the gods’ will
1080 these lie all hidden in a cave. I came
to this wild place, directed by Athena,
so that we might lay plans to kill our enemies.
Count up the suitors for me, let me know
what men at arms are there, how many men.
1085 I must put all my mind to it, to see
if we two by ourselves can take them on
or if we should look round for help.”

Telemachus

replied:

“O father, all my life your fame
as a fighting man has echoed in my ears—
1090 your skill with weapons and the tricks of war—
but what you speak of is a staggering thing,
beyond imagining, for me. How can two men
do battle with a houseful in their prime?⁴
For I must tell you this is no affair
1095 of ten or even twice ten men, but scores,
throngs of them. You shall see, here and now.
The number from Dulichium alone
is fifty-two picked men, with armorers,
a half dozen; twenty-four came from Same,
1100 twenty from Zacynthus; our own island
accounts for twelve, high-ranked, and their retainers,
Medon the crier, and the Master Harper,
besides a pair of handymen at feasts.
If we go in against all these
1105 I fear we pay in salt blood for your vengeance.
You must think hard if you would conjure up
the fighting strength to take us through.”

Odysseus

who had endured the long war and the sea
answered:

"I'll tell you now.

- 1110 Suppose Athena's arm is over us, and Zeus
her father's, must I rack my brains for more?"

Clearheaded Telemachus looked hard and said:

- "Those two are great defenders, no one doubts it,
but throned in the serene clouds overhead;
1115 other affairs of men and gods they have
to rule over."

And the hero answered:

- "Before long they will stand to right and left of us
in combat, in the shouting, when the test comes—
our nerve against the suitors' in my hall.
1120 Here is your part: at break of day tomorrow
home with you, go mingle with our princes.
The swineherd later on will take me down
the port-side trail—a beggar, by my looks,
hangdog and old. If they make fun of me
1125 in my own courtyard, let your ribs cage up
your springing heart, no matter what I suffer,
no matter if they pull me by the heels
or practice shots at me, to drive me out.
Look on, hold down your anger. You may even
1130 plead with them, by heaven! in gentle terms
to quit their horseplay—not that they will heed you,
rash as they are, facing their day of wrath.
Now fix the next step in your mind.

Athena,

- counseling me, will give me word, and I
1135 shall signal to you, nodding: at that point
round up all armor, lances, gear of war
left in our hall, and stow the lot away
back in the vaulted storeroom. When the suitors
miss those arms and question you, be soft
1140 in what you say: answer:

- 'I thought I'd move them
out of the smoke. They seemed no longer those
bright arms Odysseus left us years ago
when he went off to Troy. Here where the fire's
hot breath came, they had grown black and drear.
1145 One better reason, too, I had from Zeus:
suppose a brawl starts up when you are drunk,

NOTES

CLOSE READ

ANNOTATE: In lines 1120–1132, mark the words Odysseus uses to tell his son what he should do if the suitors abuse Odysseus.

QUESTION: What do these words suggest about Telemachus' emotions?

CONCLUDE: How do these words express Odysseus' sense of his son's love for him?

bemusing (bih MYOOZ ihng)
adj. confusing;
bewildering

5. shirkers (SHURK uhrz) *n.*
people who get out of
doing what needs to
be done.

you might be crazed and bloody one another,
and that would stain your feast, your courtship.

Tempered
iron can magnetize a man.'

Say that.

1150 But put aside two broadswords and two spears
for our own use, two oxhide shields nearby
when we go into action. Pallas Athena
and Zeus All-Provident will see you through,
bemusing our young friends.

Now one thing more.

1155 If son of mine you are and blood of mine,
let no one hear Odysseus is about.
Neither Laertes, nor the swineherd here,
nor any slave, nor even Penelope.

But you and I alone must learn how far
1160 the women are corrupted; we should know
how to locate good men among our hands
the loyal and respectful, and the shirkers⁵
who take you lightly, as alone and young."

Argus

*Odysseus heads for town with Eumaeus. Outside the palace,
Odysseus's old dog, Argus, is lying at rest as his long-absent master
approaches.*

While he spoke

an old hound, lying near, pricked up his ears
1165 and lifted up his muzzle. This was Argus,
trained as a puppy by Odysseus,
but never taken on a hunt before
his master sailed for Troy. The young men, afterward,
hunted wild goats with him, and hare, and deer,
1170 but he had grown old in his master's absence.
Treated as rubbish now, he lay at last
upon a mass of dung before the gates—
manure of mules and cows, piled there until
fieldhands could spread it on the king's estate.
1175 Abandoned there, and half destroyed with flies,
old Argus lay.

But when he knew he heard
Odysseus's voice nearby, he did his best

to wag his tail, nose down, with flattened ears,
having no strength to move nearer his master.

1180 And the man looked away,
wiping a salt tear from his cheek; but he
hid this from Eumaeus. Then he said:

“I marvel that they leave this hound to lie
here on the dung pile;

1185 he would have been a fine dog, from the look of him,
though I can’t say as to his power and speed
when he was young. You find the same good build
in house dogs, table dogs landowners keep
all for style.”

And you replied, Eumaeus:

1190 “A hunter owned him—but the man is dead
in some far place. If this old hound could show
the form he had when Lord Odysseus left him,
going to Troy, you’d see him swift and strong.
He never shrank from any savage thing
1195 he’d brought to bay in the deep woods; on the scent
no other dog kept up with him. Now misery
has him in leash. His owner died abroad,
and here the women slaves will take no care of him.
You know how servants are: without a master
1200 they have no will to labor, or excel.
For Zeus who views the wide world takes away
half the manhood of a man, that day
he goes into captivity and slavery.”

Eumaeus crossed the court and went straight forward
1205 into the megaron⁶ among the suitors:
but death and darkness in that instant closed
the eyes of Argus, who had seen his master,
Odysseus, after twenty years.

NOTES

CLOSE READ

ANNOTATE: In lines 1185–1196, mark adjectives and nouns Odysseus and Eumaeus use to describe the dog as he once was.

QUESTION: What do these words have in common?

CONCLUDE: How do they emphasize the sadness of the dog now?

6. megaron (MEHG uh ron) *n.* great, central hall of the house, usually containing a center hearth.

Penelope, Odysseus' wife, in her home overrun with suitors.



The Suitors

Still disguised as a beggar, Odysseus enters his home. He is confronted by the haughty⁷ suitor Antinous.⁸

But here Antinous broke in, shouting:

“God!

1210 What evil wind blew in this pest?

Get over,

stand in the passage! Nudge my table, will you?
Egyptian whips are sweet
to what you’ll come to here, you nosing rat,
making your pitch to everyone!

1215 These men have bread to throw away on you
because it is not theirs. Who cares? Who spares
another’s food, when he has more than plenty?”

With guile Odysseus drew away, then said:

“A pity that you have more looks than heart.

1220 You’d grudge a pinch of salt from your own larder
to your own handyman. You sit here, fat
on others’ meat, and cannot bring yourself
to rummage out a crust of bread for me!”

Then anger made Antinous’ heart beat hard,

1225 and, glowering under his brows, he answered:

“Now!

You think you’ll shuffle off and get away
after that impudence?⁹ Oh, no you don’t!”

The stool he let fly hit the man’s right shoulder
on the packed muscle under the shoulder blade—

1230 like solid rock, for all the effect one saw.
Odysseus only shook his head, containing
thoughts of bloody work, as he walked on,
then sat, and dropped his loaded bag again
upon the door sill. Facing the whole crowd

1235 he said, and eyed them all:

“One word only,

my lords, and suitors of the famous queen.

One thing I have to say.

There is no pain, no burden for the heart
when blows come to a man, and he defending

1240 his own cattle—his own cows and lambs.

NOTES

7. haughty (HAWT ee) *adj.*
arrogant.

8. Antinous (an TIHN
oh uhs)

9. impudence (IHM pyoo
duhns) *n.* quality of
being shamelessly bold;
disrespectfulness

NOTES

10. Furies (FYUR eez) *n.*
three terrible female
spirits who punish the
doers of unavenged
crimes.

guise (gyz) *n.* outward
appearance

CLOSE READ

ANNOTATE: In lines
1261–1270, mark the
noun that appears three
times. Then, mark its
synonym, which appears
twice.

QUESTION: What does this
repetition emphasize?

CONCLUDE: How does
deliberate use of repetition
help reveal the feelings of
Odysseus' son and wife?

11. Eurynome (yoo RIHN
uhm ee)

Here it was otherwise. Antinous
hit me for being driven on by hunger—
how many bitter seas men cross for hunger!
If beggars interest the gods, if there are Furies¹⁰
1245 pent in the dark to avenge a poor man's wrong, then may
Antinous meet his death before his wedding day!"
Then said Eupeithes's son, Antinous:
"Enough.
Eat and be quiet where you are, or shamle elsewhere,
unless you want these lads to stop your mouth
1250 pulling you by the heels, or hands and feet,
over the whole floor, till your back is peeled!"

But now the rest were mortified, and someone
spoke from the crowd of young bucks to rebuke him:

"A poor show, that—hitting this famished tramp—
1255 bad business, if he happened to be a god.
You know they go in foreign **guise**, the gods do,
looking like strangers, turning up
in towns and settlements to keep an eye
on manners, good or bad."

But at this notion
1260 Antinous only shrugged.
Telemachus,
after the blow his father bore, sat still
without a tear, though his heart felt the blow.
Slowly he shook his head from side to side,
containing murderous thoughts.
Penelope
1265 on the higher level of her room had heard
the blow, and knew who gave it. Now she murmured:

"Would god you could be hit yourself, Antinous—
hit by Apollo's bowshot!"

And Eurynome¹¹
her housekeeper, put in:

"He and no other?"
1270 If all we pray for came to pass, not one
would live till dawn!"

Her gentle mistress said:

"Oh, Nan, they are a bad lot; they intend
ruin for all of us; but Antinous

appears a blacker-hearted hound than any.

1275 Here is a poor man come, a wanderer,
driven by want to beg his bread, and everyone
in hall gave bits, to cram his bag—only
Antinous threw a stool, and banged his shoulder!”

So she described it, sitting in her chamber

1280 among her maids—while her true lord was eating.
Then she called in the forester and said:

“Go to that man on my behalf, Eumaeus,
and send him here, so I can greet and question him.
Abroad in the great world, he may have heard

1285 rumors about Odysseus—may have known him!”

Penelope

In the evening, Penelope interrogates the old beggar.

“Friend, let me ask you first of all:
who are you, where do you come from, of what nation
and parents were you born?”

And he replied:

“My lady, never a man in the wide world
1290 should have a fault to find with you. Your name
has gone out under heaven like the sweet
honor of some god-fearing king, who rules
in equity over the strong: his black lands bear
both wheat and barley, fruit trees laden bright,
1295 new lambs at lambing time—and the deep sea
gives great hauls of fish by his good strategy,
so that his folk fare well.

O my dear lady,

this being so, let it suffice to ask me
of other matters—not my blood, my homeland.
1300 Do not enforce me to recall my pain.
My heart is sore; but I must not be found
sitting in tears here, in another’s house:
it is not well forever to be grieving.
One of the maids might say—or you might think—
1305 I had got maudlin over cups of wine.”

12. **carriage** *n.* posture.

13. **Zacynthus** (za SIHN thuhs)

14. **Ruses** (ROOZ ihz) *n.* tricks.

deceived (dih SEEVD) *v.* lied to; tricked

CLOSE READ

ANNOTATE: In the stanza beginning on line 1335, mark the words having to do with time and duration.

QUESTION: What do these words emphasize in Penelope's story?

CONCLUDE: How do they confirm her fidelity to Odysseus?

And Penelope replied:

"Stranger, my looks,

my face, my carriage,¹² were soon lost or faded
when the Achaeans crossed the sea to Troy,
Odysseus my lord among the rest.

1310 If he returned, if he were here to care for me,
I might be happily renowned!
But grief instead heaven sent me—years of pain.
Sons of the noblest families on the islands,
Dulichium, Same, wooded Zacynthus,¹³
1315 with native Ithacans, are here to court me,
against my wish; and they consume this house.
Can I give proper heed to guest or suppliant
or herald on the realm's affairs?

How could I?

wasted with longing for Odysseus, while here
1320 they press for marriage.

Ruses¹⁴ served my turn

to draw the time out—first a close-grained web
I had the happy thought to set up weaving
on my big loom in hall. I said, that day:
'Young men—my suitors, now my lord is dead,
1325 let me finish my weaving before I marry,
or else my thread will have been spun in vain.
It is a shroud I weave for Lord Laertes
When cold Death comes to lay him on his bier.
The country wives would hold me in dishonor
1330 if he, with all his fortune, lay unshrouded.'
I reached their hearts that way, and they agreed.
So every day I wove on the great loom,
but every night by torchlight I unwove it;
and so for three years I **deceived** the Achaeans.

1335 But when the seasons brought a fourth year on,
as long months waned, and the long days were spent,
through impudent folly in the slinking maids
they caught me—clamored up to me at night;
I had no choice then but to finish it.

1340 And now, as matters stand at last,
I have no strength left to evade a marriage,
cannot find any further way; my parents
urge it upon me, and my son
will not stand by while they eat up his property.

1345 He comprehends it, being a man full-grown,
able to oversee the kind of house
Zeus would endow with honor.

But you too

confide in me, tell me your ancestry.
You were not born of mythic oak or stone."

Penelope again asks the beggar to tell about himself. He makes up a tale in which Odysseus is mentioned and declares that Penelope's husband will soon be home.

- 1350 "You see, then, he is alive and well, and headed
homeward now, no more to be abroad
far from his island, his dear wife and son.
Here is my sworn word for it. Witness this,
god of the zenith, noblest of the gods,¹⁵
1355 and Lord Odysseus's hearthfire, now before me:
I swear these things shall turn out as I say.
Between this present dark and one day's ebb,
after the wane, before the crescent moon,
Odysseus will come."

**15. god of the zenith,
noblest of the
gods** Zeus.

The Challenge

Pressed by the suitors to choose a husband from among them, Penelope says she will marry the man who can string Odysseus's bow and shoot an arrow through twelve ax handle sockets. The suitors try and fail. Still in disguise, Odysseus asks for a turn and gets it.

- And Odysseus took his time,
1360 turning the bow, tapping it, every inch,
for borings that termites might have made
while the master of the weapon was abroad.
The suitors were now watching him, and some
jested among themselves:

"A bow lover!"

- 1365 "Dealer in old bows!"

"Maybe he has one like it
at home!"

"Or has an itch to make one for himself."

"See how he handles it, the sly old buzzard!"

And one disdainful suitor added this:

"May his fortune grow an inch for every inch he bends it!"

CLOSE READ

ANNOTATE: In lines 1378–1383, mark words that indicate or describe sounds.

QUESTION: Why do you think the poet uses these words?

CONCLUDE: How do these words intensify the description of the action?

16. nocked set an arrow into the bowstring.

1370 But the man skilled in all ways of contending,
satisfied by the great bow's look and heft,
like a musician, like a harper, when
with quiet hand upon his instrument
he draws between his thumb and forefinger
1375 a sweet new string upon a peg: so effortlessly
Odysseus in one motion strung the bow.
Then slid his right hand down the cord and plucked it,
so the taut gut vibrating hummed and sang
a swallow's note.

In the hushed hall it smote the suitors

1380 and all their faces changed. Then Zeus thundered
overhead, one loud crack for a sign.
And Odysseus laughed within him that the son
of crooked-minded Cronus had flung that omen down.
He picked one ready arrow from his table
1385 where it lay bare: the rest were waiting still
in the quiver for young men's turn to come.
He nocked¹⁶ it, let it rest across the handgrip,
And drew the string and grooved butt of the arrow,
Aiming from where he sat upon the stool.

Now flashed

1390 arrow from twanging bow clean as a whistle
through every socket ring, and grazed not one,
to thud with heavy brazen head beyond.

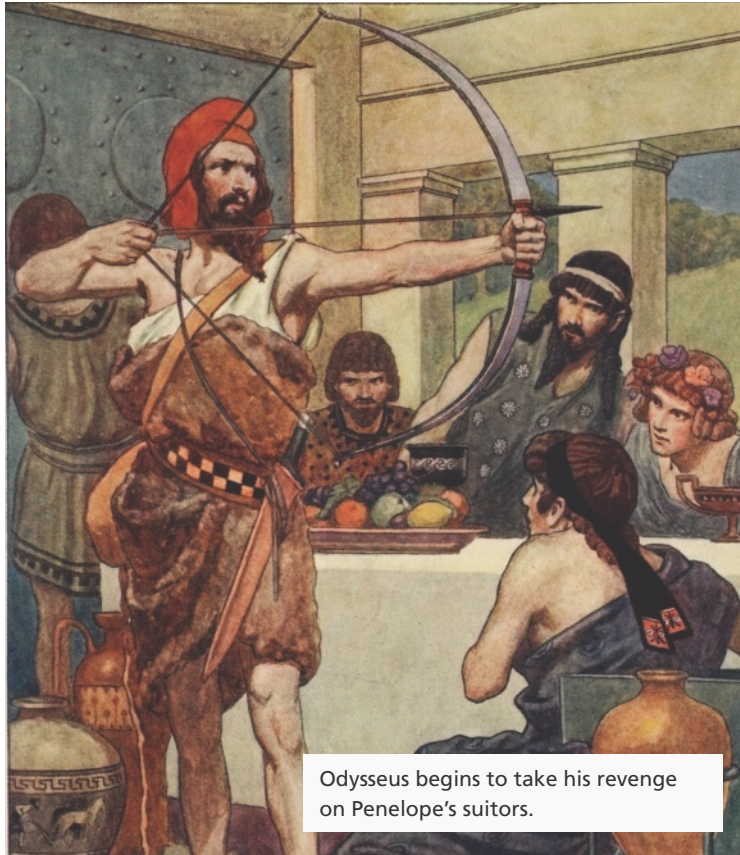
Then quietly

Odysseus said:

"Telemachus, the stranger
you welcomed in your hall has not disgraced you.

1395 I did not miss, neither did I take all day
stringing the bow. My hand and eye are sound,
not so contemptible as the young men say.
The hour has come to cook their lordships' mutton—
supper by daylight. Other amusements later,
1400 with song and harping that adorn a feast."

He dropped his eyes and nodded, and the prince
Telemachus, true son of King Odysseus,
belted his sword on, clapped hand to his spear,
and with a clink and glitter of keen bronze
1405 stood by his chair, in the forefront near his father.



Odysseus begins to take his revenge on Penelope's suitors.

Odysseus' Revenge

Now shrugging off his rags the wiliest¹⁷ fighter of the islands leapt and stood on the broad doorsill, his own bow in his hand.

He poured out at his feet a rain of arrows from the quiver and spoke to the crowd:

"So much for that. Your clean-cut game is over.

1410 Now watch me hit a target that no man has hit before, if I can make this shot. Help me, Apollo."

He drew to his fist the cruel head of an arrow for Antinous just as the young man leaned to lift his beautiful drinking cup,

embossed, two-handled, golden: the cup was in his fingers:
1415 the wine was even at his lips: and did he dream of death? How could he? In that revelry¹⁸ amid his throng of friends who would imagine a single foe—though a strong foe indeed—
could dare to bring death's pain on him and darkness on his eyes?

Odysseus's arrow hit him under the chin
1420 and punched up to the feathers through his throat.

NOTES

17. wiliest (WYL ee uhst)
adj. craftiest; slyest.

CLOSE READ

ANNOTATE: In lines 1412–1414, mark adjectives that describe the drinking cup.

QUESTION: Why do you think the poet describes the cup in such detail and with these words?

CONCLUDE: How does the description heighten the effect of Odysseus' action?

18. revelry (REHV uhl ree) *n.*
noisy partying.

19. Eurymachus (yoo RIH
muh kuhs)

- Backward and down he went, letting the winecup fall
from his shocked hand. Like pipes his nostrils jetted
crimson runnels, a river of mortal red,
and one last kick upset his table
1425 knocking the bread and meat to soak in dusty blood.
Now as they craned to see their champion where he lay
the suitors jostled in uproar down the hall,
everyone on his feet. Wildly they turned and scanned
the walls in the long room for arms; but not a shield,
1430 not a good ashen spear was there for a man to take and
throw.
All they could do was yell in outrage at Odysseus:

“Foul! to shoot at a man! That was your last shot!”
“Your own throat will be slit for this!”
“Our finest lad is down!”
You killed the best on Ithaca.”
“Buzzards will tear your eyes out!”

1435 For they imagined as they wished—that it was a wild shot,
an unintended killing—fools, not to comprehend
they were already in the grip of death.
But glaring under his brows Odysseus answered:

“You yellow dogs, you thought I’d never make it
1440 home from the land of Troy. You took my house to
plunder . . .
You dared bid for my wife while I was still alive.
Contempt was all you had for the gods who rule wide
heaven,
contempt for what men say of you hereafter.
Your last hour has come. You die in blood.”

1445 As they all took this in, sickly green fear
pulled at their entrails, and their eyes flickered
looking for some hatch or hideaway from death.
Eurymachus¹⁹ alone could speak. He said:

“If you are Odysseus of Ithaca come back,
1450 all that you say these men have done is true.
Rash actions, many here, more in the countryside.
But here he lies, the man who cause them all.
Antinous was the ringleader, he whipped us on
to do these things. He cared less for a marriage
1455 than for the power Cronion has denied him
As king of Ithaca. For that
he tried to trap your son and would have killed him.
He is dead now and has his portion. Spare

your own people. As for ourselves, we'll make
 1460 restitution of wine and meat consumed,
 and add, each one, a tithe of twenty oxen
 with gifts of bronze and gold to warm your heart.
 Meanwhile we cannot blame you for your anger."

Odysseus glowered under his black brows
 1465 and said:
 "Not for the whole treasure of your fathers,
 all you enjoy, lands, flocks, or any gold
 put up by others, would I hold my hand.
 There will be killing till the score is paid.
 You forced yourselves upon this house. Fight your way out,
 1470 or run it, if you think you'll escape death.
 I doubt one man of you skins by."

They felt their knees fail, and their hearts—but heard
 Eurymachus for the last time rallying them.
 "Friends," he said, "the man is implacable.
 1475 Now that he's got his hands on bow and quiver
 he'll shoot from the big doorstone there
 until he kills us to the last man.

Fight, I say,
 let's remember the joy of it. Swords out!
 Hold up your tables to deflect his arrows.
 1480 After me, everyone: rush him where he stands.
 If we can budge him from the door, if we can pass
 into the town, we'll call out men to chase him.
 This fellow with his bow will shoot no more."

He drew his own sword as he spoke, a broadsword of fine
 bronze,
 1485 honed like a razor on either edge. Then crying hoarse and
 loud
 he hurled himself at Odysseus. But the kingly man let fly
 an arrow at that instant, and the quivering feathered butt
 sprang to the nipple of his breast as the barb stuck in his
 liver.
 The bright broadsword clanged down. He lurched and fell
 aside,
 1490 pitching across his table. His cup, his bread and meat,
 were spilt and scattered far and wide, and his head slammed
 on the ground.
 Revulsion, anguish in his heart, with both feet kicking out,
 he downed his chair, while the shrouding wave of mist closed
 on his eyes.

Amphinomus now came running at Odysseus,
 1495 broadsword naked in his hand. He thought to make

CLOSE READ

ANNOTATE: Mark the first two sentences of the stanza that begins on line 1484.

QUESTION: How are these lines different from those that go before them?

CONCLUSION: Why do you think the poet made this change when beginning a description of the battle?

the great soldier give way at the door.
 But with a spear throw from behind Telemachus hit him
 between the shoulders, and the lancehead drove
 clear through his chest. He left his feet and fell
 1500 forward, thudding, forehead against the ground.
 Telemachus swerved around him, leaving the long dark
 spear
 planted in Amphinomus. If he paused to yank it out
 someone might jump him from behind or cut him down with
 a sword
 at the moment he bent over. So he ran—ran from the tables
 1505 to his father's side and halted, panting, saying:

“Father let me bring you a shield and spear,
 a pair of spears, a helmet.
 I can arm on the run myself: I'll give
 outfits to Eumaeus and this cowherd.
 1510 Better to have equipment.”

Said Odysseus:

“Run then, while I hold them off with arrows
 as long as the arrows last. When all are gone
 if I'm alone they can dislodge me.”

Quick

upon his father's word Telemachus
 1515 ran to the room where spears and armor lay.
 He caught up four light shields, four pairs of spears,
 four helms of war high-plumed with flowing manes,
 and ran back, loaded down to his father's side.
 He was the first to pull a helmet on
 1520 and slide his bare arm in a buckler strap.
 The servants armed themselves, and all three took their
 stand
 beside the master of battle.

While he had arrows

he aimed and shot, and every shot brought down
 one of his huddling enemies.
 1525 But when all barbs had flown from the bowman's fist,
 he leaned his bow in the bright entryway
 beside the door, and armed: a four-ply shield
 hard on his shoulder, and a crested helm,
 horsetailed, nodding stormy upon his head,
 1530 then took his tough and bronze-shod spears. . . .

*Aided by Athena, Odysseus, Telemachus, Eumaeus, and other faithful
 herdsmen kill all the suitors.*

And Odysseus looked around him, narrow-eyed,
for any others who had lain hidden
while death's black fury passed.

In blood and dust
he saw that crowd all fallen, many and many slain.

- 1535 Think of a catch that fishermen haul in to a half-moon bay
in a fine-meshed net from the whitecaps of the sea:
how all are poured out on the sand, in throes for the salt sea,
twitching their cold lives away in Helios' fiery air:
so lay the suitors heaped on one another.

Penelope's Test

Penelope tests Odysseus to prove he really is her husband.

- 1540 Greathearted Odysseus, home at last,
was being bathed now by Eurynome
and rubbed with golden oil, and clothed again
in a fresh tunic and a cloak. Athena
lent him beauty, head to foot. She made him
1545 taller, and massive, too, with crisping hair
in curls like petals of wild hyacinth
but all red-golden. Think of gold infused
on silver by a craftsman, whose fine art
Hephaestus²⁰ taught him, or Athena: one
1550 whose work moves to delight: just so she lavished
beauty over Odysseus' head and shoulders.
He sat then in the same chair by the pillar,
facing his silent wife, and said:

- “Strange woman,
the immortals of Olympus made you hard,
1555 harder than any. Who else in the world
would keep aloof as you do from her husband
if he returned to her from years of trouble,
cast on his own land in the twentieth year?

- Nurse, make up a bed for me to sleep on.
1560 Her heart is iron in her breast.”

Penelope

spoke to Odysseus now. She said:

NOTES

20. Hephaestus (hee FEHS tuhs) god of fire and metalworking.



This illustration shows Odysseus' return to Penelope after an absence of twenty years.

“Strange man,
if man you are . . . This is no pride on my part
nor scorn for you—not even wonder, merely.
I know so well how you—how he—appeared
1565 boarding the ship for Troy. But all the same . . .

Make up his bed for him, Eurycleia.
Place it outside the bedchamber my lord
built with his own hands. Pile the big bed
with fleeces, rugs, and sheets of purest linen.”

1570 With this she tried him to the breaking point,
and he turned on her in a flash raging:

“Woman, by heaven you’ve stung me now!
Who dared to move my bed?
No builder had the skill for that—unless
1575 a god came down to turn the trick. No mortal
in his best days could budge it with a crowbar.
There is our pact and pledge, our secret sign,
built into that bed—my handiwork
and no one else’s!



An old trunk of olive

1580 grew like a pillar on the building plot,
and I laid out our bedroom round that tree,
lined up the stone walls, built the walls and roof,
gave it a doorway and smooth-fitting doors.
Then I lopped off the silvery leaves and branches,
1585 hewed and shaped that stump from the roots up
into a bedpost, drilled it, let it serve
as model for the rest. I planed them all,
inlaid them all with silver, gold, and ivory,
and stretched a bed between—a pliant web
1590 of oxhide thongs dyed crimson.

There's our sign!

I know no more. Could someone else's hand
have sawn that trunk and dragged the frame away?"

Their secret! as she heard it told, her knees
grew tremulous and weak, her heart failed her.
1595 With eyes brimming tears she ran to him,
throwing her arms around his neck, and kissed him,
murmuring:

"Do not rage at me, Odysseus!

No one ever matched your caution! Think
 what difficulty the gods gave: they denied us
 1600 life together in our prime and flowering years,
 kept us from crossing into age together.
 Forgive me, don't be angry. I could not
 welcome you with love on sight! I armed myself
 long ago against the frauds of men,
 1605 impostors who might come—and all those many
 whose underhanded ways bring evil on! . . .
 But here and now, what sign could be so clear
 as this of our own bed?
 No other man has ever laid eyes on it—
 1610 only my own slave, Actoris, that my father
 sent with me as a gift—she kept our door.
 You make my stiff heart know that I am yours."

Now from his breast into his eyes the ache
 of longing mounted, and he wept at last,
 1615 his dear wife, clear and faithful, in his arms,
 longed for as the sunwarmed earth is longed for by a
 swimmer
 spent in rough water where his ship went down
 under Poseidon's blows, gale winds and tons of sea.
 Few men can keep alive through a big surf
 1620 to crawl, clotted with brine, on kindly beaches
 in joy, in joy, knowing the abyss²¹ behind:
 and so she too rejoiced, her gaze upon her husband,
 her white arms round him pressed as though forever.

21. **abyss** (uh BIHS) *n.*
 ocean depths.

The Ending

Odysseus is reunited with his father. Athena commands that peace prevail between Odysseus and the relatives of the slain suitors. Odysseus has regained his family and his kingdom.

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