

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.