



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

NOTES

## Odysseus' Revenge

Now shrugging off his rags the williest<sup>17</sup> 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,

1415 embossed, two-handled, golden: the cup was in his fingers: the wine was even at his lips: and did he dream of death? How could he? In that revelry<sup>18</sup> 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?

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

**17. williest** (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.

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.  
Eurymachus<sup>19</sup> 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

**19. Eurymachus** (yoo RIH  
muh kuhs)

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 hm.  
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

## NOTES

### 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

1505 at the moment he bent over. So he ran—ran from the tables  
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. . . .

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

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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.

NOTES

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