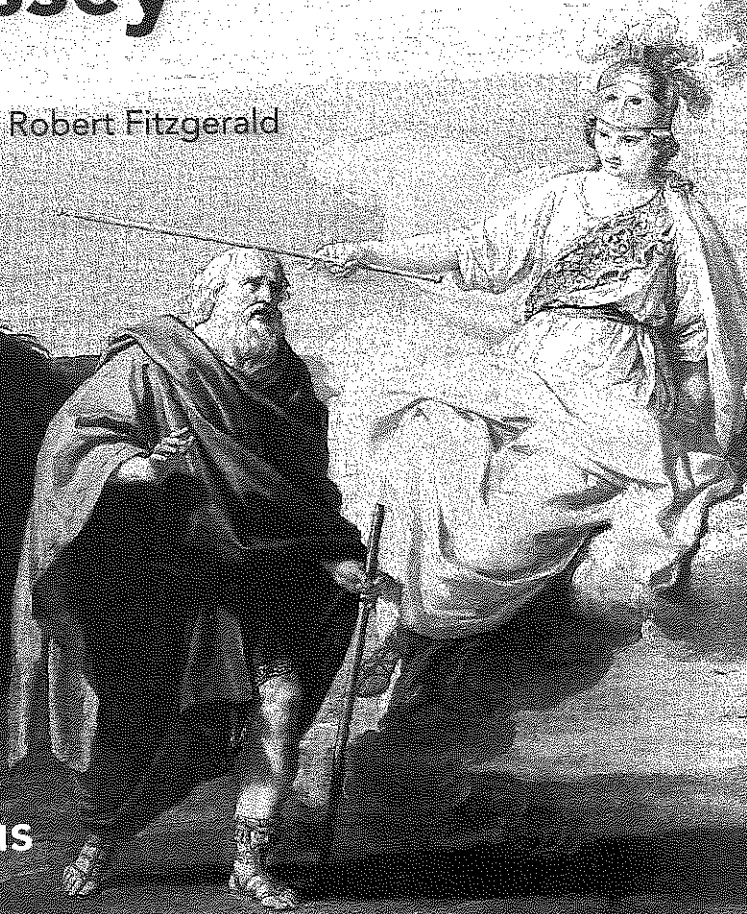


# from the Odyssey

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,<sup>1</sup> 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 oblation<sup>2</sup>  
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?

NOTES

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,<sup>3</sup> 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?<sup>4</sup>  
 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?

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

Tempered  
iron can magnetize a man.'

Say that.

**bemusing** (bih MYOOZ ihng)  
*adj.* confusing;  
bewildering

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.

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

1160 But you and I alone must learn how far  
the women are corrupted; we should know  
how to locate good men among our hands  
the loyal and respectful, and the shirkers<sup>5</sup>  
who take you lightly, as alone and young."

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