

Readings from the Odyssey

Book 1:

Where is Odysseus? The gods in assembly decide things have to change in Ithaca, Athene comes down in person, but in disguise.

Lines 107 – 177

- Homeric epithets
- **xenia**
- bard (Phemius)

lines 270 – 303

- Telemachus instructed by Athene
- **time** and **kleos** (future generations will sing your praise)

lines 325 – 359

- bard again, never blamed
- mother and son, Telemachus already showing maturity and authority

Book 2

“fresh and rosy-fingered dawn (formulaic phrase and theme)
Odysseus’ son begins to become Telemachus!

Lines 40 – 110

- Telemachus braves the suitors
- the Suitors blame **cunning** Penelope and her weaving

lines 162 - 178

- an omen from Zeus, interpreted by the soothsayer

lines 267 – 284

- Athene reassures Telemachus, and warns of the Suitors’ dark fate
- Meanwhile, they continue to taunt and misbehave
- **Eurycleia** is sworn to secrecy about his departure for Pylos. She will be the first to recognize Odysseus on his return

Book 3

Athene guides Telemachus to Pylos

Lines 3 – 10

- How many cattle?

Lines 28 – 42

- xenia

Lines 70-74

- multiple questioning technique
- Odysseus: a man “born to suffer” (says Telemachus)
- Odysseus: “a man in every kind of strategy supreme” (says Nestor)

Lines 130 – 200

- Nestor’s story of the return of the Heroes
- and why he knows nothing of Odysseus’ whereabouts
- Telemachus must be “as brave as Orestes” (says Nestor)

Lines 213 – 224

- pressure on Telemachus to do something about the Suitors
- NB the special relationship between Odysseus and Athene

Lines 253 – 313

- Nestor’s story of Agamemnon’s return to Argos
- Orestes’ lesson for Telemachus (but no mention of murder of Clytemnestra!)
- notice the bard!
- Nestor suggests Telemachus visit Menelaus in Sparta
- Athene flies off as a vulture!

Lines 404 - 415

- Nestor, ageing serenely, surrounded by his sons (including Peisistratus, who will be Telemachus companion). Contrast with situation in Ithaca.
- another feast and sacrifices to Athene
- bathing of Telemachus by Nestor’s daughter

Line 490

- guest – gifts on the way to Sparta

Book 4

- And so they came to Sparta (think of time, travel, geography, sense of adventure, departure and arrival, formulaic scenes....)
- Another (wedding) festival, another minstrel (bard) who “sang divinely to the lyre”

Lines 25 – 37

- xenia again (hospitality is reciprocated – “you and I enjoyed much hospitality from strangers before we reached our homes...)
- “... by their looks to be of divine descent...”

lines 37ff

- sweating horses; detail
- wondrous palace
- bathing in polished baths, oil, water, bread, delicacies, meat, gold cups

lines 59 – ff

- So much gold and treasure in the palace! Like the court of Zeus on Olympus?
- “No mortal can compete with Zeus, dear boys.....” (danger of committing *hubris*)
- Menelaus narrates his return and mentions the murder of Agamemnon (by his wife) and Odysseus

Lines 100 - 113

- Dramatic irony: Menelaus talks about Telemachus, not realizing he is sitting with him!
- Telemachus’ tears, noticed by Helen.
- Telemachus at last recognized (disguise and recognition in the Odyssey is a key theme – exciting for the audience)
- Peisistratus speaks up for the bashful Telemachus

Lines 168 – 183

- Menelaus’ affection for Odysseus; tears all round, spoiling dinner! (191)

Lines 203 – 211

Sons and fathers theme again “true son of your father” Nestor “ageing serenely”)

Line 219

Helen drugs the wine – to stop the grief!

Story telling in the Odyssey:

Lines 241 – 264

- Helen's tale of Odysseus in disguise at Troy (nb foreshadowing technique; he will disguise himself again as a beggar on his return to Ithaca)

Lines 265 – 289

- Menelaus' tale of Odysseus in the Wooden Horse

Line 294:

- find the anachronism!

Lines 315ff

- Telemachus tells Menelaus why he has come;
- Menelaus' indignation and warning for the Suitors (a kind of OMEN, another major theme in the epic) – they will meet a grisly fate at the hands of Odysseus.

Lines 485ff

- Menelaus' tale of the Old Man of the Sea (who can turn himself into any shape...), who tells of the return of the heroes (Ajax, Agamemnon, and Odysseus)
- What happened to Ajax, and why? (499 – 512)
- Where is Odysseus?? (550 – ff) just 5 lines!

Telemachus now eager to be off, declines Menelaus' offer of a lengthier stay; nb the giving of guest gifts (610ff)

Lines 609ff

How is the **value** of the gift assessed in this society?

Lines 625 ff

- Meanwhile back in Ithaca
- Suitors plot an ambush
- Penelope only now learns Telemachus has gone!

Lines 721ff

- Penelope constantly crying, feeling sorry for herself
- Laertes: where is he?? (735 – 741)
- Athene sends the ghost (of her sister) to comfort Penelope – but “of Odysseus, whether alive or dead I will not give you any news at all”