

HOMER, *THE ODYSSEY*, PLOT SUMMARY BETWEEN SELECTIONS

[I.207-266]

Athena, in disguise as Mentos, a friend of Laertes, Odysseus's father, introduces herself and gives Telemachus two pieces of advice: to demand before the assembled people of Ithaca an end to this persecution, and to seek out old comrades of his father's and enquire after his fate.

[II.143-IV.84]

It becomes clear that the suitors hold the upper hand and that the Ithacans will not support Telemachus. Telemachus' request for a ship is not even considered, and Leocritus dismisses the assembly with arrogant contempt. Athena takes the form of Mentor, and leads Telemachus to a ship, on which he embarks by night.

On the shores of Pylos the voyagers find Nestor sacrificing to Poseidon. He receives Telemachus hospitably, and is able to tell him what befell many of the heroes returning from Troy. Of Odysseus, however, he can tell nothing. In the evening Athena departs in the form of an eagle. Next morning Telemachus sets out for Sparta with Nestor's son Pisistratus. They arrive on the evening of the next day.

They find Menelaus celebrating the weddings of his son and his daughter.

[IV.332-V.160]

Next morning Telemachus hears of the adventures of Menelaus on his way home. Among these is a meeting with Proteus, the old man of the sea, who tells him of the deaths of the Locrian Ajax and of Agamemnon, and finally informs him of Odysseus' sojourn on the island of Calypso. In Sparta a banquet is prepared: in Ithaca the suitors are planning the murder of Telemachus on his return. Penelope hears of the plot, but Athena comforts her by a dream vision.

The gods take counsel again, and again Athena complains of Odysseus' hardships. Zeus now sends Hermes as messenger (as suggested before by Athena) to tell Calypso what the gods intend.

[V.252-VI.94]

Odysseus constructs his raft and leaves Ogyia. On the eighteenth day, when he is near Scheria, he is seen by Poseidon (now returning from the Ethiopians), who sends a storm and shatters the raft. Leucothea's veil protects Odysseus, and on the third day after the shipwreck he reaches the shore of Scheria, where he sinks into a deep sleep.

A dream sent by Athena causes the king's daughter Nausicaa to go with her maidens to the shore, where they play and wash clothes.

[VI.247- VIII.656]

Odysseus wakes up, and the girls flee in terror. Nausicaa has her servants bathe Odysseus and takes him to the grove of Athena before the city.

Under cover of a cloud which Athena wraps round him, Odysseus passes through the streets of the Phaeacians and enters the palace. As he clasps the knees of the queen, Arete, the cloud disperses, and Alcinous bids him welcome. When the nobles have left, Arete, who recognizes the clothes, asks Odysseus how he came by them and where he has come from. He relates his misfortunes since leaving Calypso, and obtains from Alcinous the promise to send him home the next day.

But the next day does not bring the desired consummation. Alcinous orders preparations to be made, but in the meantime there is a banquet, at which Demodocus, a blind bard, sings of Achilles and Odysseus. Odysseus hides his face, and the king gives the word for games, in which Odysseus humbles the braggart Euryalus. Next follows Demodocus' lay of the loves of Ares and Aphrodite, and the revenge of the injured Hephaestus. In the evening Demodocus sings of the wooden horse: Odysseus weeps, and Alcinous asks

him his name and history.

[X.386-631]

Odysseus rescues his comrades and lives for a year with Circe. When he asks to return home she sends him first to the land of the dead.

[XI.257-435]

Next comes a catalogue of heroines. There is a kind of intermezzo between the catalogue of women and the interview with Agamemnon. Odysseus tries to break off his narrative, and tactfully reminds his hearers of the promise (7. 317) to convey him to Ithaca. They prevail on him to continue his story, and Alcinous gives a firm undertaking to send him home next day.

[XII-XVI.165]

After Circe's island, the sequence of adventures takes us past the Sirens, through Scylla and Charybdis to Thrinacia and the oxen of Helios. Odysseus' comrades pinned down by adverse winds and tormented with hunger, lay hands on the cattle, which are sacred to Apollo. A storm destroys the ship and only Odysseus escapes and is carried by the waves for nine days until he lands on Ogygia, Calypso's island, where his story began.

Odysseus is sent off with gifts by the Phaeacians to Ithaca. Poseidon turns the returning vessel to stone. Odysseus wakes in a cloud, and does not know his native land until he is informed by Athena in the guise of a young shepherd. She reveals her identity, and man and goddess join in hiding the gifts of the Phaeacians. They plan their tactics against the suitors, and Athena gives the hero the appearance of an old beggar.

Odysseus next seeks out the swineherd Eumaeus, to whom he introduces himself with a long and imaginary story of his sufferings. He is given food and a blanket for the night.

Athena urges Telemachus, who is still in Sparta, to return home. By Athena's guidance Telemachus avoids the plot of the suitors. Meanwhile in Eumaeus' cottage Odysseus hears of his father Laertes, and the swineherd tells of his own life. Next dawn Telemachus lands and comes to Eumaeus.

The swineherd goes to acquaint Penelope with her son's return.

[XVI.258- XVII.212] Odysseus and Telemachus plan the punishment of the suitors, who continue to plot against Telemachus. Eumaeus returns to the cottage.

Odysseus sets out towards the city, disguised as a beggar.

[XVII.361-XIX.352]

Odysseus begs from the suitors, Antinous throws a stool at him, hitting his right shoulder. Eumaeus obtains an interview for the beggar with Penelope that evening, and returns to his cottage.

In a fist-fight Odysseus vanquishes the impudent beggar Irus, and warns Amphinomus, the least arrogant of the suitors. Penelope shows herself to the men in the hall, makes clear her readiness to wed again, and thus receives rich gifts. Odysseus is treated with scorn by the serving girl Melanthis; Eurymachus hurls a stool at him, but hits the cupbearer.

Odysseus and Telemachus remove all weapons from the hall while Athena holds a lamp for them. Penelope enters, and Odysseus prepares her for his return by some invented narratives.

[XX-XXI.273]

Full of resentment against the servant girls who have been lying with the suitors, and anxious about coming events, Odysseus is consoled by Athena, and sleeps awhile in an anteroom. On waking he is heartened by good omens. Euryclea and the serving girls prepare for the banquet on the day sacred to Apollo. Eumaeus and Melanthius arrive, together with the faithful oxherd Philoetius. A bird of omen sent by Zeus deters the suitors from their plan to kill Telemachus. At the feast Ctesippus throws a cow-heel at Odysseus, but it only strikes the wall. The foolish laughter of the suitors and the prophecies of Theoclymenus prepare us for the scene of revenge.

Penelope brings the bow, and Telemachus sets up the axes as target. He first, then some of the suitors, try in vain to string the bow. Odysseus reveals himself to Eumaeus and Philoetius. The suitors put off the contest until next day, but Odysseus, against their opposition, tries the bow himself.

[XXII.72-XXIII.171]

Eurymachus tries in vain to arrange a settlement: he also is slain. Telemachus brings arms: so does Melanthius for the suitors, but he is seized and bound by the two loyal herds. Athena helps in the fight, and all the suitors are slain. Only the bard Phemius and the herald Medon are spared. Odysseus forbids the nurse Euryclea to rejoice at the punishment of the wicked, and has the hall cleansed. The faithless servant girls are hanged; Melanthius is mutilated and killed, and the loyal servants welcome their master.

Euryclea cannot bring Penelope to believe in her husband's return. Even in his presence she has her doubts. He orders lyre-music and dancing for the Ithacans to celebrate a marriage in the palace.

[XXIII.354-END]

In the morning Odysseus goes off to find his father in the country.

Hermes leads the shades of the suitors to the underworld, where Agamemnon speaks to Achilles and Amphimedon, a conversation contrasting Penelope's fidelity and the crime of Clytemnestra. Odysseus finds his father Laertes on his farm and declares himself. Meanwhile Antinous' father has aroused the people of Ithaca to revolt: fighting flares up, but Athena makes a lasting peace.

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