



Odyssey 1.213-444: Resources for further study and discussion

Themes and Characters

In the AS prescription the focus is squarely on Telemachus: we see him as son to Odysseus and Penelope, indignant and uncertain heir to the Ithacan royal palace, and newly-spurred antagonist of the suitors who are depleting his family's resources. The disguised Athena-Mentes gives him a plan to help him find out about his father and bring some certainty to the stand-off with the suitors, and the extract ends with Telemachus announcing his plans and retiring to bed.

Understanding the text

- Read Telemachus's speeches to Athena-Mentes (lines 213-220, 230-251, 306-313) and her speech to him (252-305).
 - What does Telemachus say about his father?
 - What impression does the reader have of his qualities as a son?
 - What do you make of his remarks at line 307-8 (ἤ τοι μὲν ταῦτα φίλα φρονέων ἀγορεύεις / ὥς τε πατήρ ᾧ παιδί, καὶ οὐ ποτε λήσομαι αὐτῶν)?
 - What does Athena choose to tell Telemachus about Odysseus's character, and what actions does she tell him to take?

- Read Penelope's entrance, Telemachus's response to her, and her reaction (325-364).
 - Why does Phemius's song upset Penelope so much?
 - Why doesn't Telemachus support his mother's wish to have the bard change his song?
 - How does Penelope react to her son's ordering her away from the hall?



Broader questions

- Why does Athena choose this form to speak with Telemachus, when she could easily tell him the truth about Odysseus?
- Why does Telemachus not tell the suitors that he is going to sail to Pylos and Sparta to find news of his father?
- How has Telemachus changed, from the opening of the extract to the time it ends?
- What can we learn about Greek attitudes to women from Telemachus's interaction with Penelope and her reaction?

Xenia: Athena-Mentes, the suitors, and the absent Odysseus

A major theme of the entire *Odyssey* is the guest-host relationship known as *xenia* and deeply engrained in the moral code of Homeric Greece (see the introduction to the anthology, page 246-9).

In this extract the suitors are exploiting the hospitality of the palace at Ithaca, particularly as there is no evidence that Odysseus has even died. The appearance of Athena-Mentes at the palace gives the narrator a chance to present the suitors' behaviour from the perspective of a visitor to the palace; book 1 also makes clear the impact that the suitors are having on the household.

Understanding the text

- Read lines 224-229, 246-251, and the beginning of Athena-Mentes' speech to Telemachus (252-305).
 - What does Athena-Mentes assuming is happening in the palace?
 - How does she react to the news of the suitors' activities?
- Read the description of Athena-Mentes's departure (lines 306-318).
 - How do these lines add to our understanding of *xenia* in the palace?
 - How does this interaction contrast with the actions of the suitors?
- Read the exchange between Telemachus and the two suitors Antinous and Eurymachus (lines 368-419).
 - How does Antinous's tone differ from that taken by Eurymachus? Is there any indication that Telemachus feels differently about these two suitors?

Broader questions

- Why do you think Athena-Mentes chose this way of stirring Telemachus into action?
- How excusable are the suitors' actions, given that they suppose Odysseus to be dead?
- Should the fact that Antinous and Eurymachus take such different tones with Telemachus entitle them to different treatment when vengeance finally comes for them?