

# Odyssey xenia notes by claire

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Throughout the Odyssey there is an ongoing theme of hospitality or xenia that shows cultural values. The ancient cultural value of Xenia is a religious and social accept that has to do with the relationship between guest and hosts. Both the guess and the host have specific roles. The role of the host was to take in the stranger, provide him with shelter, food, drink and aiding them on their journey with whatever means they have to spear. This is seen in book one when Telemachus unknowingly takes in Athena as his guest. "Welcome, stranger. You shall be entertained as a guest among us. Afterward, when you have tasted dinner you shall tell us what your need is..." Whereas the role of the guest is to provide a gift if possible upon arrive, respect the host and their property as well as only staying for a reasonable amount of time. This relationship is very important in Homeric society and this can be seen in the Odyssey. It was believed that the gods wanted them to show hospitality to anyone who showed up at their homes. In book 14 Eumaeus said "for it is Zeus who sends us all beggars and strangers..." this shows us that Xenia was a part of a religious accept in the Homeric society and that the Greeks took people in due to their religion. The gods in ancient Greece often disguised themselves as mortals and so the host were expected to treat every guest as a god. By doing this there was no mistake of accidentally treating a god poorly if in fact they came disguised as a stranger "...a gift, however small means much when given by a man like me...". By turning away a stranger and no performing Xenia you are offending the gods. When you offend the gods you are punished. This was the case in when Odysseus in countered the Cyclopes Polyphemus. Polyphemus ignored the rules of Xenia because he believes the gods won't punish him due to the fact that his father was a god and believed he would

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protect him. Instead of looking after his guest instead he eats them. The consequence of this was the godlike Odysseus blinding the Cyclopes. Thus reinforcing that if you do not abide by Xenia you are disrespecting the gods and you will be punished. In the Odyssey Xenia represents a civilised society. Throughout Odysseus absence the suitors are treated well, in response to this the suitors abuse Xenia and refuse to leave when asked in book one. They show such disrespect for their host that ' Any decent man would be disgusted at the sight such disgraceful behaviour' and this abuse creates a ' rocky Ithaca'. This parallels with the behaviour of the Phaeacians in book 6 when Xenia was used '... since it is our land and our city that you have come to, you shall not lack for clothing nor anything else...' (Nausikaa). The Phaeacians were shown as civilised whereas the suitors were portrayed as barbaric. This reflected and enforced that only those of a barbaric society would not enforce the cultural custom of Xenia and if you want to be known as a respectable and civilised kingdom Xenia must be enforced and applied whenever there is a traveller.