

# Odyssey, book 23, 209-230 essay examples

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



## **Summary of the Second Part of the Odyssey: Reader Response**

After the endless travels of the first part of the Odyssey that take the viewer from the Peloponnese where Telemachus searches for his father, to the island of Calypso and the land of the Phaeacians where Odysseus finds refuge and from there to the tale of his ten-year wanderings, the second part of the epic is situated mainly in one place: Ithaca. Starting in book 13, Odysseus finally reaches his beloved homeland after twenty years, ten of which he spent fighting in the Trojan War and another ten wandering around in his almost endless journey home. Arriving in Ithaca, Odysseus is greeted by Athena, the goddess of wisdom who has long stood by his side and who transforms him into a beggar in order for him to be unrecognizable.

Odysseus first meets Eumaeus keeper of swine who has been faithful to him and who reveals to the hero the situation in his palace: the men pursuing his wife Penelope and devouring his wealth believing he is dead. After this first encounter, the poet turns briefly to the Peloponnese from where Telemachus departs so that he too can come back to Ithaca. The young man manages to escape the ambush set by his mother's suitors and finally meets with his father in the house of Eumaeus where Odysseus reveals himself to him.

What follows is a series of recognitions and events that built up towards the final fight and Odysseus' restoration as king of Ithaca and master of his house. The beggar Odysseus is treated with disrespect by the suitors and people who had allied with them, but kindly by Penelope who although still unaware of his true identity shows respect for the stranger who arrived at her home. Odysseus' faithful dog on the other hand recognizes his master

and dies right after that. His faithful servant, Eurycleia also recognizes him as she sees a scar on his leg while washing his feet. As Penelope -instructed by Athena- sets a trial with bows among the suitors, the winner of which will also win her hand, the stage for the final battle is set. Odysseus wins and then aided by his son and Athena reveals himself and kills all the suitors and those who willingly worked with them. After the battle he finally meets with his wife and both of the spouses test each other before reuniting after twenty years apart. The final book is dedicated to the re establishment of peace in Ithaca: the suitors are seen in the underworld no longer posing a threat, Odysseus meets his old father and faces the final challenge of the dead suitors' relatives once again with the help of Athena.

The second part of the Odyssey is full of scenes showing the human aspect of the heroes, all their strengths and flaws as people living and walking on earth as opposed to the almost fairytale plots of the earlier chapters, especially those relating to Odysseus journey home. Although the scenes of the first part are undoubtedly powerful especially as Odysseus meets a number of extraordinary creatures like the Cyclops Polyphemus who eats some of his comrades (Odyssey, Book 9), the witch Circe who transforms his companions to swine (Odyssey, Book 10) and even the dead, the people he knew but are no longer alive, like the heroes of the Trojan War Achilles and Agamemnon and his mother who was alive when he left Ithaca (Book 11), they belong more to the sphere of fantasy that seems remote from the reader both then and now. The dead are ghosts, memories; Polyphemus, Circe and even Calypso are gods or semi-gods existing in their own secluded worlds. Ithaca and its inhabitants -both good and bad- are very real.

The revelation scenes are all not only powerful and moving but also timeless. The scene where the dog recognizes his master and the way they both react is indicative (Odyssey, Book 12, 254-337):

But now, as he saw Odysseus close by and knew him, he wagged his tail and dropped his ears, though he could not now move nearer to his master. Then Odysseus glanced aside, wiped away a tear unheeded by Eumaeus

Similarly, the way Odysseus disguised as a beggar is treated by the people he meets is a careful study of human character. The suitors, who have long lived from another's man wealth and who have tried to take his wife and house, mock and are even cruel towards the beggar. Interestingly, one of the suitors accuses Odysseus of being unwilling to work and earn an honest living: " you have learned bad ways and will never keep at any work; instead, you mean to go cringing and begging about the country to fill your never-sated belly" (Odyssey, Book 18, 360-368). To hear such words from a man who has been living off another man's house is provocative to say the least, but is at the same time very realistic and consistent with the character the poet portrays.

Even Penelope's reaction when she finally finds herself face to face with the husband she has been waiting for the past twenty years is psychologically accurate. Time and hardship have made her suspicious, unable to trust what people say to her.

Deep in my heart I always have had misgivings that some strange man might come and beguile me with his words; schemers of dark designs are many.

This was therefore her way to protect herself, her son and ultimately her own husband and their marriage. It is only natural that even when Odysseus stands right before her she would want to be absolutely sure that it is really him.

In all these respects, I believe that the second part of the Odyssey is stronger than the first. Lacking the powerful scenes of Odysseus' wanderings, it focuses on emotions and ultimately presents a very convincing account of a homecoming and a perfect ending for the story.

## **WORK CITED**

Homer. *The Odyssey*. Trans. Walter Shewring. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1980.