

## SELECTIONS FROM THE ODYSSEY

*Tell me, O Muse, of that **ingenious** hero who, after he had **sacked** the city of Troy, wandered far and wide, and saw the cities of many people, and learned their ways. Many were the **woes** he suffered upon the sea, seeking to save his own life and bring his men safely home. O goddess, daughter of Zeus, tell me of these things.*

**ingenious:** clever, inventive, imaginative

**sacked:** raided and looted

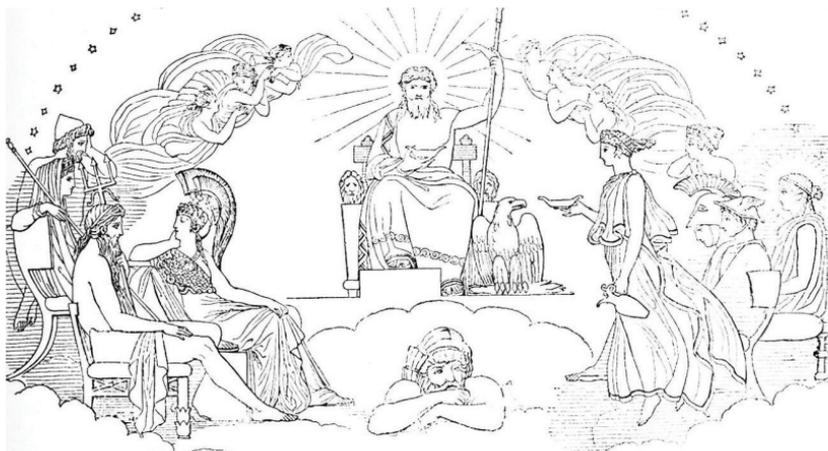
**woes:** heavy troubles; great sadness

### *A Visit from a Goddess*

In the halls of Olympus, the gods were gathered together—all but Poseidon, the sea god, who hated Odysseus and kept him from reaching his home after he and his men had sailed away from Troy.

#### **Poseideon's Anger**

In the *Iliad*, Poseidon favored the Greeks in their fight against Troy. So why does he now hate the Greek hero Odysseus? That will be explained later in the *Odyssey*.



THE GODS MEET IN COUNCIL ON MOUNT OLYMPUS.

Zeus, king of the gods, was first to speak. “See now,” said Zeus, “how people blame us gods for their own **folly**.”

**folly:** foolishness

Then Athena, daughter of Zeus and goddess of wisdom, replied, “For their foolish or evil actions, some men deserve their suffering. But my heart aches for Odysseus, when I think of how he suffers far away from all his friends and family. Father Zeus, why do you ignore poor Odysseus? Did he not offer you many gifts and sacrifices in the land of Troy? Why, then, are you so angry with him?”

And Zeus said, “My child, what are you talking about? How can I forget Odysseus?”

No man on earth is more capable or more generous in his offerings to the immortal gods. But Poseidon is still furious with Odysseus. And, while he will not go so far as to kill Odysseus, Poseidon **torments** him by preventing him from getting home. Still, let us work together to help Odysseus, for Poseidon will not be able to stand against us all.”

**torments:**  
causes emotional  
or physical pain

Athena said, “If the gods intend to help Odysseus reach his home, then I will go to **Ithaca** to stir up the spirit of Odysseus’s son, Telemachus.”

Athena grasped her bronze spear, and down she darted from the **summits** of Olympus to the island of Ithaca, where she appeared in **disguise** in front of Odysseus’s house. Inside the house sat Telemachus, sad and **brooding**. Years ago, when Telemachus was a child only a month old, his father had been called to join the war against Troy.

**Ithaca:** Odysseus’s homeland, an island that is now part of Greece, located to the west of continental Greece

**summits:** highest points of hills or mountains

**disguise:** an appearance that conceals one’s true identity

**brooding:** thinking anxiously about unhappy matters

On that long-ago day, Odysseus reluctantly said goodbye to his infant son, his young wife

Penelope, and his father, old Laertes. He took his sailors and his fighting men with him and he sailed away from the island of Ithaca where he was king.

After ten years, Troy was at last taken by the kings and princes of Greece, but still Odysseus did not return. Ten years more went by, with no word of Odysseus. And now that infant son he had left behind, Telemachus, had grown up and was a young man.

On this day, as Telemachus sat in his father's house, he was surrounded by a busy troop of servants preparing for a great feast. Some were carrying platters of roast meat, others were filling huge bowls with wine and water, and others were washing the tables. In and around the house many young **nobles** lounged, relaxing on couches or playing games, to pass the time until the feast would be ready. Their talk was loud and rowdy, showing no respect for themselves or for others.

**nobles:** persons of high rank or royal status; people of wealth and power

A traveler approached the gateway that led into the **courtyard** of Odysseus's house. He was a man of middle age, carrying a long spear in his hand. Seeing

**courtyard:** an open area enclosed by the walls of a building or buildings

the stranger standing unnoticed at the entrance, Telemachus hurried towards him, his hand held out in welcome.

“Forgive me, friend,” Telemachus said, “for not noticing you sooner. My thoughts were far away. But welcome to the house of Odysseus. Come inside and take some refreshment.”

“I thank you,” said the stranger, “and I am glad to enter the house of the **renowned** Odysseus.”

**renowned:** widely known and honored

The stranger followed Telemachus into the great hall of the house and placed his spear in a stand. Telemachus led him to a corner, away from the noisy crowd of men. A handmaiden brought water in a golden pitcher and poured it over their hands into a basin of silver. A table was set before them, heaped with good things to eat. Then **host** and guest together comforted their hearts with food and wine.

**host:** one who receives and cares for others as guests

But now Telemachus and his guest were disturbed by the crowd of men who ate and drank and talked loudly. They stared rudely at the stranger.

Telemachus drew his chair closer to the stranger and said quietly, “You see these unwelcome men who are feasting and giving orders in my father’s house. Once there was a man who would have driven them like frightened hounds from this hall. Sadly, his bones lie at the bottom of the sea. But, sir, now that you have eaten, tell me, who are you, and where is your home? Is this your first visit to Ithaca, or are you an old friend of this house?”

“My name is Mentès,” answered the stranger, “and I am a prince of a brave race of sailors. I am a friend of this house, well known to its master, Odysseus, and his father, Laertes. But tell me now, are you not the son of Odysseus? I knew him well, and you have his face and eyes.”

“Yes, I am his son,” replied Telemachus.

“Now explain to me once more,” said Mentès. “What is the meaning of this lawless **riot** in the house? What has brought all these men here?”

**riot:** great disturbances

“I will tell you,” answered Telemachus. “These are the men who have come to **woo** my mother. They demand she choose one of them to marry.

**woo:** to try to win someone’s affection

But she will give no answer to

them, for she ever hopes for her husband's return. And while she keeps them waiting for her answer, they eat up my father's goods. Before long, I think, they will make an end of me as well."

"How I wish," said Mentès, "that Odysseus were here with his helmet, shield, and spears. He would soon deal with these suitors. It may or may not be the will of the gods that he return, but either way, you must get these men out of your house. Therefore, **take heed**, and do as I tell you."

**take heed:** pay close attention; listen carefully

With his gray, clear, shining eyes, the stranger looked steadily at Telemachus and said, "Tomorrow call these suitors to the place of assembly, and there stand up and tell them that the time has come for them to depart to their homes. Then prepare a ship with twenty rowers to take you to Pylos, where old King Nestor dwells. He was with Odysseus in the war of Troy; ask him for news of your father. From Pylos go to Sparta, the kingdom of Menelaus, the last of the Greeks to reach home after the fall of Troy—perhaps from him you may learn some news of your father."

"Already," said Telemachus, "your gaze and

your speech make me feel equal to the task.”

“If you learn that your renowned father is indeed dead and gone,” continued the stranger, “then return home and hold a great funeral in his memory. And then may your mother choose a good man to be her husband, knowing that Odysseus will never come back. After that, you must punish those who have wasted your father’s goods and insulted his house. You are a man now, and must play a man’s part. And when you have done these things, Telemachus, you will rise to fame and be free to seek your own fortune. But now, I must proceed on my journey.”

As he led the stranger from the hall to the outer gate, Telemachus said, “I will not forget what you have told me. I know you possess a wise and a friendly heart.”

The stranger clasped the young man’s hands and went through the gate. Then, as Telemachus looked after him, he saw the stranger change in form. First he became a woman, tall and fair-haired, with a spear of bronze in her hand. And then the woman changed into a great sea-eagle that rose on wide wings and flew high through the

air. Telemachus knew then that his visitor was an immortal and no other than the goddess Athena, who had been his father's friend.

### *Telemachus Addresses the Suitors*

Telemachus returned to the hall. As he passed through the crowd, one suitor turned to another and said, "Never before did I see Telemachus hold himself so proudly."

Some men called out for the **minstrel** to come and sing to amuse them. The minstrel came and

**minstrel:** in ancient times, one who sang songs and recited poetry

sang a sad tale of the homecoming of the Greeks from Troy, and of how some god or goddess heaped troubles upon them as they left the ruined city.

As the minstrel sang, Telemachus's mother, Penelope, came down the stairs with two **handmaidens** beside her. When she heard the words he sang, Penelope cried, "Oh, have you no other song to sing but this tale that fills my heart with tears?"

**handmaidens:** female servants

"Mother," said Telemachus, "do not blame the minstrel for his song. He did not cause the sadness