

DEATH AT THE PALACE

The climax of the story is here, in Book 22. Although Odysseus is ready to reclaim his rightful kingdom, he must first confront more than a hundred hostile suitors. The first one he turns to is Antinous. All through the story, Antinous has been the meanest of the suitors and their ringleader. He hit Odysseus with a stool when the hero appeared in the hall as a beggar, and he ridiculed the disguised king by calling him a bleary vagabond, a pest, and a tramp.

Now shrugging off his rags the wildest fighter of the islands
leapt and stood on the broad doorsill, his own bow in his
hand.

He poured out at his feet a rain of arrows from the quiver
and spoke to the crowd:

“So much for that. Your clean-cut game is over.

1225 Now watch me hit a target that no man has hit before,
if I can make this shot. Help me, Apollo.”^o

He drew to his fist the cruel head of an arrow for Antinous
just as the young man leaned to lift his beautiful drinking
cup,

1230 embossed, two-handled, golden: the cup was in his fingers,
the wine was even at his lips, and did he dream of death?
How could he? In that revelry amid his throng of friends
who would imagine a single foe—though a strong foe
indeed—

could dare to bring death’s pain on him and darkness on
his eyes?

1235 Odysseus’ arrow hit him under the chin
and punched up to the feathers through his throat.

Backward and down he went, letting the wine cup fall
from his shocked hand. Like pipes his nostrils jetted
crimson runnels,^o a river of mortal red,
and one last kick upset his table

1240 knocking the bread and meat to soak in dusty blood.
Now as they craned to see their champion where he lay
the suitors jostled in uproar down the hall,
everyone on his feet. Wildly they turned and scanned
the walls in the long room for arms; but not a shield,

Vocabulary

revelry (rev’əl·rē) *n.*: merrymaking; festivity.



1221–1303. As you read this action scene, imagine it as a film. After you finish reading, choose one part of the scene, and sketch it in your notebook. Make a list of the props you would need if you were filming the battle.

1226. Help me, Apollo: Odysseus prays to Apollo because this particular day is one of the god’s feast days. Apollo is also the god of archery.

1238. runnels (run’əlz) *n.*: streams.

not a good ashen spear was there for a man to take and
 1245 throw.
 All they could do was yell in outrage at Odysseus:
 “Foul! to shoot at a man! That was your last shot!”
 “Your own throat will be slit for this!”
 “Our finest lad is down!
 You killed the best on Ithaca.”
 “Buzzards will tear your eyes out!”
 1250 For they imagined as they wished—that it was a wild shot,
 an unintended killing—fools, not to comprehend
 they were already in the grip of death.
 But glaring under his brows Odysseus answered:
 “You yellow dogs, you thought I’d never make it
 1255 home from the land of Troy. You took my house to plunder,
 twisted my maids to serve your beds. You dared
 bid for my wife while I was still alive.
 Contempt was all you had for the gods who rule wide
 heaven,
 contempt for what men say of you hereafter.
 1260 Your last hour has come. You die in blood.”
 As they all took this in, sickly green fear
 pulled at their entrails, and their eyes flickered
 looking for some hatch or hideaway from death.
 Eurymachus alone could speak. He said:
 1265 “If you are Odysseus of Ithaca come back,
 all that you say these men have done is true.
 Rash actions, many here, more in the countryside.
 But here he lies, the man who caused them all.
 Antinous was the ringleader, he whipped us on
 1270 to do these things. He cared less for a marriage
 than for the power Cronion^o has denied him
 as king of Ithaca. For that
 he tried to trap your son and would have killed him.
 He is dead now and has his portion. Spare
 1275 your own people. As for ourselves, we’ll make
 restitution of wine and meat consumed,
 and add, each one, a tithe of twenty oxen
 with gifts of bronze and gold to warm your heart.
 Meanwhile we cannot blame you for your anger.”



Suitor hiding behind a table: The return of Odysseus. Limestone relief from Turkey (380 B.C.).

Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria.

1271. Cronion (krō'nē·ən): another name for Zeus, meaning “son of Cronus.”

1280 Odysseus glowered under his black brows
and said:

“Not for the whole treasure of your fathers,
all you enjoy, lands, flocks, or any gold
put up by others, would I hold my hand.
There will be killing till the score is paid.

1285 You forced yourselves upon this house. Fight your way out,
or run for it, if you think you’ll escape death.
I doubt one man of you skins by.” . . .

*Telemachus joins his father in the fight. They are helped by the
swineherd and cowherd. Now the suitors, trapped in the hall with-
out weapons, are struck right and left by arrows, and many of them
lie dying on the floor.*

At this moment that unmanning thundercloud,
the aegis, Athena’s shield,
took form aloft in the great hall.

1290 And the suitors mad with fear
at her great sign stampeded like stung cattle by a river
when the dread shimmering gadfly strikes in summer,
in the flowering season, in the long-drawn days.
After them the attackers wheeled, as terrible as falcons
from eyries° in the mountains veering over and diving

1295 down
with talons wide unsheathed on flights of birds,
who cower down the sky in chutes and bursts along the
valley—
but the pouncing falcons grip their prey, no frantic wing
avails,
and farmers love to watch those beakèd hunters.
1300 So these now fell upon the suitors in that hall,
turning, turning to strike and strike again,
while torn men moaned at death, and blood ran smoking
over the whole floor. . . .

(from Book 22)

Vocabulary

glowered (glou’ərd) v.: glared; stared angrily.

avails (ə·vālz’) v.: is of use; helps.



Ulysses Slaying the Suitors (detail)
(1802) by Henry Fuseli.

© 2003 Kunsthaus Zurich.

1295. **eyries** (er’ēz) *n.*: nests built in
high places.



1221–1303. How does this
bloody episode relate to the epic’s
theme about the value of hospital-
ity and about what happens to
people who mock divine laws?

ODYSSEUS AND PENELOPE

Odysseus now calls forth the maids who have betrayed his household by associating with the suitors. He orders them to clean up the house and dispose of the dead. Telemachus then “pays” them by hanging them in the courtyard.

Eurycleia tells Penelope about the return of Odysseus and the defeat of the suitors. The faithful wife—the perfect mate for the wily Odysseus—suspects a trick from the gods. She decides to test the stranger who claims to be her husband.

1305 Crossing the doorsill she sat down at once
in firelight, against the nearest wall,
across the room from the lord Odysseus.

There

leaning against a pillar, sat the man
and never lifted up his eyes, but only waited
for what his wife would say when she had seen him.
1310 And she, for a long time, sat deathly still
in wonderment—for sometimes as she gazed
she found him—yes, clearly—like her husband,
but sometimes blood and rags were all she saw.
Telemachus’s voice came to her ears:

“Mother,

1315 cruel mother, do you feel nothing,
drawing yourself apart this way from Father?
Will you not sit with him and talk and question him?
What other woman could remain so cold?
Who shuns her lord, and he come back to her
1320 from wars and wandering, after twenty years?
Your heart is hard as flint and never changes!”

Penelope answered:

“I am stunned, child.

I cannot speak to him. I cannot question him.
I cannot keep my eyes upon his face.
1325 If really he is Odysseus, truly home,
beyond all doubt we two shall know each other
better than you or anyone. There are
secret signs we know, we two.”

A smile

1330 came now to the lips of the patient hero, Odysseus,
who turned to Telemachus and said:

“Peace: let your mother test me at her leisure.
Before long she will see and know me best.



1304. Make notes about Penelope as you read this episode. What might she be thinking?



Penelope (1878) by Anthony Frederick Augustus Sandys. Colored chalk on paper. Cecil Higgins Art Gallery, Bedford, Bedfordshire, England.

Odysseus orders Telemachus, the swineherd, and the cowherd to bathe and put on fresh clothing.

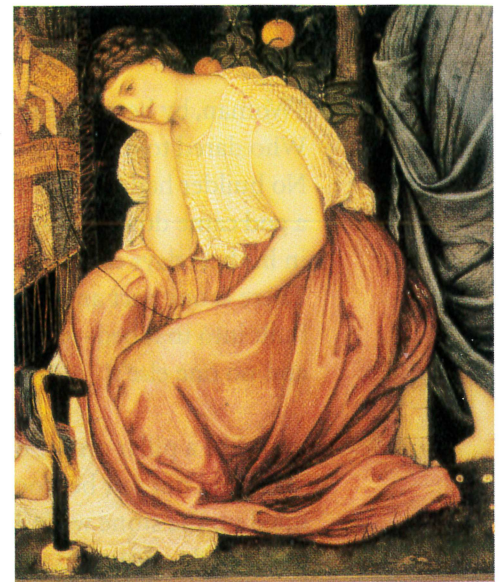
“Strange woman,

Nurse, make up a bed for me to sleep on.
Her heart is iron in her breast.”

“Strange man,

Make up his bed for him, Eurycleia.
Place it outside the bedchamber my lord
built with his own hands. Pile the big bed
with fleeces, rugs, and sheets of purest linen.”

aloof (ə·looʹf) *adj.*: at a distance; unfriendly.



The De Morgan Foundation, London, UK.

- 1365 With this she tried him to the breaking point,
and he turned on her in a flash, raging:
- “Woman, by heaven you’ve stung me now!
Who dared to move my bed?
No builder had the skill for that—unless
- 1370 a god came down to turn the trick. No mortal
in his best days could budge it with a crowbar.
There is our pact and pledge, our secret sign,
built into that bed—my handiwork
and no one else’s!
- An old trunk of olive
- 1375 grew like a pillar on the building plot,
and I laid out our bedroom round that tree,
lined up the stone walls, built the walls and roof,
gave it a doorway and smooth-fitting doors.
Then I lopped off the silvery leaves and branches,
- 1380 hewed and shaped the stump from the roots up
into a bedpost, drilled it, let it serve
as model for the rest, I planed them all,
inlaid them all with silver, gold, and ivory,
and stretched a bed between—a pliant web
of oxhide thongs dyed crimson.
- 1385 There’s our sign!
- I know no more. Could someone else’s hand
have sawn that trunk and dragged the frame away?”
- Their secret! as she heard it told, her knees
grew tremulous and weak, her heart failed her.
- 1390 With eyes brimming tears she ran to him,
throwing her arms around his neck, and kissed him,
murmuring:
- “Do not rage at me, Odysseus!
- No one ever matched your caution! Think
what difficulty the gods gave: they denied us
- 1395 life together in our prime and flowering years,
kept us from crossing into age together.
Forgive me, don’t be angry. I could not
welcome you with love on sight! I armed myself
long ago against the frauds of men,
- 1400 impostors who might come—and all those many

Vocabulary

pliant (pli’ənt) *adj.*: flexible.

tremulous (trem’yōō·ləs) *adj.*: trembling; shaking.



1374–1384. This description of Odysseus and Penelope’s bed is famous—and complex. **Paraphrase** Odysseus’s description of the bed. What characteristics of the bed suggest the strength and endurance of their love?

whose underhanded ways bring evil on! . . .
But here and now, what sign could be so clear
as this of our own bed?

No other man has ever laid eyes on it—
1405 only my own slave, Actoris, that my father
sent with me as a gift—she kept our door.
You make my stiff heart know that I am yours.”

Now from his breast into his eyes the ache
of longing mounted, and he wept at last,
1410 his dear wife, clear and faithful, in his arms,
longed for

as the sun-warmed earth is longed for by a swimmer
spent in rough water where his ship went down
under Poseidon’s blows, gale winds and tons of sea.
Few men can keep alive through a big surf
1415 to crawl, clotted with brine, on kindly beaches
in joy, in joy, knowing the abyss behind:
and so she too rejoiced, her gaze upon her husband,
her white arms round him pressed, as though forever. . . .

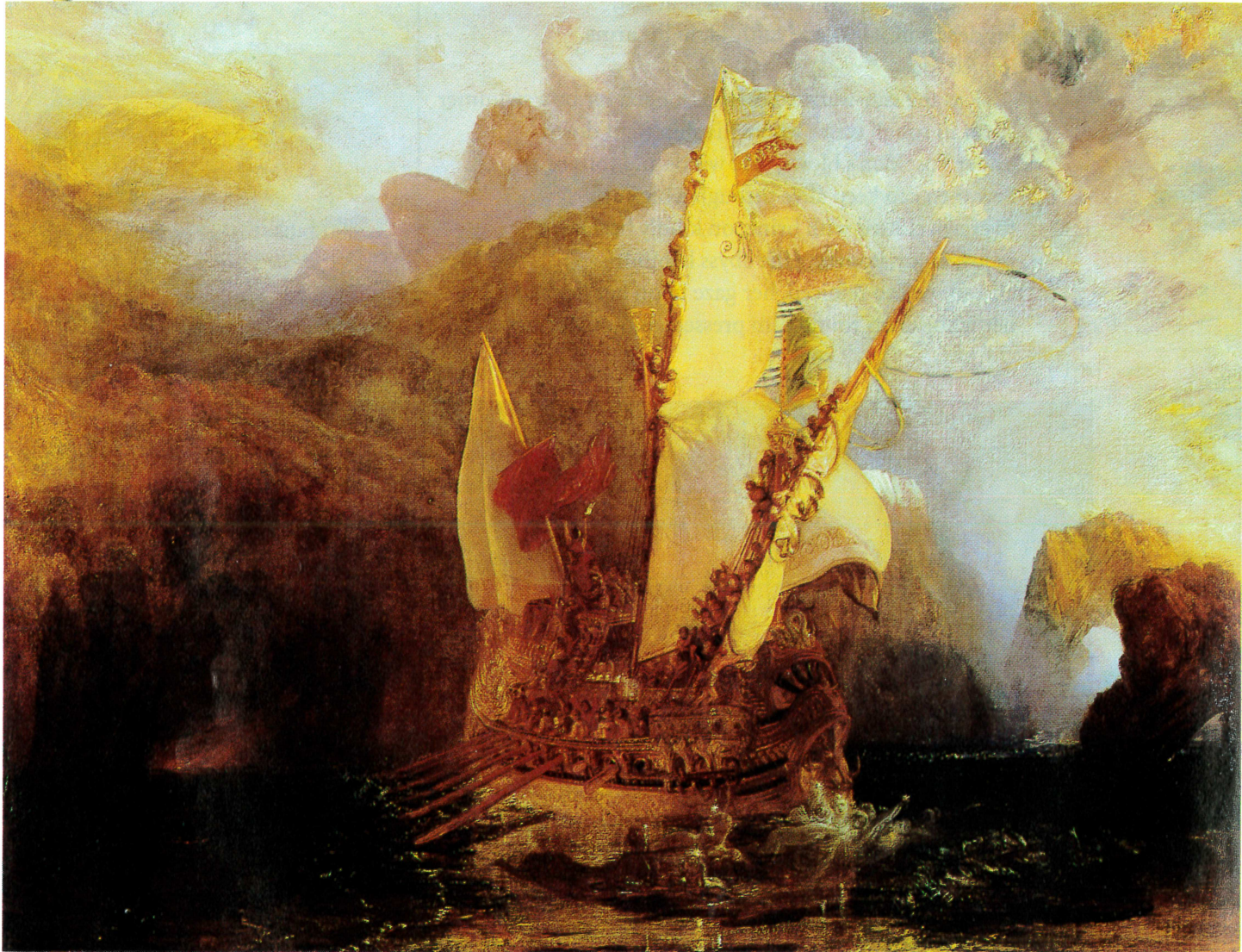
(from Book 23)

 **1408–1418.** The journey
ends with an embrace. What
simile helps you understand the
joy Odysseus feels in the arms of
his wife?



Penelope and Her Suitors (1912) by J. W. Waterhouse.

City of Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums Collection, Scotland.



Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus (detail) (19th century) by J.M.W. Turner. Oil on canvas.
Tate Gallery, London.

Ithaca

C. P. Cavafy

*translated by Edmund Keeley
and Philip Sherrard*



- When you set out for Ithaca,
pray that your road's a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery.
Laistrygonians, Cyclops,
5 angry Poseidon—don't be scared of them:
you won't find things like that on your way
as long as your thoughts are exalted,
as long as a rare excitement
stirs your spirit and your body.
10 Laistrygonians, Cyclops,
wild Poseidon—you won't encounter them
unless you bring them along inside you,
unless your soul raises them up in front of you.
- Pray that your road's a long one.
15 May there be many a summer morning when—
full of gratitude, full of joy—
you come into harbors seen for the first time;
may you stop at Phoenician trading centers
and buy fine things,
20 mother-of-pearl and coral, amber and ebony,
sensual perfumes of every kind,
as many sensual perfumes as you can;
may you visit numerous Egyptian cities
to fill yourself with learning from the wise.
- 25 Keep Ithaca always in mind.
Arriving there is what you're destined for.
But don't hurry the journey at all.
Better if it goes on for years
so you're old by the time you reach the island,
30 wealthy with all you've gained on the way,
not expecting Ithaca to make you rich.
Ithaca gave you the marvelous journey.
Without her you wouldn't have set out.
She hasn't anything else to give.
- 35 And if you find her poor, Ithaca won't have
fooled you.
Wise as you'll have become, and so
experienced,
you'll have understood by then what an
Ithaca means.

The Sea Call

Nikos Kazantzakis

translated by Kimon Friar

When Odysseus meets Teiresias in the underworld, the prophet tells him that he will reach home but will then take yet another journey to a land where people live who know nothing of the sea. (See pages 676–677.) In this excerpt from a modern sequel to the Odyssey by the twentieth-century Greek poet Nikos Kazantzakis, Odysseus has returned to Ithaca. Sitting by the hearth with his family, his eyes alight with excitement, he relates his adventures. But then . . .

Odysseus sealed his bitter lips and spoke no more,
but watched the glowering fire fade, the withering flames,
the ash that spread like powder on the dying coals,
then turned, glanced at his wife, gazed on his son and father,
5 and suddenly shook with fear and sighed, for now he knew
that even his native land was a sweet mask of Death.
Like a wild beast snared in a net, his eyes rolled round
and tumbled down his deep eye-sockets, green and bloodshot.
His tribal palace seemed a narrow shepherd's pen,
10 his wife a small and wrinkled old housekeeping crone,
his son an eighty-year-old drudge who, trembling, weighed
with care to find what's just, unjust, dishonest, honest,
as though all life were prudence, as though fire were just,
and logic the highest good of eagle-mounting man!
15 The heart-embattled athlete laughed, dashed to his feet,
and his home's sweetness, suddenly, his longed-for land,
the twelve gods, ancient virtue by his honored hearth,
his son—all seemed opposed now to his high descent.
The fire dwindled and died away, and the four heads
20 and his son's smooth-skinned calves with tender softness glowed
till in the trembling hush Penelope's wan cries
broke in despair like water flowing down a wall.
Her son dashed and stood upright by his mother's throne,
touched gently with a mute compassion her white arm,
25 then gazed upon his father in the dim light, and shuddered,
for in the last resplendence of the falling fire
he could discern the unmoving eyes flash yellow, blue,
and crimson, though the dark had swallowed the wild body.
With silent strides Odysseus then shot back the bolt,
30 passed lightly through the courtyard and sped down the street.
Some saw him take the graveyard's zigzag mountain path,
some saw him leap on rocks that edged the savage shore,
some visionaries saw him in the dead of night
swimming and talking secretly with the sea-demons,
35 but only a small boy saw him in a lonely dream
sit crouched and weeping by the dark sea's foaming edge.

Response and Analysis

from the *Odyssey*, Part Two

Reading Check

1. Describe Argos's condition when Odysseus sees him.
2. What is the contest of the bow, and how will Penelope reward the winner?
3. Just before trying the bow, Odysseus reveals himself to two people. Who are they? Why does he confide in them?
4. List at least five images or events from Odysseus's battle with the suitors.
5. How does Penelope test Odysseus after the battle?

Thinking Critically

6. What **Homeric simile** in lines 1031–1033 describes the feelings of Odysseus and his son as they embrace after twenty years? How would you describe exactly what the father and his son are feeling here?
7. **Situational irony** occurs when what happens is different from what we expect. Why is it ironic that Odysseus returns to his kingdom dressed as a beggar?
8. **Dramatic irony** refers to a situation in which readers know more than the characters know. Where in the scene in the swineherd's hut is there dramatic irony?
9. In epics it is rare for heroes to have relationships with ordinary people, but in the *Odyssey*, servants play important roles. How does Odysseus treat Eumaeus and the cowherd? What values might Homer be trying to teach through that treatment?
10. What **character traits** does Penelope reveal in her interactions with Odysseus disguised as a beggar?

11. What does the interaction between Odysseus and Penelope in lines 1348–1418 tell you about their relationship? Calypso wondered what it was about Penelope that drew Odysseus homeward (see page 654). Now that you've met Penelope, how would you answer Calypso?
12. The *Odyssey* is many centuries old. Do you think the feelings and needs shown by the people in the *Odyssey* are shared by people today? Which feelings does the speaker in "An Ancient Gesture" identify with (see the **Connection** on page 697)? Which experiences or people in this story did you identify with most? Why?
13. Suppose a modern general, like Odysseus, had fought a war for ten years and was missing for another ten years. What emotions might he (or she) have experienced upon returning home? What changes might he (or she) have found at home after twenty years? (Check your Quickwrite notes for page 689.) 
14. In "Ithaca" (see the **Connection** on page 711), a modern Greek poet uses Ithaca as a **symbol**, a place that functions as itself in the poem but also stands for something beyond itself. Explain what you think "arriving in Ithaca" could mean for all of us.

Extending and Evaluating

15. Do you think Odysseus's revenge on the suitors and maids is excessive or too brutal? Explore this question from Odysseus's viewpoint (remember that he is the rightful king) and from your own modern viewpoint.

SKILLS FOCUS

Literary Skills

Analyze characteristics of epic poetry, including character traits.

Writing Skills

Discuss the hero's character traits in a brief essay. Write a continuation of the story. Write a story plan. Write a movie proposal. Discuss how the epic relates to life today in a brief essay.

WRITING

Choose from among the following assignments to respond to the *Odyssey*:

1. Noble or Not?

In a brief **essay**, discuss at least four of Odysseus's **character traits**. Find situations in the epic that reveal each trait. In your final paragraph, sum up your opinion of Odysseus's character. Do you think he is totally admirable? To what extent would he be considered a hero today?

2. Prophetic Puzzler

In Part One, lines 639–658 (page 677), Teiresias makes a famous prophecy: Odysseus will take off on yet another journey after he returns home. (For part of one writer's extension of the *Odyssey*, see "The Sea Call," the **Connection** on page 712.) What do you think happens to Odysseus after he takes back his kingdom? Write your own continuation of Odysseus's story based on Teiresias's prophecy.

3. Her Odyssey

Write a **story plan** showing how an odyssey could have a woman as its voyaging hero. You may set your story in any time and place, from Odysseus's Greece to your hometown today to a distant galaxy in the future. Consider these points in your plan:

- occupation of the hero; her reason for being away from home; her situation at home
- trials of her journey; how she deals with the "monsters" she meets
- what happens when she returns home

4. And Now—The Movie

Write a **proposal** in which you suggest ways that the *Odyssey* could be made into a movie—set in contemporary times. In your proposal, written for the people who will produce the movie, you will have to explain how you would modernize the *Odyssey*.

Write two or three paragraphs. Use a chart like the one below to organize your ideas:

1200 B.C.	Today
a. Trojan War as a background	a.
b. Hero is soldier who fought in war	b.
c. Hero journeys home around Mediterranean and down to the underworld	c.
d. Hero uses ships with oars and sails	d.
e. Hero meets Lotus Eaters, Sirens, Scylla, and Charybdis	e.
f. Hero is tempted by Circe and Calypso	f.
g. Fortune hunters at home hound hero's wife	g.
h. Hero's son is insulted	h.
i. Gods dominate the action	i.

5. Timeless Messages

A work of literature becomes important to us when we feel that it relates to our lives. In a brief **essay**, discuss at least three ways in which the *Odyssey* relates to life today. You might consider what it says about these values:

- courtesy and respect for all groups of people
- courage, trust, and discipline
- loyalty to family and community
- obedience to law—human or divine