



Odysseus' Revenge

Now shrugging off his rags the williest¹⁷ 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:

1410 "So much for that. Your clean-cut game is over. Now watch me hit a target that no man has hit before, if I can make this shot. Help me, Apollo."

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,

1415 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 revelry¹⁸ amid his throng of friends who would imagine a single foe—though a strong foe indeed—

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

1420 Odysseus' arrow hit him under the chin and punched up to the feathers through his throat.

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

1425 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, 1430 not a good ashen spear was there for a man to take and 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!"

17. **williest** (wil' ē est) *adj.*
craftiest; slyest.

28

◀ **Critical Viewing** Do you think this illustration presents the slaughter of the suitors accurately? Explain. **[Evaluate]**

18. **revelry** (rev' əl rē) *n.* noisy festivity.

Reading Skill Historical and Cultural Context

Does the manner in which Odysseus kills Antinous agree with your idea of a "fair fight"? Explain.

30



**Reading
Check**

Whom does Odysseus kill first?

1435 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:

1440 “You yellow dogs, you thought I’d never make it
home from the land of Troy. You took my house to
plunder. . .

31

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.
Your last hour has come. You die in blood.”

1445 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.
Eurymachus¹⁹ alone could speak. He said:

1450 “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
to do these things. He cared less for a marriage
1455 than for the power Cronion 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
your own people. As for ourselves, we’ll make
1460 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.”

1465 Odysseus glowered under his black brows
and said:

1470 “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.
You forced yourselves upon this house. Fight your way out,
or run for it, if you think you’ll escape death.

Vocabulary

contempt (kən tempt’)

n. disdain or scorn

Reading Skill

Historical and Cultural

Context What cultural values are revealed by Odysseus’ explanation for his anger in lines 1441–1444?

19. Eurymachus

(yŏō rī’ mē kēs)

I doubt one man of you skins by."

They felt their knees fail, and their hearts—but heard Eurymachus for the last time rallying them.

"Friends," he said, "the man is implacable. Now that he's got his hands on bow and quiver he'll shoot from the big doorstone there until he kills us to the last man.

Fight, I say,

let's remember the joy of it. Swords out! Hold up your tables to deflect his arrows.

After me, everyone: rush him where he stands.

If we can budge him from the door, if we can pass into the town, we'll call out men to chase him. This fellow with his bow will shoot no more."

He drew his own sword as he spoke, a broadsword of fine bronze,

honed like a razor on either edge. Then crying hoarse and loud

he hurled himself at Odysseus. But the kingly man let fly an arrow at that instant, and the quivering feathered butt sprang to the nipple of his breast as the barb stuck in his liver.

The bright broadsword clanged down. He lurched and fell aside,

pitching across his table. His cup, his bread and meat, were spilt and scattered far and wide, and his head slammed on the ground.

Revulsion, anguish in his heart, with both feet kicking out, he downed his chair, while the shrouding wave of mist closed on his eyes.

Amphinomus now came running at Odysseus, broadsword naked in his hand. He thought to make the great soldier give way at the door.

But with a spear throw from behind Telemachus hit him between the shoulders, and the lancehead drove clear through his chest. He left his feet and fell forward, thudding, forehead against the ground.

Telemachus swerved around him, leaving the long dark spear

planted in Amphinomus. If he paused to yank it out

Literary Analysis

Epic Simile Why is the comparison of Eurymachus' sharp sword to a razor only a simile and not an epic simile?

33 Reading Check

What does Eurymachus offer Odysseus to try to calm his anger?

from the *Odyssey*, Part 2, 1109

someone might jump him from behind or cut him down with
a sword
at the moment he bent over. So he ran—ran from the tables
to his father's side and halted, panting, saying:

1505

"Father let me bring you a shield and spear,
a pair of spears, a helmet.
I can arm on the run myself; I'll give
outfits to Eumaeus and this cowherd.
Better to have equipment."

1510

Said Odysseus:

"Run then, while I hold them off with arrows
as long as the arrows last. When all are gone
if I'm alone they can dislodge me."

34

Quick

upon his father's word Telemachus

1515

ran to the room where spears and armor lay.

He caught up four light shields, four pairs of spears,
four helms of war high-plumed with flowing manes,
and ran back, loaded down, to his father's side.

He was the first to pull a helmet on

1520

and slide his bare arm in a buckler strap.

The servants armed themselves, and all three took their
stand

beside the master of battle.

While he had arrows
he aimed and shot, and every shot brought down
one of his huddling enemies.

1525

But when all barbs had flown from the bowman's fist,
he leaned his bow in the bright entryway

beside the door, and armed: a four-ply shield
hard on his shoulder, and a crested helm,

horsetailed, nodding stormy upon his head,

1530

then took his tough and bronze-shod spears. . . .

*Aided by Athena, Odysseus, Telemachus, Eumaeus, and
other faithful herdsmen kill all the suitors.*

And Odysseus looked around him, narrow-eyed,
for any others who had lain hidden
while death's black fury passed.

Reading Skill
Historical and Cultural
Context What cultural
values are reflected in
Telemachus' behavior
toward his father?

he saw that crowd all fallen, many and many slain.

In blood and dust

1535 Think of a catch that fishermen haul in to a half-moon bay
in a fine-meshed net from the whitecaps of the sea:
15 how all are poured out on the sand, in throes for the salt sea,
16 twitching their cold lives away in Helios' fiery air:
so lay the suitors heaped on one another.

Literary Analysis

Epic Simile Which aspects of the slain suitors' appearance does the epic simile in lines 1535–1539 emphasize?