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The Odyssey

Book 14 ~ Study Guide

from John McIlvain

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Image source: http://www.beloit.edu/~classics/main/courses/classics100/museum2/art_museum2.html

Note: This site is designed to be used with Robert Fagles' translation of the *Odyssey*, published by Penguin USA. It was prepared for a 9th grade English class.

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THE LOYAL SWINEHERD

SCENE: Ithaca

IMPORTANT CHARACTERS: Odysseus, Eumaeus.

For the next seven books Odysseus, following Athena's directions, assumes the disguise of an old beggar. Here, he travels to the swineherd's place - a pig farm (technically Odysseus') that is overseen by the loyal Eumaeus. Eumaeus has retained the traditional values relating to hospitality; he quickly calls off the dogs that threaten Odysseus when he arrives, and immediately offers him food and shelter. He also clearly has remained faithful to his master ("Worlds away as he is. I call him Master, Brother!"). Eumaeus reveals the terrible state of things with the opportunistic and greedy suitors tells Penelope's fate and laments Telemachus' journey to Pylos. When Odysseus foretells his own return, Eumaeus expresses doubt. After worrying about Telemachus' safety, he asks the stranger to tell his story. Odysseus claims he is a man from Crete who has fallen upon hard times after fighting in the Trojan War and having a successful seven year venture in Egypt. The tales have some similarity to Odysseus' adventures in that they feature many swings of fortune. In the story, "the stranger" mentions that recently he has heard of Odysseus' being readied with a ship for his return to Ithaca. Once again Eumaeus expresses doubt, somewhat exasperating the story teller.

The chapter ends with the swineherd preparing a feast for the guest who had suffered so much. He passes a final "test" by covering his thin clad guest with a winter cloak before going to sleep near the "white tusked boars" to ensure their protection.

PAY ATTENTION TO:

- Odysseus testing of Eumaeus; the frequent mention of Zeus;
- Eumaeus referred to as "_ou";
- Eumaeus' pride in Odysseus; his pessimism;
- Odysseus as a story teller;
- parallels and difference in his "story" to his own experiences;
- Odysseus as a tester of Eumaeus;
- the fixing of the "tasty supper in the lodge";
- cloaks.

EPITHETS : Who is:

- "loyal swineherd?"
- "great teller of tales?"

QUESTIONS:

1. How is the swineherd (Eumaeus) connected to Odysseus?
2. What is the prediction about Odysseus that the stranger swears "on my oath" to Eumaeus?
3. How does Eumaeus react to this information?
4. Odysseus tells the swineherd he is from what kind of background? Suffered what kind of hardships?
5. How does Eumaeus react to Odysseus' story?
6. Who gets the "boar's long loin . . . the cut of honor" in Eumaeus' shelter?
7. Why does Odysseus say, "I'm not long for the living. The cold will do me in./ See, I've got no cloak."

QUOTATIONS TO REMEMBER:

And you replied, Eumaeus, loyal swineherd, (63)
It's wrong, my friend, to send a stranger packing -
even one who arrives in worse shape than you.
Every stranger and beggar comes from Zeus."

"Eat up now, my friend. It's all we slaves have got, (93)
scrawny pork, while the suitors eat the fatted hogs –
no fear of the god in their hard hearts, no mercy
Trust me, the blessed gods have no love for crime.
They honor justice, the decent acts of men."

"Believe me, my master's wealth was vast; (111)
No other prince on earth could match his riches."

"True, this very month - just as the old moon dies (188)
and the new moon rises into life - Odysseus will return!
He will come home and take revenge on any man
who offends his wedded wife and princely son. "

I hale from Crete's broad land . . . (228)

But now my heyday's gone - (244)

. . .it was always oarswept ships that thrilled my heart, (266)
and wars, and the long polished spears and arrows,
dreadful gear that makes the next man cringe.
I loved them all - god planted that love inside me.
Each man delights in the work that suits him best. , , ,

"But swept away by their own reckless fury, the crew went beserk - (296)
they promptly began to plunder the lush Egyptian farms. . . .

"Zeus himself . . . (350)
thrust the huge mast of my dark prowed vessel
right into my arms

"The gods hid me themselves" (404)

"Bring in your fattest hog! (468)
I'll slaughter it for our guest from far abroad."

"You won't want for clothes or whatever else (596)
is due a worn-out traveler come for help."

Then out he went to sleep where the white-tusked boars (600)
had settled down for the night.

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