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The Odyssey

Book 24 ~ 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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PEACE

SCENE: Hades, Ithaca (the town and Laertes' farm)

CHARACTERS: shades of the tutors, Agamemnon, Achilles, Odysseus, Laertes, Telemachus, Dolius (Father of Melanthius and Melanthe); Eupithes (father of Antinous), Medon, Halitherses, Athena.

The suitors descend into Hades and meet three of the Greek Captains from the Trojan war, Achilles, Patroclus and Agamemnon. Once again we hear from Agamemnon, who not only details the nature of his death, but contrasts it with the honors the Achaeans paid to Achilles when he had died. The suitors, who tell their story hoping for solace, instead are scorned by Agamemnon, who extols the virtues of Penelope. When he reaches the farm, Odysseus decides to test his father - old habits die hard. Their ultimate reunion, like those between Odysseus and Telemachus, and Odysseus and Penelope, is emotional. It is juxtaposed to the non-reunion of Eupithes and his slain son Antinous. A number of the relatives of the suitors vow vengeance and cannot be dissuaded by the sensible voices of Medon and Halitherses. They come to fight Odysseus, his father and the faithful herdsmen and a new ally, Dolius, the loyal father of the traitorous Melanthe and Melanthius. The three generations of Odysseus family stand side by side and Laertes is given a moment of glory. Another slaughter seems immanent but Athena disguised as Mentor stays Odysseus' hand and the

even the honest ones to come.

At these words (352)
a black cloud of grief came shrouding over Laertes.
Both hands clawing the earth for dirt and grime,
he poured it over his grizzled head, sobbing in spasms.
Odysseus' heart shuddered . . .

Living poof - and Laertes (383)
knees went slack, his heart surrendered . . .

". . .we'll hang our heads together, (478)
all disgraced, even by generations down the years,
if we don't punish the murderers of our brothers and our sons!
Why life would lose its relish . . ."

(Zeus to Athena) Do as your heart desires - (531)
but let me tell you how it should be done.

"Hold back you men of Ithaca, back from brutal war! (584)
Break off - shed no more blood - make peace at once!"
So Athena commanded. Terror blanched their faces,
they went limp with fear, weapons slipped from their hands . . .
They spun in flight to the city, wild to save their lives,
but loosing a savage cry, the long-enduring great Odysseus,
gathering all his force, swooped like a soaring eagle -
just as the son of Cronus hurled a reeking bolt
just at her feet, the mighty father's daughter,
and blazing eyed Athena wheeled on Odysseus, crying,
"Royal son of Laertes, Odysseus, master of exploits,
hold back now. Call a halt to the great leveler, War -
don't court the rage of Zeus who rules the world!"
So she commanded. He obeyed her, glad at heart. (598)

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