

Metis – means wisdom, skill or craft.

Odysseus is always showing his metis, with the ship he made to get off Calypso's island, with the marriage bed he made for Penelope. Eumaeus, the swineherd also shows metis, in the introduction to his book.

Unlike Achilles in the Iliad, Odysseus is not famous for his great strength or courage, but for his keen ability to deceive and trick others.

Nostos – the idea of homecoming after a long journey

There are many instances in The Odyssey in which Odysseus is longing to return home to Penelope, his wife, for example, when he is stuck on Calypso's island, Ogygia. Another example is during the night before he leaves the island of the Phaeacians, after he has told them his lengthy story, when he "kept turning his face at the blazing Sun, impatient for it to set, as he was longing to be on his way".

What books do I need to know?

1,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,16,19,21,22,23.

Book 1. Athene visits Telemachus.

The poem opens with: 'Tell me, Muse, the story of that resourceful man who was driven to wander far and wide after he had sacked the holy citadel of Troy.' Odysseus' metis is immediately highlighted. In this epic poem, Athena is Homer's Muse, and she has taken Odysseus as her 'favourite'.

Homer writes that 'all the gods pitied him, except Poseidon, who pursued the heroic Odysseus with relentless malice to the day when he reached his own country'. This is because Odysseus blinded his son, Polyphemus, the Cyclops, which we are told about in detail in Book 9 and outlined around line 70 of Book 1.

Zeus immediately clears up the question of fate, and if everything is predetermined, saying: 'What a lamentable thing it is that men should blame the gods and regard us as the source of their troubles, when it is their own transgressions which bring them suffering that was not their destiny.' (Line 36)

The first time Athene begins speaking, she opens with a triad of flattery of Zeus: 'Father of ours, Son of Cronos, King of Kings'.

Note that, so far, it is only Poseidon out of the gods who has not had an epithet... sad times ☹

Athene appears in the disguise of the Taphian chieftain Mentos, a 'family friend', and Telemachus welcomes her/him into his home, the house of Odysseus, and immediately demonstrates xenia. (See xenia essay [here](#).) He greets 'Mentos' with 'Welcome, friend! (...) You can tell us what has brought you here when you have had some food.' Zeus is also called Zeus Xenios (god of traveling)... you don't ever not do xenia or you will incur the wrath of Zeus.

Athene says to Telemachus: 'I will tell you everything honestly'; whenever anyone in the poem says they are going to do anything honestly (mainly Odysseus and Athene who say it though), you know NEVER to believe them.

Athene predicts Odysseus' return: 'The reason for my presence here is this. I actually heard that *he* was home – I mean your father. But the gods must be hindering his return, because the good Odysseus is not dead, but alive somewhere on this earth.' But then does not say she/he knows where he is- she is only meant to be Mentos, not Athene.

Athene advises Telemachus to tell the Suitors to 'leave and go home' and then to 'Choose (his) best ship, man her with twenty oarsmen, and set out to inquire after (his) long absent father'. Once this is settled, she suggests, he should 'think of some way of destroying this mob in (his) house, either by cunning or in open fight'.

Athene then disappears 'like a bird through a hole in the roof' and he realised 'a god had been with him'.

Telemachus has a change of mind set! "So go to your quarters now and attend to your own work, the loom and the spindle, and tell the servants to get on with theirs. Making decisions must be men's concern, and mine in particular; for I am the master in this house." This is the first point where he moves from helpless boy to independent man.

'bright-eyed Athene closed her (Penelope's) eyes in sweet sleep'.

Antinous, the dick-ish suitor is introduced. 'It is obvious that the gods are teaching you this bold and haughty way of speaking. Being your father's son, you are heir to this island realm. Heaven grant that you may never be its king!' (You're insulting!! Cannot say that even to the guy whose house you are chilling in!)

Eurykleia is introduced; she was brought by Mentos when she was a girl for the price of twenty oxen. She was treated 'with all the respect due to a loyal wife, though for fear of his wife's displeasure, he had not slept with her'. She now served 'as torch-bearer to his grandson and she who all of the household women loved most, for she had nursed him as a child'.

Book 5. Calypso

Zeus makes the decision to send Hermes to tell Calypso that 'The long-enduring Odysseus must now set out for home' after seven years. He then predicts exactly how Odysseus will get home:

"He shall set out on a raft put together by his own hands, and on the twentieth day, after great hardship, reach Scherie, the rich country of the Phaeacians, who are close to the gods. They will take him to their hearts and treat him like a god. They will convey him by ship to his own land, giving him bronze, gold and woven materials in such quantities as he could never have won for himself from Troy, even if he had come away with his fair share of the spoil. This is how it is ordained that he shall see his friends and come to his high-roofed house and his native land once more."

Note that Zeus is not the maker of fate: just the interpreter.

not refuse the goddess' favours, if you want her to free your men and look after you. But make her swear a solemn oath (...) not to try any of her tricks on you, or when she has you stripped naked she may rob you of your **courage** and your **manhood**."

Hermes then hands Odysseus **moly, a herb with 'a black root and a milk-white flower'**.

It all happens as Hermes predicted, and Odysseus ends up in bed with Circe. (He's totally taking one for the team.)

The four maids who do the housework for Circe 'are the daughters of Springs and Groves and sacred Rivers that flow out into the sea'.

Circe does *xenia* now, gives him a bath, rubs him with olive oil, and feeds him (except he doesn't eat, because he's worrying about his men). "Could any honourable man bear to taste food and drink before he had freed his men and seen them face to face?"

So Circe turns his men back into men, but "they looked younger and much more handsome and taller than before". And they "all wept tears of happiness, till the walls echoed with the mournful sound".

Odysseus is sent back to his men to store all his ship equipment in a cave, and to bring all his men up to Circe's home.

Eurylochus is, understandably, against him. "Why are you looking for trouble - going to Circe's palace, where she will turn you all into pigs or wolves or lions, and force you to keep watch over that great house of hers?" And points out how he did the same thing (stupidity, risking the lives of his men) with the Cyclops. "It was this man's recklessness that cost them their lives."

So, naturally, Odysseus considered drawing the long sword from (his) sturdy side and lopping his head off to roll in the dirt.

Odysseus was dissuaded from this particular plan, and they suggested that they just leave Eurylochus behind to guard the ship (but he came anyway, as he didn't want to be lonely).

They all wandered off to Circe's house, where they met the 21 men who were pigs, and who Circe had bathed and olive-oiled and dressed them.

They all cried again.

Circe tells Odysseus to tell his men to get a grip. And says: "Your sufferings have been so continuous that **you have lost all pleasure in living**."

They stayed at Circe's house 'for a whole year', but then his men decided they wanted to go home, and so, that night, Odysseus asks Circe for her help for them to get back home. She tells him that he has to find his 'way to the Halls of Hades and dread Persephone to consult the soul of Teiresias, the blind Theban prophet'.

To get there he has to go 'across the River of Ocean', then he will 'come to a wild coast and Persephone's Grove, where the tall poplars grow, and the willows that so quickly shed their seeds'.



1. She set up a 'great web' on her loom, and said it was a shroud for Laertes for when he dies, as there would be scandal if he was not laid to rest with a shroud as he 'amassed great wealth' during his life. She would then undo her work at night, and did this for 3 years, but on the 4th year her unfaithful maids caught her and told the suitors, who forced her to complete it.

Odysseus tells her a Crete story, and says that he entertained Odysseus in the palace. She asks for proof of ID, as it were. He describes a brooch Odysseus wore, in detail, and she gets emotional and believes him.

Odysseus tells her that Odysseus is close by, and will return soon.

Penelope insists on his feet being washed, and he only wants Eurycleia to do it as she has suffered as much as he has. She recognises a scar he has just above the knee, obtained when he was hunting a boar when he was young. She exclaims and Athene quickly distracts Penelope so she does not hear, while Odysseus grabs her by the throat, pulls her closer to him and tells her to shush.

Penelope asks Odysseus to interpret a dream she has had. She has a flock of twenty geese, and an eagle with a crooked beak swoops down and kills them all. The eagle then tells her not to be afraid for the geese were her suitors and the eagle is her husband, now home to kill them all.

"There is not one who will escape his destined death."

She tells Odysseus that she is planning to make them all do a test, one that only her husband would be able to win. She is going to use twelve axes, set up 'like she props under a new keel' and they should, while standing a long way off, shoot an arrow through all twelve. But they also have to string the bow, which will be quite tricky.

Then Penelope bids him goodnight.

Book 21: The Great Bow.

Penelope is prompted by Athene 'to confront the Suitors in the palace with the axes of grey iron that were to be a test of their skills and the instruments of their destruction'. They have to use Odysseus' bow, which is massive and was given to him by Iphitus. Iphitus was killed by Heracles shortly after.

She gets the bow, cries at the nostalgia, then goes to the Suitors and issues her challenge. She tells Eumaeus and the cowherd to stand up the axes, and they both cry a bit, Antinous has a huge go at them and tells them they are 'snivelling peasants'.

Telemachus tries and fails to string the bow, and he might have been able to on the fourth try, but Odysseus put an end to his attempts with a shake of the head'.

The first to try is Leodes, son of Oenops who 'always sat by the great wine-bowl in the far corner' and 'abhorred the Suitors' recklessness, and their conduct filled him with indignation'.

Melanthius, the goatherd, and sister of Melanthe, the horrible servant woman who Penelope calls a bitch, makes a fire at Antinous' request and they try to grease the bow and warm it, so they might have a better chance of stringing it.

All the men give it a go, but they are not strong enough, Antinous and Eurymachus hold back though.

Eumaeus and the cowherd, Philoetius, sneak out, Odysseus follows them and asks if they would stand behind Odysseus should he return and fight the Suitors.

He reveals himself to them by showing them his scar above his knee.

He comprises a plan!

1. When the Suitors refuse to let him
2. Have the bow and quiver, Eumaeus must bring the bow down the hall and put it in his hands.
3. He must then tell the women to lock the tight-fitting door, which leads to their rooms, and they must not leave their quarters.
4. Philoetius must bolt and bar the courtyard gate, so none can escape.

When Odysseus wanders back to the hall, Eurymachus is trying, and he fails. He is not upset about losing the chance to marry Penelope, but about the fact he and the rest of the men have been proved inadequate to Odysseus.

Antinous suggests that they give up for the day and make a sacrifice of the very best goats to Apollo, the great archer, and they all agree with this plan. Odysseus then asks if he can test his strength, and 'see whether there's any power left in these limbs that were once so strong'. His request 'enraged' them, and Antinous turns on him, finishing with 'don't attempt to compete with men younger than yourself'.

Penelope interrupted, and tells him to behave himself and be polite, and points out that there will be little harm in letting him try. Eurymachus defers to their principle, and Penelope tells them to stop being stupid and to let him have a go. Telemachus gives him the bow, as he is master of the house and 'not one of them (...) will override his decision. Telemachus tells Penelope to go to her quarters, getting her out of the way of the fighting.

Odysseus 'strung the great bow without effort or haste' and 'the Suitors were utterly mortified' and to mark the moment, 'a great thunderclap (came) from Zeus'. He then proceeded to shoot the bow through all twelve axes.

He then says that now is the time for supper, and NODS, signalling Telemachus to jump to attention.

Book 22. The Battle in the Hall.

Book 22 opens with Odysseus killing Antinous, and the battle begins. Each of the men was 'laboured under the delusion that (Odysseus) had killed the man by accident'.

"It has not dawned on the fools that the fate of all of them was sealed."

Odysseus gets really grumpy at them and gives them a 'black look'.