

## PART TWO: THE HOMECOMING

# BOOK 16:

## *Father and Son*

*In Books 13–15, King Alcinous and his friends send Odysseus on his way home. Odysseus sleeps while the rowers bring him to Ithaca. When he awakens, he fails to recognize his homeland until Athena appears and tells him that he is indeed home. She disguises him as an old man, so that he can surprise the suitors, and then urges him to visit his faithful swineherd, Eumaeus. The swineherd welcomes the disguised Odysseus and tells him about what has been happening in Odysseus' home. Athena goes to Telemachus and tells him to return home. She warns him of the suitors' plot to kill him and advises him to stay with the swineherd for a night. Telemachus does as she bids.*

But there were two men in the mountain hut—  
Odysseus and the swineherd. At first light  
blowing their fire up, they cooked their breakfast  
and sent their lads out, driving herds to root  
5 in the tall timber.

When Telemachus came,  
the wolfish troop of watchdogs only fawned on him  
as he advanced. Odysseus heard them go  
and heard the light crunch of a man's footfall—  
at which he turned quickly to say:

“Eumaeus,  
10 here is one of your crew come back, or maybe  
another friend: the dogs are out there snuffling  
belly down; not one has even growled.  
I can hear footsteps—”

But before he finished  
his tall son stood at the door.

### ANALYZE VISUALS

Review the information given in the summary at the top of this page. What do you think Marc Chagall wanted to capture in this painting?

*Athene and Telemach*, from *Odyssey II* (1975), Marc Chagall.  
Lithograph on Arches paper. 16.9" × 13". Photograph by George  
R. Staley. © 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

## The swineherd

15 rose in surprise, letting a bowl and jug  
tumble from his fingers. Going forward,  
he kissed the young man's head, his shining eyes  
and both hands, while his own tears brimmed and fell.  
Think of a man whose dear and only son,  
20 born to him in exile, reared with labor,  
has lived ten years abroad and now returns:  
how would that man embrace his son! Just so  
the herdsman clapped his arms around Telemachus **A**  
and covered him with kisses—for he knew  
25 the lad had got away from death. He said:

“Light of my days, Telemachus,  
you made it back! When you took ship for Pylos  
I never thought to see you here again.  
Come in, dear child, and let me feast my eyes;  
30 here you are, home from distant places! **B**  
How rarely anyway, you visit us,  
your own men, and your own woods and pastures!  
Always in the town, a man would think  
you loved the suitors' company, those dogs!”

35 Telemachus with his clear candor said:

“I am with you, Uncle. See now, I have come  
because I wanted to see you first, to hear from you  
if Mother stayed at home—or is she married  
off to someone and Odysseus' bed  
40 left empty for some gloomy spider's weaving?”

Gently the forester replied to this:

“At home indeed your mother is, poor lady,  
still in the women's hall. Her nights and days  
are wearied out with grieving.”

## Stepping back

45 he took the bronze-shod lance, and the young prince  
entered the cabin over the worn door stone.  
Odysseus moved aside, yielding his couch,  
but from across the room Telemachus checked him:

“Friend, sit down; we'll find another chair  
50 in our own hut. Here is the man to make one!”

### **A** EPIC

Reread lines 19–23. What **theme** is being developed in this **epic simile**?

**27 when you took ship for Pylos:** Ten years earlier, Telemachus went to Pylos (pī'lās') in search of knowledge about Odysseus' whereabouts.

### **B** EPIC

Reread lines 26–30. How do these lines indicate an epic **setting**?

The swineherd, when the quiet man sank down,  
built a new pile of evergreens and fleeces—  
a couch for the dear son of great Odysseus—  
then gave them trenchers of good meat, left over  
55 from the roast pork of yesterday, and heaped up  
willow baskets full of bread, and mixed  
an ivy bowl of honey-hearted wine.  
Then he in turn sat down, facing Odysseus,  
their hands went out upon the meat and drink  
60 as they fell to, ridding themselves of hunger. . . .

*Telemachus sends the swineherd to let his mother know he has returned safely.  
Athena appears and urges Odysseus to let Telemachus know who he really is.*

Saying no more,

she tipped her golden wand upon the man,  
making his cloak pure white and the knit tunic  
fresh around him. Lithe and young she made him,  
65 ruddy with sun, his jawline clean, the beard  
no longer grew upon his chin. And she  
withdrew when she had done.



Detail of *Goddess Athena Disguises Ulysses as Beggar* (18th century), Giuseppe Bottani. Civiche Racc d'Arte, Pavia, Italy. Photo © Dagli Orti /The Art Archive.

Then Lord Odysseus **C**

reappeared—and his son was thunderstruck.  
Fear in his eyes, he looked down and away  
70 as though it were a god, and whispered:

“Stranger,

you are no longer what you were just now!  
Your cloak is new; even your skin! You are  
one of the gods who rule the sweep of heaven!  
Be kind to us, we’ll make you fair oblation  
75 and gifts of hammered gold. Have mercy on us!”

The noble and enduring man replied:

“No god. Why take me for a god? No, no.  
I am that father whom your boyhood lacked  
and suffered pain for lack of. I am he.”

80 Held back too long, the tears ran down his cheeks  
as he embraced his son.

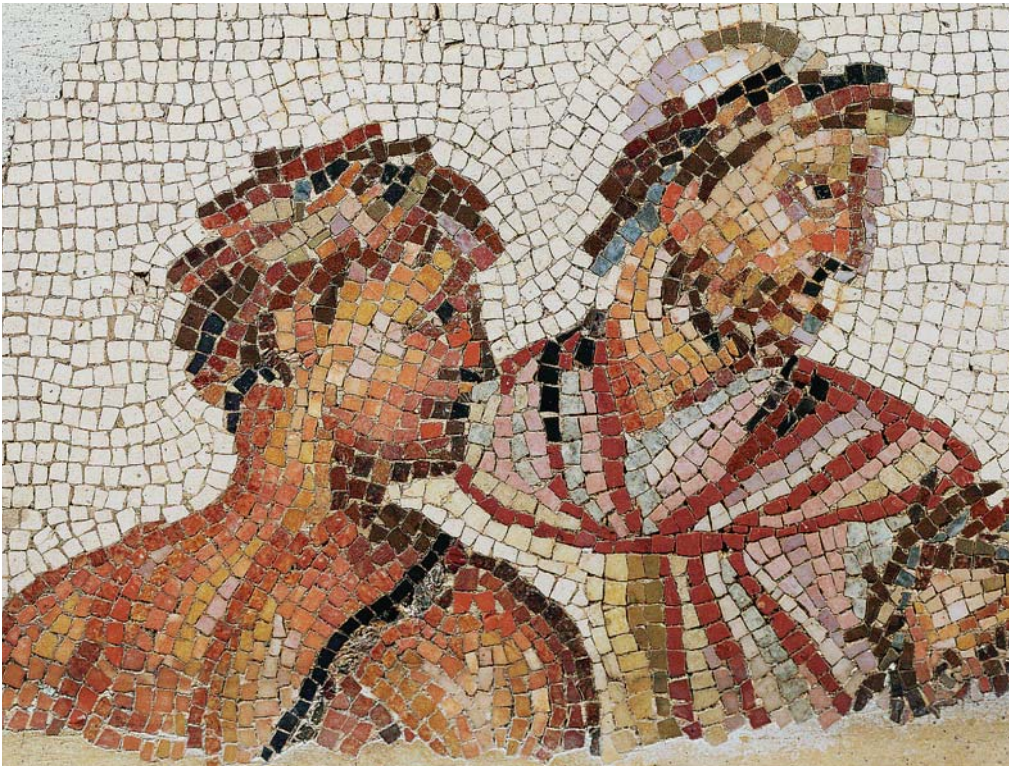
**C EPIC**

What supernatural event is described in lines 61–67?

**74 oblation:** sacrifice

**ANALYZE VISUALS**

This detail of an ancient Roman mosaic shows Odysseus (Ulysses) and Telemachus. How does the technique of clustering colored tiles together affect the kind of image that can be created? Be specific.



*Ulysses and His Son Telemachus* (A.D. first century). Mosaic.  
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. © Erich Lessing/Art Resource, New York.

Only Telemachus,

uncomprehending, wild  
with incredulity, cried out:

“You cannot

be my father Odysseus! Meddling spirits  
85 conceived this trick to twist the knife in me!  
No man of woman born could work these wonders  
by his own craft, unless a god came into it  
with ease to turn him young or old at will.  
I swear you were in rags and old,  
90 and here you stand like one of the immortals!” **D**

Odysseus brought his ranging mind to bear  
and said:

“This is not princely, to be swept  
away by wonder at your father’s presence.  
No other Odysseus will ever come,  
95 for he and I are one, the same; his bitter  
fortune and his wanderings are mine.  
Twenty years gone, and I am back again  
on my own island. . . .”

Then, throwing

100 his arms around this marvel of a father  
Telemachus began to weep. Salt tears  
rose from the wells of longing in both men,  
and cries burst from both as keen and fluttering  
as those of the great taloned hawk,  
105 whose nestlings farmers take before they fly.  
So helplessly they cried, pouring out tears,  
and might have gone on weeping so till sundown. . . . **E**

*Telemachus lets Odysseus know that they face more than 100 suitors. Odysseus tells Telemachus to return home. He will follow—still disguised as an old man—and Telemachus must pretend not to know him. He must also lock away Odysseus’ weapons and armor.*

**D EPIC**

Reread lines 61–90. What central **conflict** is beginning to find resolution in this scene? What elements indicate the importance of this moment?

**91 brought his ranging mind to bear:** took control of his wandering thoughts.

**E EPIC**

Reread lines 99–107. What striking **character trait** is emphasized in both Odysseus and Telemachus? Why is this unusual?