

Summary

After recounting his travels and troubles to the Phaeacians, Odysseus yearns to go home to Ithaca and understands he can only do so with their help. King Alcinous, king of the Phaeacians, has all the attendees of the assembly give Odysseus many exquisite gifts. The next day, King Alcinous has all the gifts boarded onto a ship, sacrifices an ox and mixes some wine as libations to Zeus, and sends Odysseus back home to Ithaca on the ship with gifts and a crew of Phaeacian sailors to take him home. Upon boarding the ship, Odysseus immediately falls into a very deep sleep as he is very weary from all his travels. When they reach the shores of Ithaca, the Phaeacian sailors must lay his sleeping body and his gifts down on the shore because he is too tired to wake up at that moment. Soon after, Poseidon notices that Odysseus has made it home to Ithaca and is furious that the Phaeacians assisted Odysseus. As punishment, Poseidon fulfills an old prophecy by turning the Phaeacian ship to stone as it approaches the Phaeacian harbour. Many Phaeacians watch the ship sink and they decide to never aid travelers again. Odysseus then wakes up and doesn't recognize his surroundings as Athena masked it in a mist so that no one would know Odysseus had come home. Odysseus then suspects the Phaeacians for tricking him and stranding him on yet another island, but is assured by Athena, who takes on the form of a little boy. She explains to Odysseus that he is indeed in Ithaca. Athena then tells him that he will need to punish the suitors and that his son, Telemachus, has gone to Sparta in search for him.

Main Idea

Book 13 of the *Odyssey*, *Ithaca at Last*, was mainly about Odysseus' arrival in Ithaca and Poseidon's wrath once he realizes this.

Prediction

As Athena mentioned, Odysseus must face the suitors to take back Ithaca and his place with Penelope. I predict that Odysseus will use his cunning wit that he displayed numerous times in previous challenges such as escaping Polyphemus' cave, navigating away from Scylla and Charybdis, etc. to put himself in a position of power over the suitors. Since Athena encouraged Odysseus to seek a violent option, Odysseus will most likely trap the suitors and not offer them a chance to explain themselves or give them a fair trial. This is supported by Tiresias saying "...you will find a world of pain at home, crude, arrogant men devouring all your goods, / courting your noble wife, offering gifts to win her. / No doubt you will pay them back in blood when you come home!" (132-135), which explains how Odysseus will either kill or seriously maim the suitors who are trying to win Penelope.

Questions

- Why didn't Athena just change Odysseus' appearance to begin with instead of creating the mist around him?
 - Were there people of Ithaca around the area where the Phaeacian's ship came onto the shore?

- Why did Athena disguise herself as a little boy to meet Odysseus?
 - Does the mist only prevent the person within the mist to not see their real surroundings or is it akin to an invisibility bubble to people outside of the mist?
- If Athena is so supportive of Odysseus taking Ithaca back, why doesn't she set up a plan where she meets with all the suitors and convinces them to turn on each other?

Important Quotations

"*Ithaca* ... Heart racing, Odysseus that great exile / filled with joy to hear Athena, daughter of storming Zeus, / pronounce that name. He stood on native ground at last / and he replied with a winging word to Pallas, / not with a word of truth-he choked it back, / always invoking the cunning in his heart: 'Ithaca ... yes, I seems to have heard of Ithaca, / even on Crete's broad island far across the sea, / and now ...'" (pg. 294, lines. 284-291)

- At this moment, Odysseus finally sees that his long journey away from home has come to an end. Although Tiresias told him that there are some obstacles to going back to his old life, he is relieved that he has reached his land after 20 years. Moreover, it also represents Odysseus' cautious nature, as he makes it seem as if he unintentionally arrived in Ithaca and has no connection to it or its people.

Personal Response

I felt a strong connection to certain aspects of this text such as Odysseus' cleverly crafted response to Athena when he first sees him, as well as Odysseus' relief after finally reaching his home after a long journey. I felt a personal connection to both instances, as I tend to analyze and often over-analyze situations presented to me, believing that there is some sort of underlying story or ulterior motives to someone's actions. Moreover, this doubting behaviour gives insight that aids in deciding what I should and shouldn't tell someone. I also personally relate to Odysseus' relief after finally coming home in my daily commute to get home from school. Although my journey is nowhere near as long as Odysseus' journey, both in terms of time and distance, there have been a few instances where I may have missed my bus stop or GO station stop. On those days, reaching home trying to minimize the amount of time I waste becomes more of an accomplishment than a commute.

Connections & Conventions

There are numerous epic conventions throughout book 13 that focus around Odysseus and the people he faces. To begin, Odysseus is a great warrior who proved himself as second in wit to Achilles, and is quite strong; based on his display at the Phaeacian games and sports festival. He also receives supernatural help from Athena in the form of a mist covering him and a change to his appearance to allow him to move about the city more freely. Moreover, the text uses extended similes to describe environments, people, and places in great detail, giving the reader and listeners a very complete image of the situation Odysseus is facing and the elements in the environment.

The Phaeacian ship turning to stone and the Phaeacian harbour being threatened to be covered by a mountain ridge demonstrates that Poseidon is punishing them as they are

guilty by association. The idea of being punished for something or someone a certain character is related to is also explored in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, in which Enkidu dies as a result of Gilgamesh and Enkidu slaying Humbaba, even though it was actually Gilgamesh who cut off Humbaba's head. Enkidu dies because he aided Gilgamesh and because the gods needed someone other than Gilgamesh to punish.

The similarities between Book 13 and the *Epic of Gilgamesh* are also explored in both cultures' gods being almighty beings whose wrath must not be incurred. In both texts, the gods threaten to bring about great destruction to civilization if their rule or authority is questioned. The Phaeacians' ship was turned to stone by Poseidon as part of an ancient prophecy, and Gilgamesh incurs the wrath of almost all the gods when he and Enkidu kill Humbaba.