



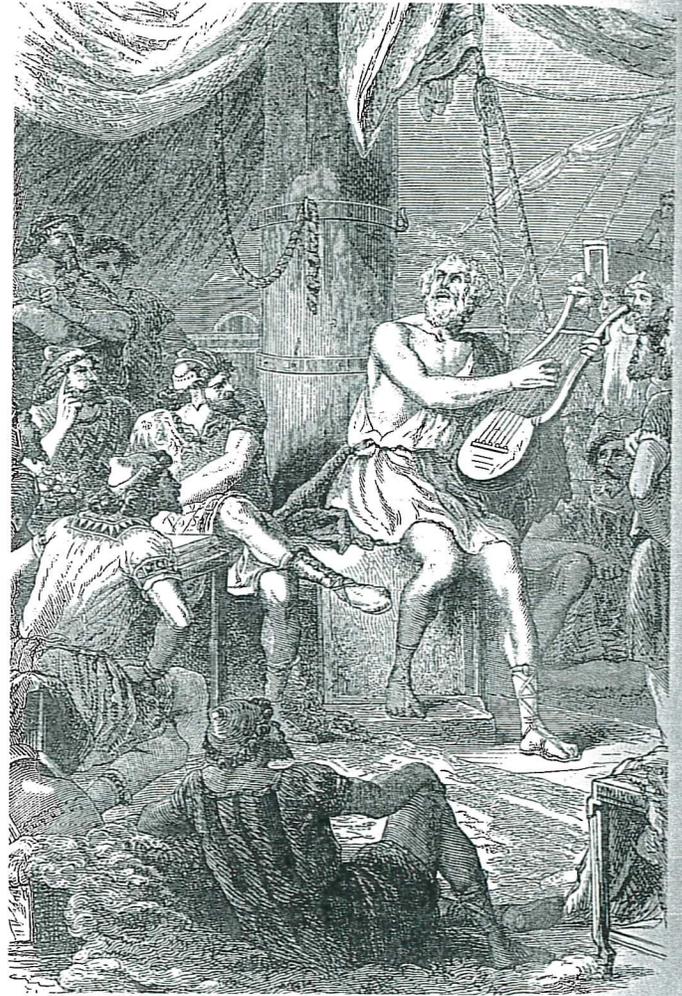
—Before You Read—

from the *Odyssey*, Part 3

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

- While facts about Homer himself are not available, a great deal is known about the role of poets and the stories they sang or recited in the days before writing. From this information, it may be possible to infer some things about Homer's training. Like other oral poets, he probably spent years learning his art. The demand for master poets grew as their reputation spread, and as a student, Homer probably traveled from city to city with his teacher, listening and learning the secrets of the trade.
- Although they were rarely aristocrats by birth, poet-singers were often treated royally by patrons who valued the entertainment they could provide at great occasions. Sometimes their fame could be a disadvantage. It is said that unscrupulous nobles in Greece had their favorite singers blinded so that they would be compelled to perform for them for the rest of their lives.



Homer sings a poem to sailors.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

cower (kou'ər) *v.* to crouch or shrink back, as in fear or shame; p. 853

impudence (im'pyə dəns) *n.* speech or behavior that is aggressively forward or rude; p. 858

mortified (môr'tə fīd') *adj.* deeply embarrassed, shamed, or humiliated; p. 859

rebuke (ri būk') *v.* to scold sharply; criticize; p. 859

guise (gīz) *n.* outward appearance; false appearance; p. 859

renowned (ri nound') *adj.* famous; widely known; p. 861

commandeer (kom'ən dēr') *v.* to seize by force or threats; p. 862

justification (jus'tə fə kā'shən) *n.* a reason for an action that shows it to be just, right, or reasonable; p. 863

omen (ō'mən) *n.* a sign or event thought to foretell good or bad fortune; forewarning; p. 865

contemptible (kən təmp'tə bəl) *adj.* deserving of scorn; disgraceful; p. 865

Part 3

Father and Son

The kindly Phaeacians load Odysseus with gifts and take him home, leaving him fast asleep on the shores of Ithaca. On their return journey, Poseidon turns their ship into a lump of stone for daring to assist Odysseus.

Odysseus is disoriented after twenty years away from home, but the goddess Athena meets him and tells him what happened: during his long absence, a number of young men from Ithaca and neighboring islands have moved into Odysseus's great house. Thinking Odysseus is dead, the suitors, as they are called, eat his food, drink his wine, and insist that Odysseus's wife Penelope choose one of them as her husband. Penelope, who still loves Odysseus and prays for his safe return, has put off a decision as long as she can, but the situation has become very tense.

Athena disguises Odysseus as an old beggar and promises to help him. She tells him to seek shelter with a swineherd named Eumaeus (yoo mē' əs). Meanwhile, Odysseus's son, Telemachus (tə lem' ə kəs), who had set out on a journey to discover the fate of his father, escapes an ambush planned by the suitors and secretly lands on Ithaca. Following Athena's instructions, he also goes to Eumaeus's hut. While the loyal swineherd is informing Penelope of her son's return, Athena appears to the disguised Odysseus.

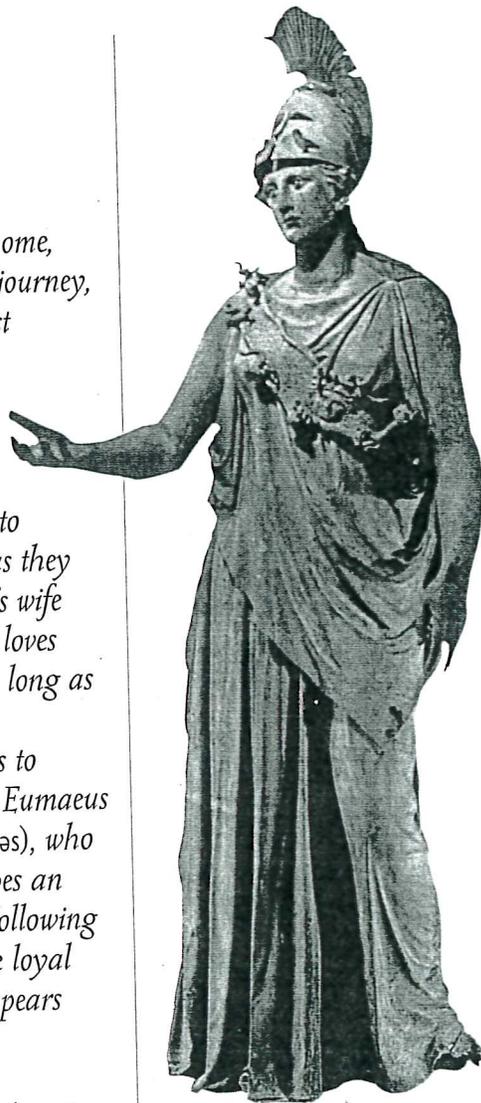
From the air

she walked, taking the form of a tall woman,
handsome and clever at her craft, and stood
beyond the gate in plain sight of Odysseus,
unseen, though, by Telemachus, unguessed,
for not to everyone will gods appear.°

Odysseus noticed her; so did the dogs,
who cowered whimpering away from her. She only
nodded, signing to him with her brows,
a sign he recognized. Crossing the yard,
he passed out through the gate in the stockade
to face the goddess. There she said to him:

Vocabulary

cower (kou'ər) *v.* to crouch or shrink back, as in fear or shame



Statue of Athena, 340–330 B.C. Bronze.
National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

1–6 From . . . appear: Athena's "craft" includes the ability to disguise herself or others and to make herself visible or invisible. She has already made Odysseus appear to be an old beggar. Now she makes herself visible to Odysseus and, at the same time, invisible to his son Telemachus.

50 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,
and here you stand like one of the immortals!”^o

55 Odysseus brought his ranging mind to bear^o
and said:

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

As for my change of skin,
65 that is a charm Athena, Hope of Soldiers,^o
uses as she will; she has the knack
to make me seem a beggar man sometimes
and sometimes young, with finer clothes about me.
It is no hard thing for the gods of heaven
to glorify a man or bring him low.”^o

70 When he had spoken, down he sat.

Then, throwing

his arms around this marvel of a father
Telemachus began to weep. Salt tears
rose from the wells of longing in both men,
75 and cries burst from both as keen and fluttering
as those of the great taloned hawk,
whose nestlings farmers take before they fly.
So helplessly they cried, pouring out tears,
and might have gone on weeping so till sundown,
80 had not Telemachus said:

“Dear father! Tell me
what kind of vessel put you here ashore
on Ithaca? Your sailors, who were they?
I doubt you made it, walking on the sea!”

85 Then said Odysseus, who had borne the barren sea:^o

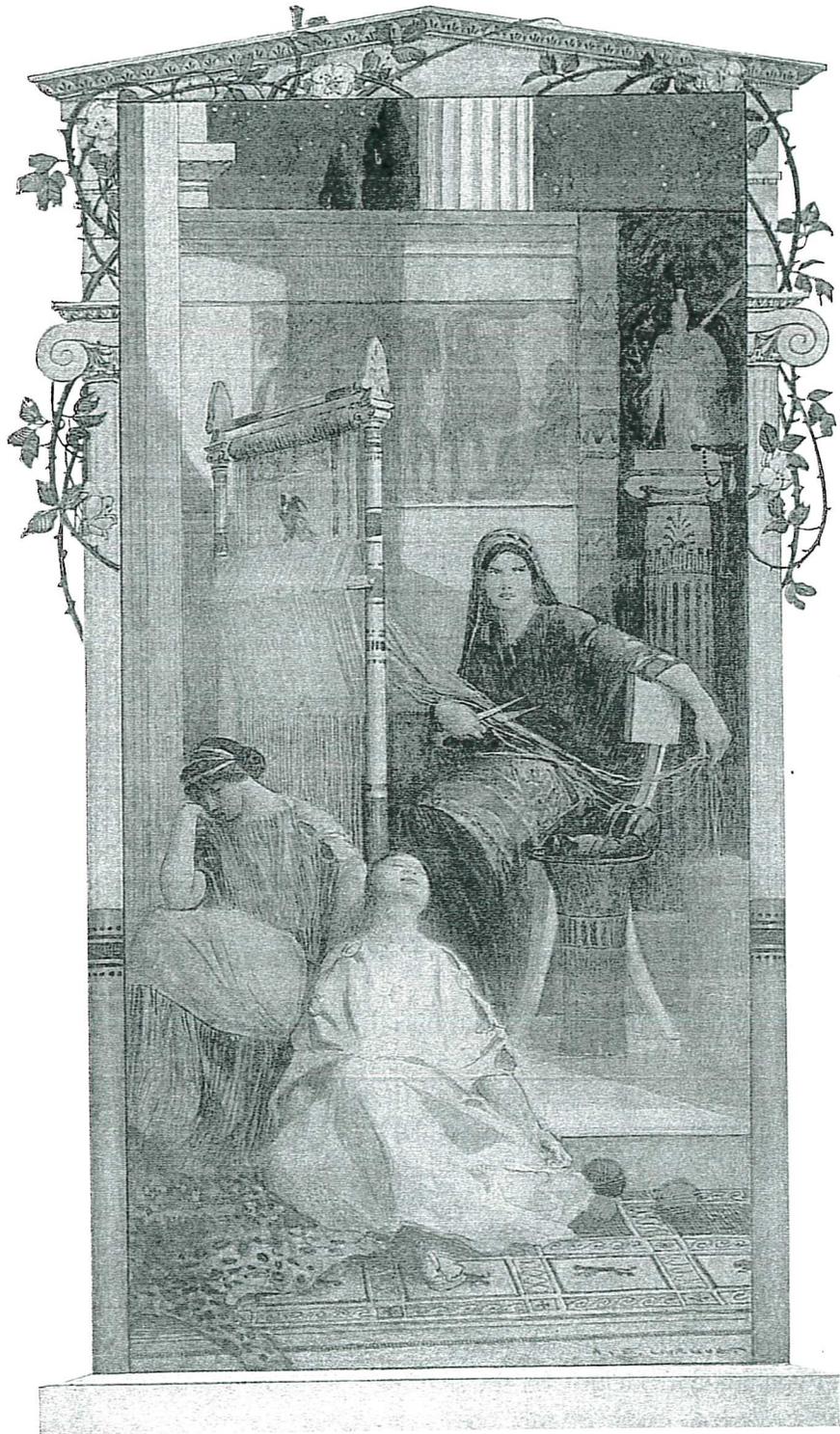
53 the immortals: a common reference to the gods, who never die.

54 Odysseus . . . bear: Odysseus focuses his thoughts.

64 Hope of Soldiers: When she chooses to be, Athena is a fierce battle-goddess, defending Greece—and favored Greeks—from outside enemies.

68–69 It is . . . low: It isn’t difficult for the gods to make a man appear great or humble.

85 borne the barren sea: endured the hardships of the sea.



Penelope and Her Handmaidens, 1920. A. F. Gorguet. Illustration from text *L'illustration*. Private collection.

Viewing the art: What does this image add to your understanding of Penelope and of what life has been like at Odysseus's great house during his absence?

“Only plain truth shall I tell you, child.
 Great seafarers, the Phaeacians, gave me passage
 as they give other wanderers. By night
 over the open ocean, while I slept,
 90 they brought me in their cutter,^o set me down
 on Ithaca, with gifts of bronze and gold
 and stores of woven things. By the gods’ will
 these lie all hidden in a cave. I came
 to this wild place, directed by Athena,
 95 so that we might lay plans to kill our enemies.
 Count up the suitors for me, let me know
 what men at arms are there, how many men.
 I must put all my mind to it, to see
 if we two by ourselves can take them on
 100 or if we should look round for help.”

90 cutter: a single-masted sailboat.

The Beggar at the Manor

The next morning Telemachus returns home and tells Penelope about his travels but not about his father’s homecoming. Odysseus, disguised again as a beggar, also returns to his own house. No one recognizes him except his faithful old dog, which lifts up its head, wags its tail, and dies. In the great hall, Telemachus permits the “beggar” to ask for food. The suitors give him bread and meat, as is the custom, but one of their leaders, a man named Antinous (an tin’ ō əs), is particularly insulting. He refuses to offer any food, and while Odysseus is talking, he angrily interrupts.

But here Antinous broke in, shouting:

“God!

What evil wind blew in this pest?

Get over,

5 stand in the passage! Nudge my table, will you?
 Egyptian whips are sweet
 to what you’ll come to here, you nosing rat,
 making your pitch to everyone!
 These men have bread to throw away on you
 10 because it is not theirs. Who cares? Who spares
 another’s food, when he has more than plenty?”

With guile Odysseus drew away,^o then said:

12 With guile . . . away: Odysseus is slyly provoking Antinous.