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PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS OF HOMER'S *ODYSSEY*



<i>Gods, Goddesses, and Lesser Divinities</i>	
Zeus	son of Cronus; king of the gods
Poseidon	son of Cronus; king of the sea
Hades	son of Cronus; ruler of the underworld
Athene	daughter of Zeus; goddess of skill and intelligence
Apollo	son of Zeus and Leto; archer; god of light
Artemis	daughter of Zeus and Leto; goddess of the hunt
Aphrodite	daughter of Zeus and Dione; goddess of love
Ares	son of Zeus; god of war
Hephaestus	son of Zeus and Hera; god of the forge
Hermes	son of Zeus; messenger of the gods
Persephone	daughter of Demeter; wife of Hades; queen of the underworld
Proteus	old man of the sea; deposed by Zeus
Eidothea	daughter of Proteus; sea-nymph
Calypso	daughter of Atlas; island nymph of Ogygia
Aeolus	son of Hippotas; keeper of the winds
Circe	daughter of the sun; goddess of the wild; sorceress

<i>Family and Household of Odysseus</i>	
Odysseus	son of Laertes; king of Ithaca
Laertes	son of Arceisius; aged father of Odysseus
Penelope	daughter of Icarius; wife of Odysseus
Telemachus	son of Odysseus and Penelope
Mentor	friend and steward of Odysseus
Phemius	son of Terpes; house minstrel
Medon	herald
Eumaeus	son of Ctesius; keeper of the swine
Melanthius	son of Dolus; keeper of the goats
Philoetius	keeper of the cattle
Dolius	gardener, field worker
Euryclea	daughter of Ops; old nurse of Odysseus and Telemachus
Eurynome	head maid and housekeeper
Melantho	daughter of Dolius; favorite maid of Penelope
Eurylochus	husband of Odysseus' sister; sailor in Odysseus' crew
Elpenor	youngest sailor in Odysseus' crew

BOOK I



*The gods in council—Athene's visit to Ithaca—
the challenge from Telemachus to the suitors*

Tell me, O Muse, of that ingenious hero who traveled far and wide after he had sacked the famous town of Troy. Many cities did he visit, and many were the nations with whose manners and customs he was acquainted. Moreover, he suffered much by sea while trying to save his own life and bring his men safely home. But do what he might, he could not save his men, for they perished through their own sheer folly in eating the cattle of the Sun-god Hyperion; so the god prevented them from ever reaching home. Tell me, too, about all these things, O daughter of Zeus, from whatsoever source you may know them.

So now all who escaped death in battle or by shipwreck had got safely home except Odysseus, and he, though he was longing to return to his wife and country, was detained by the goddess Calypso, who had got him into a large cave and wanted to marry him. But as years went by, there came a time when the gods settled that he should go back to Ithaca. Even then, however, when he was among his own people, his troubles were not yet over. Nevertheless, all the gods had now begun to pity him except Poseidon, who still persecuted him without ceasing and would not let him go home.

Now Poseidon had gone off to the Ethiopians, who are at the world's end, and lie in two halves, the one looking west

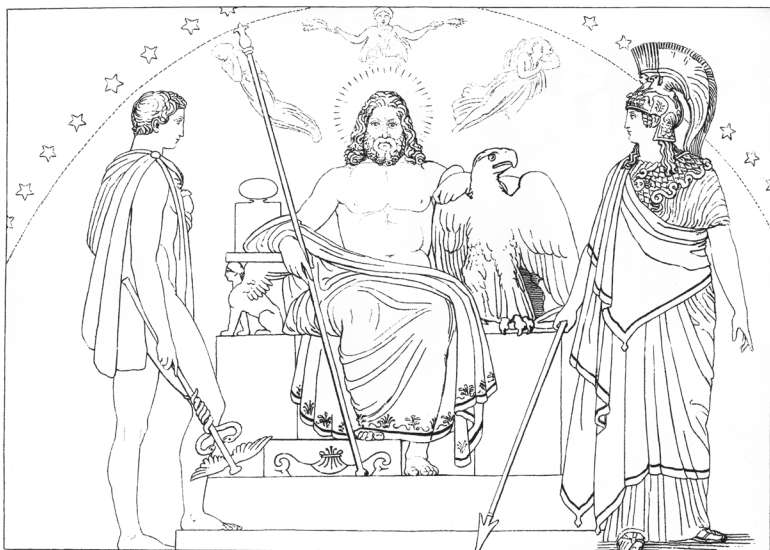
and the other east.¹ He had gone there to accept a hecatomb of sheep and oxen, and was enjoying himself at his festival. But the other gods met in the house of Olympian Zeus, and the sire of gods and men spoke first. At that moment he was thinking of Aegisthus, who had been killed by Agamemnon's son Orestes;² so he said to the other gods:

"See now, how men lay blame upon us gods for what is after all nothing but their own folly. Look at Aegisthus. He must needs make love to Agamemnon's wife unrighteously and then kill Agamemnon, though he knew it would be the death of him; for I sent Hermes to warn him not to do either of these things, inasmuch as Orestes would be sure to take his revenge when he grew up and wanted to return home. Hermes told him this in all goodwill, but he would not listen; and now he has paid for everything in full."

Then Athene said, "Father, son of Cronus, king of kings, it served Aegisthus right, and so it would anyone else who does as he did. But Aegisthus is neither here nor there. It is for Odysseus that my heart bleeds, when I think of his sufferings in that lonely sea-girt island, far away, poor man, from all his friends. It is an island covered with forest, in the very middle of the sea, and a goddess lives there, daughter of the magician Atlas, who looks after the bottom of the ocean and carries the great columns that keep heaven and earth asunder. This daughter of Atlas has got hold of poor, unhappy Odysseus, and keeps trying by every kind of blandishment to make him forget his home, so that he is tired of life and thinks of nothing but how he may once more see the smoke of his own chimneys. You, sir, take no heed of this,

[1] Black races are evidently known to the writer as stretching all across Africa, one half looking West on to the Atlantic, and the other East on to the Indian Ocean.

[2] Zeus refers here to the terrible homecoming of Agamemnon, king of Argos and chief of the Greeks at Troy, and his murder by the slave Aegisthus, whom Queen Clytemnestra had taken as her lover. Since then, Agamemnon's and Clytemnestra's son, Orestes, had killed both his mother and Aegisthus to avenge his father's death. For fuller accounts of the same dreadful deed, see Books III, IV, and XI.



Council of Zeus, Athene, and Hermes

and yet when Odysseus was before Troy, did he not propitiate you with many a burnt sacrifice? Why then should you keep on being so angry with him?"

And Zeus said, "My child, what are you talking about? How can I forget Odysseus than whom there is no more capable man on earth, nor more liberal in his offerings to the immortal gods that live in heaven? Bear in mind, however, that Poseidon is still furious with Odysseus for having blinded an eye of Polyphemos, king of the Cyclopes. Polyphemos is son to Poseidon by the nymph Thoosa, daughter to the sea-king Phorcys. Therefore, though he will not kill Odysseus outright, he torments him by preventing him from getting home. Still, let us lay our heads together and see how we can help him to return. Poseidon will then be pacified, for if we are all of a mind, he can hardly stand out against us."

And Athene said, "Father, son of Cronus, king of kings, if, then, the gods now mean that Odysseus should get home, we

should first send Hermes to the Ogygian island to tell Calypso that we have made up our minds and that he is to return. In the meantime, I will go to Ithaca to put heart into Odysseus' son Telemachus. I will embolden him to call the Achaeans in assembly and speak out to the suitors of his mother Penelope, who persist in eating up any number of his sheep and oxen. I will also conduct him to Sparta and to Pylos to see if he can hear anything about the return of his dear father—for this will make people speak well of him."

So saying, she bound on her glittering golden sandals, imperishable, with which she can fly like the wind over land or sea. She grasped the redoubtable bronze-shod spear, so stout and sturdy and strong, wherewith she quells the ranks of heroes who have displeased her, and down she darted from the topmost summits of Olympus, whereon forthwith she was in Ithaca, at the gateway of Odysseus' house, disguised as a visitor, Mentès, chief of the Taphians; and she held a bronze spear in her hand. There she found the lordly suitors seated on hides of the oxen which they had killed and eaten, and playing draughts in front of the house. Menservants and pages were



Descent of Athene to Ithaca

bustling about to wait upon them, some mixing wine with water in the mixing bowls, some cleaning down the tables with wet sponges and laying them out again, and some cutting up great quantities of meat.

Telemachus saw her long before anyone else did. He was sitting moodily among the suitors, thinking about his brave father and how he would send them flying out of the house if he were to come to his own again and be honored as in days gone by. Thus brooding as he sat among them, he caught sight of Athene and went straight to the gate, for he was vexed that a stranger should be kept waiting for admittance. He took her right hand in his own, and bade her give him her spear. "Welcome," said he, "to our house, and when you have partaken of food, you shall tell us what you have come for."

He led the way as he spoke, and Athene followed him. When they were within, he took her spear and set it in the spear-stand against a strong bearing-post along with the many other spears of his unhappy father, and he conducted her to a richly decorated seat under which he threw a cloth of damask. There was a footstool also for her feet,³ and he set another seat near her for himself, away from the suitors, that she might not be annoyed while eating by their noise and insolence, and that he might ask her more freely about his father.

A maidservant then brought them water in a beautiful golden ewer and poured it into a silver basin for them to wash their hands, and she drew a clean table beside them. An upper servant brought them bread, and offered them many good things of what there was in the house, the carver fetched them plates of all manner of meats and set cups of gold by their side, and a manservant brought them wine and poured it out for them.

[3] The original use of the footstool was probably less to rest the feet than to keep them (especially when bare) from a floor which was often wet and dirty.