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| Thematic Focus: Xenia – The Sacred Bond Between Host and Guest |
| **Speech of Antinous to Telemachus**   * The *Odyssey*, Book II, lines 88-142 * Translator: Robert Fagels |
| All just sat there, silent…no one had the heart to reply with harshness.  Only Antinous, who found it in himself to say,  “So high and mighty, Telemachus – such unbridled rage!  Well now, ﬂing your accusations at us?  Think to pin the blame on us? You think again.  It’s not the suitors here who deserve the blame,  it’s your own dear mother, the matchless queen of cunning.  Look here. For three years now, getting on to four,  she’s played it fast and loose with all our hearts,  building each man’s hopes—  dangling promises, dropping hints to each—  but all the while with something else in mind.  This was her latest masterpiece of guile:  she set up a great loom in the royal halls  and she began to weave, and the weaving ﬁnespun,  the yarns endless, and she would lead us on: ‘Young men,  my suitors, now that King Odysseus is no more,  go slowly, keen as you are to marry me, until  I can ﬁnish off this web …  so my weaving won’t all fray and come to nothing.  This is a shroud for old lord Laertes, for that day  when the deadly fate that lays us out at last will take him down.  I dread the shame my countrywomen would heap upon me,  yes, if a man of such wealth should lie in state  without a shroud for cover.’  Her very words,  and despite our pride and passion we believed her.  So by day she’d weave at her great and growing web—  by night, by the light of torches set beside her,  she would unravel all she’d done. Three whole years  she deceived us blind, seduced us with this scheme …  Then, when the wheeling seasons brought the fourth year on,  one of her women, in on the queen’s secret, told the truth  and we caught her in the act—unweaving her gorgeous web.  So she ﬁnished it off. Against her will. We forced her.  Now Telemachus, here is how the suitors answer you—  you burn it in your mind, you and all our people:  send your mother back! Direct her to marry  whomever her father picks, whoever pleases her.  So long as she persists in tormenting us,  quick to exploit the gifts Athena gave her—  a skilled hand for elegant work, a ﬁne mind  and subtle wiles too—we’ve never heard the like,  not even in old stories sung of all Achaea’s  well-coifed queens who graced the years gone by:  Mycenae crowned with garlands, Tyro and Alcmena …  Not one could touch Penelope for intrigue,  but in this case she intrigued beyond all limits.  So, we will devour your worldly goods and wealth  as long as she holds out, holds to that course  the gods have charted deep inside her heart.  Great renown she wins for herself, no doubt,  great loss for you in treasure. We’ll not go back  to our old estates or leave for other parts,  not till she weds the Argive man she fancies.”   |  | | --- | | **PASSAGE QUESTIONS** | | * In what way does Homer use this speech to make us hate Antinous? * Who is Antinous’ audience? What values does he share with them? * In what way does the text make us understand the suitors’ violation of *xenia*? * What Antinous’ purpose in delivering this speech? What is his measurable, demonstrable goal here? * How does Antinous go about trying to achieve his goal? | |