

The *Odyssey* of Homer

Book 7

Thank you for supporting The Classics Cave.

You'll find books, readings, workouts, and more at www.theclassicscave.com. **Do you want to support the Cave's mission?** Let's talk! Contact Tim Young at tim@theclassicscave.com to sponsor or donate to the Cave.

"My father had me learn every word of Homer . . . to see me develop into a good man." —Niceratus of Athens

"Homer enthusiasts say that Homer has been the educator of Greece, and for the education and government of humans, we should build up our entire lives with the assistance of this poet." —Socrates of Athens

The Classics Cave • www.theclassicscave.com

Book 7

The House of Alcinous

Reading 7

Thanks for supporting The Classics Cave.
Please visit and support our sponsors.

This reading comes from the Cave's
The Best of Homer's Odyssey.

IN THIS MANNER, then, much-enduring godlike Odysseus prayed in the sacred grove while the strong mules carried the young girl to the city. When she reached her father's glorious house, Nausicaa stopped before the gateway, and her brothers stood around her like immortals. They unyoked the mules from the wagon and carried the clothing inside. She went into her own bedroom where the old Apeirean woman and maid Eurymedusa lit a fire for her.

9-13 *Eurymedusa had been snatched up on a raid and given to Alcinous, Nausicaa's father. He gave her to serve as Nausicaa's nursemaid. Old, she is still in the young princess' service.*

14-33 And now Odysseus rose to go to the city. But Athena, with affectionate intentions, poured a dense mist around him so that none of the great-spirited Phaeacians would encounter him by chance, question him in some sneering way, and ask him who he was. The goddess, bright-eyed Athena, met him just as he was entering the lovely city. [20] She was disguised as a young girl carrying a water jar. She stood before him, and godlike Odysseus questioned her. "Child, could you not guide me to the house of the man called Alcinous, the one who is the ruler of this people? I ask because I am a stranger from a distant land, a man who has suffered much, and I don't know any of the people here who hold this land and city."

The bright-eyed goddess Athena said to him, “Since you ask me to do so, I will show you the house, father stranger, since my own blameless father lives nearby him. [30] But go in silence—I will walk before you on the path. And do not look at any of the men or ask any questions, for they do not have much tolerance for foreign men, nor do they treat with affection or hold dear that man who comes from a distant place.”

34-47 Odysseus follows Athena to Alcinous’ palace. He’s amazed as they go by the harbor, amazed as he sees the ships therein and all the men going about their work. Thanks to the dense mist, no one sees him as they go. When they arrive, Athena turns to speak to him.

48-54 “Here, father stranger, is the house you asked me to show you. Here you will find the kings fostered by Zeus [50] sitting at table feasting. But go inside and let your spirit not be alarmed. For in the end, the bold and courageous man does better in all things, even if he comes from another place. You will first come upon the lady of the house in the great hall. Arete is her given name.”

55-68 Athena tells Odysseus to go straight to Arete, the daughter of Rhexenor. Along with Alcinous, Rhexenor was the son of Nausithous, who was the son of Poseidon and Periboea, the best looking of women and daughter of the Giant Eurymedon. When Apollo struck Rhexenor down, Alcinous wed Arete and honored her like no other woman on earth.

69-82 “In this manner is she wholeheartedly honored [70] by her dear children, and by Alcinous himself, and also by the people who look upon her as though she is a goddess and greet her with many words when she strolls through the city. For she herself possesses a noble mind and settles quarrels if she is well disposed to do so—even among men. If she considers you with affection in her spirit, then there is hope that you will see those who are dear to you and come to your high-roofed house in your own fatherland.”

Saying this, bright-eyed Athena left lovely Scheria and flew off over the barren sea. [80] She came to

Marathon and to Athens, with its wide streets, and made her way into Erechtheus’ strong house. As for Odysseus, he approached Alcinous’ glorious house.

83-141 Standing before Alcinous’ great house, and gazing in wonder at its opulence, Odysseus sees that it is made of a variety of precious materials—bronze, silver, and gold. The house shines! Two dogs stand guard next to the doorway. Hephaestus made them of silver and gold. They are immortal and ageless. Inside the house are throne-seats luxuriously covered with very finely woven cloth. Here the Phaeacian leaders eat in grand style, for they possess “an abundance” to carry them through the year, year after year. Nearby, youths stand holding lighted torches. Fifty women are scattered about grinding ripe yellow grain and working upon the loom with excellence. Homer explains that just as Phaeacian men are expert sailors, so are Phaeacian women expert weavers. Surrounding the house are orchards, vineyards, and springs given by the gods. The orchards are full of pears, pomegranates, apples, figs, and olives.

After marveling at the abundance, Odysseus finally enters through the doorway and into the great hall. There he sees the Phaeacian chief men and rulers. He passes them all—still within the dense mist provided by Athena—and approaches Alcinous and Arete.

142-152 Then he threw his arms around Arete’s knees. Right then the god-given mist scattered from around him, and those sitting there marveled in silence at the sight of the man in the house.

And Odysseus entreated her for protection. “Arete, daughter of godlike Rhexenor, I come to your husband and to your knees after much suffering and toil, and to all these feasting here, too. May the gods grant them a happy and prosperous life, and may each man hand on to his children [150] the wealth in his house and the honors and rights granted by the people. This I ask of you—an escort for me that I may swiftly come home. I ask this because I have been suffering misery far away from my people for a very long time.”

153-166 Finishing his request, Odysseus sits down upon the hearth in the midst of its ashes. Everyone present is

astonished. Finally, the hero Echeneus advises Alcinous to treat the stranger well as a revered suppliant by giving him a proper welcome—a chair, wine, and food.

167-177 But when strong and mighty Alcinous heard his plea, he took Odysseus, the wise and cunning man, by the hand, and he pulled him up from the hearth and sat him upon a shining chair next to him—causing his [170] son, manly Laodamas, to stand up, for since his father loved him very much, he sat next to him. And one of the handmaids brought water for hand washing in a beautiful vessel made of gold and poured it out over a basin made of silver so that he could wash his hands. And bringing bread to him, the well-respected housekeeper set it before him along with much other food, showing him favor as she was able. So it was that much-enduring godlike Odysseus ate and drank.

178-185 *As Odysseus eats, the rest drink and pour out libations to Zeus. Then Alcinous speaks.*

186-198 “Listen, chief men and rulers of the Phaeacians, so that I may tell you what my spirit within me bids. Now that you have feasted, go to your houses, and tomorrow at dawn we will call more of the elders together, [190] and we will entertain the stranger in the great hall and make fair sacrifices to the gods. After that we will think about the escort—how with our escort, and without toil or distress, the stranger may speedily and gladly come to the land of his fathers, even if he comes from a distant land. In the meantime, may he not suffer any harm or woe before he sets foot in his own land. But when he gets home, he will suffer whatever fate that the grievous Spinners spun out for him with their flaxen thread when he came to be on the day his mother gave birth to him.”

199-210 *Alcinous wonders aloud if Odysseus is actually one of the gods—the same gods who feast with them at times because they are closely related, as are the Cyclopes and wild Giants. Odysseus demurs, clarifying he’s not like the immortals in either bodily frame or stature. He’s a mortal man.*

211-221 “Whoever you have known among men, the one who has endured the greatest suffering, I liken myself to him in pains and distress. And I could tell of the fill of evil I’ve endured, the sufferings willed by all the gods together.

“But now permit me to eat, even though I am distressed—for there is nothing more shameful and dog-like than one’s hateful belly. It calls upon a man to remember it by absolute necessity, even if he is very oppressed and is bearing much grief and misfortune in his heart and mind, as I am now carrying all the sorrow in mine. My belly always insists that [220] I eat and drink, and bids me lay aside all memory of my sorrows and dwell on replenishing itself.”

222-316 *Odysseus finishes by expressing his simple desire to return home after so much misery. Then, he says, he will be able to die inside his high-roofed house among his own possessions and slaves.*

Once the other Phaeacians depart for their own houses, Arete takes the lead in questioning Odysseus, asking where he secured his clothing, for she recognizes it. Odysseus responds by once again stressing how much he has suffered thanks to the gods. Then he tells them about Calypso, the fearful goddess, who lives far away on Ogygia. She has nothing to do with either the gods or men, he explains. He bemoans the bad fortune that led him to her hearth and home after Zeus blasted his ships and all his good comrades perished. He describes how Calypso welcomed him and promised to make him immortal and ageless. Still, after seven years he could not be persuaded to accept her deal. And finally, urged on by Zeus or her own mind, he surmises, she sent him off on a raft in the eighth year. After weeks at sea and great suffering caused by earth-shaking Poseidon, he came to their island and fell asleep by the river. And it was by the river that their daughter found him—the one who looks like a goddess. Odysseus reveals how Nausicaa behaved perfectly by understanding his predicament and giving him bread and wine, even as a good host would, and clothing him—unlike most youths who behave thoughtlessly.

Alcinous is surprised that Nausicaa herself didn’t bring Odysseus to their house after he had appealed to her as a suppliant. Odysseus asks him not to be angry with his

daughter. And lying, he claims that Nausicaa did offer to lead him, but that he declined since he was afraid that they would respond with anger at the sight of her daughter leading a strange man because, as he judges, “we tribes of men upon the earth are exceedingly jealous.” Alcinous responds by asserting that he would not have been angry without good cause—for, he declares, right mindedness and fitting measure is better in all things. He then expresses the same wish that Nausicaa had earlier expressed, that Odysseus would be her husband. If so, he would give Odysseus a house and other property. But only if he desires it, he clarifies. No one will make him stay. Alcinous explains how they will help Odysseus return home.

317-333 “And as for your conveyance home, I will assign the hour for it so that you may be sure of your departure. Let it be tomorrow. Once aboard you will sleep while my men speed you along the calm sea until you reach [320] your homeland and house or whatever place is dear to you. The men will row there even if that place is far beyond Euboea, which is called the most distant land by those among our people who once carried golden haired Rhadamanthus to visit Ti-

tyus, the son of Gaia. They reached that land and completed the voyage without trouble, and on the same day they looped back again and went home. But you yourself will judge how my ships and young men are the best in rowing with oars, tossing up much seawater as they go.”

That’s what Alcinous said. And much-enduring godlike Odysseus rejoiced, [330] and in prayer he said, “Father Zeus, may Alcinous fulfill every word he has spoken. And may the light of his glory and fame never go out through the wheat-bearing land, and may I come to my fatherland.”

334-342 *Hearing Odysseus’ prayer, Arete has the housemaids give him warm woolen clothing and prepare a bed with purple coverings for him in the portico. With this, they all go off to bed.*

343-347 In this manner much-enduring godlike Odysseus slept there on the bed beneath the echoing portico. But Alcinous slept in the innermost part of his high house, and his wife, the lady of the house, made her bed beside him.

So ends Book 7. **See you in Book 8, “Feasting with the Phaeacians.”**

Thank you for supporting The Classics Cave.

You’ll find books, readings, workouts, and more at www.theclassicscave.com. **Do you want to support the Cave’s mission?** Let’s talk! Contact Tim Young at tim@theclassicscave.com to sponsor or donate to the Cave.

“My father had me learn every word of Homer . . . to see me develop into a good man.” —Niceratus of Athens

“Homer enthusiasts say that Homer has been the educator of Greece, and for the education and government of humans, we should build up our entire lives with the assistance of this poet.” —Socrates of Athens

The Classics Cave ▪ www.theclassicscave.com



THE CLASSICS CAVE
The earliest light for a brighter life
www.theclassicscave.com

