# A Dog-Eat-Dog World in Homer's *Odyssey*


## Abstract:

The Homeric epics contain a plethora of similes, all of which were used with a specific intent. Accordingly, when confronted with the description of Odysseus' men being snatched like puppies and smashed against the ground (*Od*. 9.289-290), the reader may wonder why Homer uses this particularly striking simile. In terms of audience reception of this phrasing, were puppies killed regularly or was this meant to be shocking? To consider this question, this paper will examine the significance of dogs in the action of the *Odyssey* thematically, specifically in liminal situations, in an attempt to show that that the dogs described in each transitional scenario indicate whether the expectation of ξενία will be respected, and to what level.

Just as there is a variety of dogs in modern society ranging from pampered to ferocious, a similar diversity is depicted in the world of Odysseus, as he struggles through the realm of the fantastic to return at last to his home on Ithaka. Monstrous, metaphorical, and actual dogs in the *Odyssey* perform a function for their master and the reader. When they appear at the threshold of the *oikos*, they have a duty to protect the inhabitants. The depiction of the canine indicates the mentality of its owner and the type of reception a visitor may expect. Odysseus meets many of these "dogs" on his adventures, and as the story unfolds, his crew is fed and fed upon, and eventually Odysseus returns home to punish the "bad dogs" who were wrecking his house in his absence.


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