To the contemporary reader, Book 22 of Homer's *Odyssey* presents the mechanisms of violence. Odysseus has just returned to Ithaka after a ten-year absence. He has witnessed the overriding lawlessness that has plagued his house and decides to take action. His only recourse in restoring order and authority is to render punishment by death and destruction. He takes up his armour, and with the help of Telemachus, slaughters Penelope's unruly suitors, whose many transgressions remained unchecked during the course of his journey home from the Trojan war. The details of the slaughter are presented in graphic detail. There is reference to the weaponry used, the way in which the victims are killed, the profusion of blood. Eurykleia, Odysseus' nurse, beholds the sullied remains—corpses piled on top of each other amid the filth and pools of blood. As she perceives the gore, Odysseus is “awful” ("δεινός") to look upon (Homer, Od. 22.405).

Nikos Kazantzakis begins the *Odysseia* (1938) precisely at the point at which Odysseus has slaughtered the transgressors. Drawing on Book 22 of Homer's *Odyssey*, the opening lines of Canto 1 are tempered with visual traces of the excessive force Odysseus has wrought to exact justice. Odysseus has hung up his bow after murdering the errant youths and proceeds to the baths to cleanse himself of his bloody rampage. The sequel’s action begins mid-sentence to denote Kazantzakis' stark narrative intervention:

And when in his broad courtyards he had struck down the unruly youths

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1 All translations from the original Greek are mine unless otherwise indicated.

Key to Abbreviations:

K, OMS: Kazantzakis’ *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel* (1958)

K, O: Kazantzakis’ *Odysseia* (1938)

SL: *Selected Letters of Nikos Kazantzakis*.

2 Kimon Friar's translation, *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel* (1958), was instrumental in interpreting the *Odysseia* as a "sequel." Kazantzakis worked closely with Friar, a renowned translator and literary scholar, to translate this work into English. Friar replicates Kazantzakis’ seventeen-syllable iambic into a twelve beat iambic in English.
Odysseus hung high his sated bow and walked towards the warm baths
to cleanse his enormous body.
Two slavewomen were drawing the water, but when they saw their
master
they screamed, for his belly and loins steamed
and thick black blood dripped from both of his palms;
...

K, O, 1.74–79

In Kazantzakis’ eclectic revision, however, he formulates a sequel in which
Odysseus decisively flees his homeland after he restores civic order. He embarks
on a new journey to lands outside the boundaries of Helladic space—from
the Mediterranean to the far reaches of Africa and the Antarctic. Kazantzakis
adapts the Homeric text to graft his philosophical exploration of the limits
of human consciousness in an episodic meandering through a number of
conceptual paradigms drawn from Eastern and Western thought. The Odysseia
is based on the presumption of the enlightened mission of poetry that looks
upon Homeric epic as a foundational text to ground its philosophical ideas. In
integrating elements of epic into the poetic narrative, the Odysseia transcends
historical time through the symbolic realm of the aesthetic. It resonates with
poetry of the Romantic era, rather than the Modernist, in deeming poetry as a
place of reconciliation in which to situate the spiritual quest for freedom.4

We see Kazantzakis’ bold interventions in every aspect of his revision. The
last two books of Homer’s epic are excised. The poem’s 24 cantos, consisting of
33,333 lines, present a modernized version of epic form. It is written in a radi-
calized linguistic register: a simplification of the Modern Greek vernacular,5 yet
rich in its use of regional words. Instead of replicating the Homeric hexameter,
or even adopting Modern Greek folk poetry’s traditional fifteen-syllable line,
Kazantzakis formulates a seventeen-syllable iambic.6 In justifying the use of

3 I borrow the word ‘sated’ from Kimon Friar’s translation of the Odyssea, K, OMS, I.2.
4 I am drawing on Jochen Schulte-Sasse’s (1989) observations on the aesthetic in European
eighteenth-century literature.
5 In the first edition of the Odyssea, Kazantzakis writes phonetically, using a simplified spelling
and a monotonic system of accents; posthumous editions use the polytonic.
6 Kazantzakis and classicist Yannis Kakridis adopt this new meter in their translation of Ho-
er’s Iliad into Modern Greek. In a 1944 letter to writer Yiorgos Theotokas Kazantzakis
remarks that they are translating the Iliad to gauge “how much the Greek language and under-
standing have advanced” since Alexandros Pallis’ attempt (SL, 594). Pallis’ 1904 translation
elicited protest by conservative philologists, who resisted any translation from Ancient Greek.