

Homer

The Odyssey

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For Colleen

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

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This translation is also available free of charge as a PDF and HTML document and in an abridged version. Please consult the internet at the following link: [Odyssey Table of Contents](#).

Note that in the following translations, the numbers in square brackets refer to the Greek text, and the numbers without brackets refer to the English text. In the translation a shorter indented line is usually combined with the short line above it as a single line in the reckoning. Footnotes and introductory summaries at the start of each book have been provided by the translator.

In this English text, the possessive of names ending in -s is usually indicated in the customary way by adding 's (e.g., Zeus, Zeus's; Atreus, Atreus's, and so on). This convention has the effect of adding a syllable to the word (the sound -iz). It also sometimes produces a rather odd-sounding result. Thus, for metrical and euphonic reasons, the possessive of a name is in places indicated by a simple apostrophe, without the s (an alternative fairly common in written English): e.g.,

Achilles' anger instead of *Achilles's anger*. This latter procedure does not add an extra syllable to the word. In the above example, *Achilles'* has three syllables, unlike *Achilles's*, which has four.

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BOOK ONE
ATHENA VISITS ITHACA

[The invocation to the Muse; the gods discuss Odysseus and decide he should return; Athena goes to Ithaca to encourage Telemachus, speaks to him disguised as Mentès, offering advice about dealing with his mother and the suitors and suggesting he go on a trip to Pylos and Sparta; Penelope speaks to Phemius, the singer, asking him to change the song; Telemachus criticizes her; Penelope goes upstairs; Eurykleia carries the lit torches to escort Telemachus to his rooms.]

Muse, speak to me now of that resourceful man
who wandered far and wide after ravaging
the sacred citadel of Troy.¹ He came to see
many people's cities, where he learned their customs,
while on the sea his spirit suffered many torments,
as he fought to save his life and lead his comrades home.
But though he wanted to, he could not rescue them—
they all died from their own stupidity, the fools.
They feasted on the cattle of Hyperion,
god of the sun—and so he snatched away their chance
of getting home someday.² So now, daughter of Zeus,
tell us his story, starting anywhere you wish.

10

[10]

The other warriors, all those who had escaped
being utterly destroyed, were now back safely home,
facing no more dangers from battle or the sea.
But Odysseus, who longed to get back to his wife
and reach his home, was being held in a hollow cave
by that mighty nymph Calypso, noble goddess,
who desired to have Odysseus as her husband.
But as the seasons came and went, the year arrived
in which, according to what gods had once ordained,
he was to get back to his home in Ithaca—
not that he would be free from troubles even there,
among his people. The gods pitied Odysseus,
all except Poseidon, who kept up his anger
against godlike Odysseus and did not relent
until he reached his native land.³

20

[20]

¹The Muses, the divine patrons of the arts, are daughters of Zeus.

²Hyperion, who is also called Helios, treasured his several herds of cattle; the incident with his cattle is related in detail in Book 12.

³Poseidon, divine brother of Zeus and god of the sea, is often called “encircler of the earth” or “Earthshaker” (because he rules over earthquakes).

BOOK ONE

But at that moment,
Poseidon was among the Ethiopians,
very far away, those same Ethiopians,
the most remote of people, who live divided 30
in different groups, one where Hyperion goes down,
the other where he rises.¹ Poseidon went there
to receive a sacrificial offering to him—
bulls and rams—and was now sitting at a banquet,
enjoying himself. But other gods had gathered
in the great hall of Olympian Zeus. Among them all,
the father of gods and men was the first to speak.
In his heart he was recalling royal Aegisthus,
whom Orestes, Agamemnon's celebrated son, [30]
had slaughtered.² With him in mind, Zeus now addressed them: 40

“It's disgraceful how humans blame the gods.
They say their tribulations come from us,
when they themselves, through their own foolishness,
bring hardships which are not decreed by Fate.
Now there's Aegisthus, who took for himself
the wife of Agamemnon, Atreus' son,
and then butchered him, once the man came home.
None of that was set by Fate. Aegisthus knew
his acts would bring about his total ruin.
We'd sent Hermes earlier to speak to him. 50
The keen-eyed killer of Argus told him
not to slay the man or seduce his wife,
for Orestes would avenge his father,
once he grew up and longed for his own land. [40]
That's what Hermes said, but his fine warning
did not persuade Aegisthus in his heart.
So he has paid for everything in full.”³

Athena, goddess with the gleaming eyes, answered Zeus:

¹To the ancient Greeks, the name Ethiopia did not necessarily denote the country of today, but was rather used as a loose term for various peoples imagined as living at the ends of the earth.

²Aegisthus had seduced Agamemnon's wife, Clytaemnestra, while Agamemnon was in Troy, and, when he returned from the war, the two lovers killed Agamemnon and took control of Argos. Orestes, who was away at the time, came back to Argos in disguise and avenged his father. This famous story is referred to a number of times in the *Odyssey*.

³Hermes, Zeus's divine son, killed the monster Argus, whom Hera had told to guard the goddess Io to prevent her getting into sexual mischief with Zeus.

BOOK ONE

“Son of Cronos and father to us all,
you who rule on high, yes indeed, Aegisthus 60
now lies dead, something he well deserved.¹
May any other man who does what he did
also be destroyed! But my heart is torn
for versatile Odysseus, ill-fated man,
who has had to suffer such misfortune
for so many years, far away from friends.
He’s on an island, surrounded by the sea,
the one that forms the ocean’s navel stone.² [50]
And there, in the forests, lives a goddess,
daughter of tough-minded Atlas, who knows 70
the ocean depths and by himself holds up
those gigantic pillars which separate
earth and heaven. That’s the one whose daughter
prevents the sad, unlucky man from leaving.
Her soft seductive speech keeps tempting him,
urging him to forget his native land.
Odysseus yearns to see even the smoke
rising from Ithaca and longs for death.
Yet, despite that, Olympian Zeus, your heart
does not respond to him. Did not Odysseus 80 [60]
offer you delightful sacrifices
on Troy’s far-reaching plain beside the ships?
If so, why are you so angry with him?”

Cloud-gatherer Zeus then answered her and said:

“My child,
what a speech has passed your barrier of teeth!
How could I forget godlike Odysseus,
preeminent among all mortal men
for his intelligence and offerings
to the immortal gods who hold wide heaven?
But Earthshaker Poseidon, a stubborn god, 90
is still furious about that cyclops,
the one whose eye Odysseus destroyed,
godlike Polyphemus, the mightiest [70]

¹Cronos, the major deity before the Olympians, was leader of the Titans; he was overthrown by his son Zeus and imprisoned deep in the earth.

²The Greek word *omphalos* (navel stone) Homer uses here to describe Calypso’s island of Ogygia.

BOOK ONE

of all the Cyclopes.¹ Thoosa bore him,
the sea nymph, a daughter of that Phorcys
who commands the restless deep.² Poseidon,
down in those hollow caves, had sex with her.
That's the reason Earthshaker Poseidon
makes Odysseus wander from his country.
But he has not killed him yet. So come now,
let's all of us consider his return,
so he can journey back to Ithaca.
Poseidon's anger will relent. He can't
fight the immortal gods all by himself,
not with all of us arrayed against him."

100

Athena, goddess with the gleaming eyes, replied:

[80]

"Son of Cronos and father to us all,
ruling high above, if immortal gods
now find it pleasing for wise Odysseus
to return back home, then let's send Hermes,
killer of Argus, as our messenger,
over to the island of Ogygia,
so he can quickly tell that fair-haired nymph
our firm decision—that brave Odysseus
will now leave and complete his voyage home.³
I'll go to Ithaca and urge his son
to action and put courage in his heart,
so he will call those long-haired Achaeans
to assembly, and there address the suitors,
who keep on butchering his flocks of sheep
and shambling bent-horned cattle. I'll send him
on a trip to Sparta and sandy Pylos,

110

[90]

120

¹The Cyclopes (singular Cyclops), as we find out later in the poem, are aggressive uncivilized man-eating monsters with only one eye. In Book 9 we find out how Odysseus earned Poseidon's anger.

²Phorcys is a primordial god of the sea.

³The god Hermes is often called the "Killer of Argus" because he killed the monster Argus, whom goddess Hera had ordered to keep watch on Io, so that she would not get into sexual mischief with Zeus; *Achaeans*: Strictly speaking, the term *Achaeans* refers to the inhabitants of Achaea, a region of the Peloponnese in Greece. However, here and in the rest of Homer's text the word designates *residents of Greece generally*, in contrast to those who do not speak Greek (the *barbarians*). Homer rarely uses the term *Greeks* or *Hellenes*, words which to modern readers might suggest a greater degree of political unity than what, in fact, prevails. Occasionally, instead of the name *Achaeans*, Homer uses the word *Argives* (citizens of Argos) or *Danaans* (descendants of Danaus) as a general name for all the Greeks. The suitors are the rich young aristocratic men of Ithaca and the islands who are seeking to marry Penelope, Odysseus's wife, in the belief that Odysseus is dead.

BOOK ONE

to learn about his father's voyage home—
he may hear of it somewhere—and to gain
a worthy reputation among men.”

Athena spoke. Then she tied those lovely sandals
on her feet, the immortal, golden sandals
which carry her as fast as stormy blasts of wind
across the ocean seas and endless tracts of land.
She took with her that weighty, powerful spear— 130
immense and sturdy, with a point of sharpened bronze— [100]
with which she conquers ranks of human warriors
when they annoy her, daughter of a mighty father.
She raced down from the peak of Mount Olympus,
sped across to Ithaca, and then just stood there,
at Odysseus' outer gate before the palace,
on the threshold, her hand still gripping the bronze spear,
in the form of Mentēs, a foreigner, the chief
who ruled the Taphians.¹ There she met the suitors,
those arrogant men, who were enjoying themselves 140
playing checkers right outside the door, sitting down
on hides of cattle they themselves had butchered.
Some heralds and attendants were keeping busy
blending fine wine with water in the mixing bowls. [110]
Some were wiping tables down with porous sponges
and setting them in place, while others passed around
huge quantities of meat. Godlike Telemachus
observed Athena first, well before the others.
He was sitting with the suitors, his heart troubled,
picturing in his mind how his noble father 150
might get back, then scatter the suitors from his home,
win honour for himself, and reassert control
of his own household. As he thought about all this,
sitting there among the suitors, he saw Athena.
At once he hurried over to the outer gate,
for in his heart he considered it disgraceful
that a stranger should linger at his door for long. [120]
He moved up beside Athena, grasped her right hand
and took her bronze-tipped spear. Then he spoke to her—
his words had wings:

“Welcome to you stranger. 160
You must enjoy our hospitality.

¹Mentes is an old friend of Odysseus.

BOOK ONE

Then, after you have had some food to eat,
you can tell us what you need.”

After saying this,
Telemachus led Athena into his home.
She followed. Once they came inside the high-roofed house,
he walked to a tall pillar carrying the spear
and set it in a finely-polished rack, which held
many other spears belonging to Odysseus.
He brought Athena in and sat her in a chair,
a beautifully constructed work. Beneath it 170
he rolled out a linen mat and then set in place [130]
a footstool for her feet. Beside her he drew up
a lovely decorated chair for him to sit in.
They were somewhat distant from the other people,
in case the noise the suitors made disturbed the guest
and made him hate the meal because he had to share
the company of overbearing men. Then, too,
Telemachus wished to discuss his absent father.
A female servant carried in a fine gold jug
and poured water out into a silver basin, 180
so they could wash their hands. Beside them she set down
a polished table. Then the worthy housekeeper [140]
carried in the bread and put it down before them.
She laid out a rich selection of fine things to eat,
drawing freely on supplies she had in store.
A carver sliced up many different cuts of meat
and served them. Then he brought out goblets made of gold,
as a herald went back and forth serving the wine.

Then, one after another, the proud suitors came.
They sat down on reclining seats and high-backed chairs. 190
Heralds poured water out for them to wash their hands,
and women servants piled wicker baskets full of bread,
while young lads filled their bowls up to the brim with drink.
The suitors reached out with their hands to help themselves
to the fine food prepared and placed in front of them.
When each and every man had satisfied his need [150]
for food and drink, their hearts demanded something more—
dancing and song—the finest joys of dinner feasts.

A herald gave a splendid lyre to Phemius,
so he was forced to sing in front of all the suitors. 200

BOOK ONE

On the strings he plucked the prelude to a lovely song.¹
But then Telemachus, leaning his head over
close to Athena, so no one else could listen,
murmured to her:

“Dear stranger, my guest,
I’ll tell you something—please don’t get upset.
These men here, they spend all their time like this,
with songs and music—it’s easy for them,
because they gorge themselves on what belongs [160]
to someone else, and with impunity,
a man whose white bones may well be lying 210
on the mainland somewhere, rotting in the rain,
or in the sea, being tossed around by waves.
If they saw him return to Ithaca,
they’d all be praying they had swifter feet
rather than more wealth in gold or clothing.
But by now some evil fate has killed him,
and for us there is no consolation,
not even if some earth-bound mortal man
should say that he will come. The day has passed
when he might have got back home. But tell me, 220
and speak candidly—Who are your people?
Who are you? What city do you come from?
What about your parents? What kind of ship
did you sail here in? What about the crew? [170]
By what route did they come to Ithaca?
Who do they say they come from? For I know
there’s no way you could reach this place on foot.
And I also need to understand one point,
so tell me the truth—this present visit,
is it your first journey here, or are you 230
a guest-friend of my father’s? Many men
have arrived here in our home as strangers,
since he became a roaming wanderer
among all sorts of people.”²

¹A lyre is a stringed instrument resembling a small harp.

²A guest friend refers to someone who has been welcomed and entertained in that house before or someone who has entertained a nobleman in his own house. Telemachus is trying to establish whether Mentos already has that relationship established on the basis of past visits or whether this is his first visit to Odysseus’s home. Guest friendship involves a complex set of rituals about hospitality to certain special visitors (which includes the exchange of appropriate gifts).

BOOK ONE

Then Athena,
goddess with the gleaming eyes, answered Telemachus:

“To you I will indeed speak openly.
I can tell you that my name is Mentēs, [180]
a son of wise Anchialus, and king
of Taphians, who love the oar.¹ I’ve come,
as you surmise, with comrades on a ship, 240
sailing across the wine-dark sea to men
whose style of speech is very different,
on my way to Temese for copper,
and carrying a freight of shining iron.
My ship is berthed some distance from the town,
close to the fields, in Reithron’s harbour,
below Mount Neion’s woods. We can both claim
that we indeed are guest-friends, the two of us,
just as our fathers were so long ago.
If you want, go up and ask Laertes, 250
that old fighter, who, they say, no longer comes
down to the city, but who bears his troubles
in fields far from the town.² He has with him [190]
an old attendant woman, who prepares
his food and drink, once his legs grow weary
hobbling up and down his vineyard hills.
I’ve travelled here because some people claim
your father has apparently come back.
But immortal gods are still preventing him
from returning home. For there is no chance 260
that brave Odysseus has been killed somewhere.
No. He’s still alive but being detained
on an island, surrounded by the sea,
with wild and hostile men restraining him,
holding him back against his will. But now, [200]
let me tell you about a prophecy
the gods have set right here inside my heart,
which, I think, will come to pass—even though
I am no prophet and have no sure skills
in reading omens from the birds. I say 270
Odysseus will not stay away much longer
from his dear native land, not even if
he’s chained in iron fetters. He’ll devise

¹The Taphians are sea-faring people of the island of Taphos.

²Laertes is the father of Odysseus.

BOOK ONE

some way to get back home, for he's a man
of infinite resources. But come now,
tell me this, and speak straight and to the point.
Are you in truth Odysseus' son? You're tall,
your head and handsome eyes look just like his,
astonishingly so. We used to spend
a lot of time together, before he left
and sailed away to Troy, where other men,
the best of all the Argives, voyaged, too,
in their hollow ships. But since those days,
Odysseus and I have not seen each other."

280

[210]

Noble Telemachus then answered her and said:

"Stranger, I will speak quite frankly to you.
My mother says I am Odysseus' son.
I can't myself confirm that, for no man
has ever yet been sure about his parents.
I wish I'd been the son of some man blest
to reach old age among his own possessions,
for now—and I say this because you asked—
I'm the son of a man who is, they say,
of all mortal men, the most unfortunate."

290

[220]

Goddess Athena with the gleaming eyes answered him:

"Well then, at least the gods have given you
a family which, in days to come, will have
a glorious name, since Penelope
has given birth to such a noble son.
But come, speak openly and tell me this—
What is this feast? Who are these crowds of men?
Why do you need this? Is it a wedding?
Or a drinking party? It seems clear enough
this is no meal where each man brings his share,
and I can see that people here are acting
in an insulting, overbearing way,
while dining in your home. Looking at them
and their disgraceful conduct, any man
who mingled with them, if he had good sense,
would lose his temper."

300

Noble Telemachus
then said to Athena in reply:

310 [230]

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“Stranger,
since you’ve questioned me about the matter,
I’ll tell you. Our house was once well on its way
to being rich and famous—at that time
Odysseus was alive among his people.
But now the gods with their malicious plans
have changed all that completely. They make sure
Odysseus stays where nobody can see him—
gods have not dealt with other men this way.
I would not show such grief if he were dead, 320
not if he’d fallen among his comrades [240]
in the land of Troy, or if he’d perished
in his friends’ arms, once the war was over.
Then the Achaeans all would have put up
a tomb for him, and he’d have won great fame
in future days—so would his son, as well.
But as things stand, some spirits of the storm
have snatched him off and left no trace. He’s gone
somewhere people cannot see or hear him,
abandoning me to tears and sorrow. 330
But it’s not him alone who makes me sad
and cry out in distress. For now the gods
have brought me more intolerable grief.
All the best young men who rule the islands,
Dulichium and wooded Zacynthus,
and Same, as well as those who lord it here
in rocky Ithaca—they are all now
wooing my mother and ravaging my house.¹
She won’t turn down a marriage she detests,
but can’t bring herself to make the final choice. 340
Meanwhile, these men are feasting on my home [250]
and soon will be the death of me as well.”

This made Pallas Athena angry—she said to him:

“It’s bad Odysseus is still wandering
when you need him here so much! He could lay
his hands on these disrespectful suitors.
I wish he’d come home now and make a stand
right at the outer gate, with helmet on,
two spears and his own shield—the sort of man

¹Dulichium, Zacynthus, and Same are islands close to Ithaca, part of Odysseus’s kingdom.

BOOK ONE

he was when I first saw him in our house, 350
 drinking and enjoying himself. At that time,
 he was returning from the home of Ilus,
 the son of Mermerus, from Ephyre.
 Odysseus had gone there in his fast ship, [260]
 seeking a man-killing poison, something
 he could smear over his bronze arrow points.
 However, Ilus did not give him any,
 for he revered the gods who live forever.
 But my father gave him some—his heart felt
 a very strong affection for Odysseus. 360
 How I wish Odysseus from way back then
 would now return and mingle with the suitors.
 They'd all come to a speedy end and find
 their courtship painful. But all these matters
 lie in the laps of gods—he may return
 and take out his revenge in his own hall,
 or he may not. But I'd encourage you
 to think of ways to force these suitors out, [270]
 to rid your halls of them. So hear me out.
 Listen now to what I'm going to tell you. 370
 Tomorrow you must summon the Achaeans
 to an assembly and address them all,
 appealing to the gods as witnesses.
 Tell the suitors to go back to their homes.
 As for your mother, if her heart is set
 on getting married, then let her return
 to where her father lives, for he's a man
 of great capabilities and power.
 He'll organize the marriage and arrange
 the wedding gifts, as many as befit 380
 a well-loved daughter. Now, as for yourself,
 if you'll listen, I have some wise advice.
 Get yourself a crew of twenty rowers [280]
 and the best boat you possess. Then leave here—
 set off in search of news about your father,
 who's been gone so long. Some living mortal
 perhaps can tell you something, or you may hear
 a voice from Zeus, which often brings men news.
 Sail first to Pylos—speak to noble Nestor.¹
 After you've been there, proceed to Sparta 390

¹Nestor, king of Pylos, had fought alongside other Achaeans during the Trojan War and had returned home safely afterwards.

BOOK ONE

and fair-haired Menelaus, the last one
of all bronze-clad Achaeans to get home.¹
If you hear reports your father is alive
and coming home, you could hang on a year
still wasting his resources. But if you hear
that he is dead and gone, then come back home, [290]
to your dear native land, build him a tomb,
and carry out as many funeral rites
as are appropriate. Give your mother
over to a husband. When you've done that 400
and brought these matters to a close, then think,
deep in your mind and heart, how you might kill
these suitors in your home, either openly
or by some trick. You must not keep on acting
like a child—you're now too old for that.
Have you not heard how excellent Orestes
won fame among all men when he cut down [300]
his father's murderer, sly Aegisthus,
because he had killed his famous father?
You are fine and strong, I see, and you, too, 410
should be brave, so people born in future years
will say good things of you. I must go now,
down to my swift ship and to my comrades.
I suspect they're getting quite impatient
waiting for me. Make sure you act with care—
and think about what I've been telling you."

Prudent Telemachus then answered her:

"Stranger,
you've been speaking to me as a friend,
thinking as a father would for his own son—
and what you've said I never will forget. 420
But come now, though you're eager to be off,
stay here a while. Once you've enjoyed a bath [310]
and your fond heart is fully satisfied,
go back with joyful spirits to your ship,
carrying with you an expensive gift,
something truly beautiful, which will be
my gift to you, an heirloom of the sort
dear guest-friends give to those who are their friends."

¹Menelaus, brother of Agamemnon, is king of Sparta and husband of Helen (whose abduction had ostensibly incited the Trojan War).

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Goddess Athena with the gleaming eyes then said:

“Since I’m eager to depart, don’t keep me
a moment longer. And whatever gift
your heart suggests you give me as a friend,
present it to me when I come back here.
Pick me something truly beautiful.
It will earn you something worthy in return.”

430

This said, Athena with the gleaming eyes departed,
flying off like some wild sea bird. In his heart she put
courage and strength. She made him recall his father
more keenly than before. In his mind, Telemachus
could picture her—a sense of wonder filled his heart.
He believed she was a god. So he moved away.
And then the noble youth mingled with the suitors.
The famous minstrel Phemius was performing,
as they sat in silence, listening. He was singing
of the return of the Achaeans, that bitter trip
Athena forced on them when they sailed home from Troy.¹

[320]
440

In her upper room, the daughter of Icarius,
wise Penelope, heard the man’s inspired song.
She came down the towering staircase from her room,
but not alone—two female servants followed her.
When beautiful Penelope reached the suitors,
she stayed beside the door post in the well-built room,
a small bright veil across her face. On either side
her two attendants waited. With tears streaming down,
Penelope addressed the famous singer:

[330]
450

“Phemius,
you know all sorts of other ways to charm
an audience, actions of gods and men
which singers celebrate. As you sit here,
sing one of those, while these men drink their wine
in silence. Don’t keep up that painful song,
which always breaks the heart here in my chest,
for, more than anyone, I am weighed down

460 [340]

¹Athena, though a supporter of the Achaeans during the war, was outraged at the way their army behaved during the sack of Troy, especially at their savage treatment of Troy’s holy places. So she punished the army by making the voyage home very difficult or even fatal for some of its leaders.

BOOK ONE

with ceaseless grief which I cannot forget.
I remember, always with such yearning,
my husband's face, a man whose fame has spread
far and wide through Greece and central Argos."

Sensible Telemachus answered her and said:

"Mother, why begrudge the faithful singer
delighting us in any way his mind
may prompt him? One cannot blame the singers. 470
It seems to me it's Zeus's fault. He hands
to toiling men, each and every one of them,
whatever he desires. There's nothing wrong
with this man's singing of the evil fate [350]
of the Danaans, for men praise the most
the song which they have heard most recently.
Your heart and spirit should accept his song.
For Odysseus was not the only man
at Troy who lost his chance to see the day
he would come back. Many warriors were killed. 480
Go up to your rooms and keep busy there
with your own work, the spindle and the loom.
Tell your servants to perform their duties.
Talking is men's concern, yes, every man's,
but especially mine, since in this house
I'm the one in charge."

Astonished at his speech, [360]
Penelope went back up to her own chambers,
keeping her son's prudent words lodged in her heart.
With her attendant women she climbed up the stairs,
went up to her rooms and there wept for Odysseus, 490
her dear husband, until gleaming-eyed Athena
cast sweet sleep upon her eyelids.

In the shadowy halls
the suitors then started to create an uproar,
each man shouting out his hope to lie beside her.
Then shrewd Telemachus began his speech to them:

"You suitors of my mother, who display
such insolent arrogance, let us for now
enjoy our banquet. But no more shouting,
for it's grand to listen to a singer [370]

as fine as this one—his voice is like a god's. 500
 But in the morning let us all assemble,
 sit down for a meeting, so I can speak
 and tell you firmly to depart my home.
 Prepare your feasts elsewhere, ones that eat up
 your own possessions, moving house to house.
 If you think it's better and would prefer
 that one man's livelihood should be consumed
 without paying anything, I'll call on
 the immortal gods to see if mighty Zeus
 will bring about an act of retribution. 510
 And if you are destroyed inside my home, [380]
 you will not be avenged."

Telemachus finished.
 They all bit their lips, astonished he had spoken out
 so boldly. Then, Antinous, son of Eupeithes,
 answered him:

"Telemachus, the gods themselves,
 it seems, are teaching you to be a braggart
 and give rash speeches. I do hope that Zeus,
 son of Cronos, does not make you king
 of this island Ithaca, even though
 it is your father's legacy to you." 520

Shrewd Telemachus then answered him and said:

"Antinous, will you be angry with me,
 if I say something? I would be happy 390
 to accept that, if Zeus gave it to me.
 Are you maintaining that becoming king
 is the very worst of trials for mortal men?
 No. To be king is not something evil.
 One's family gets rich immediately,
 and one receives more honours for oneself.
 But there are other kings of the Achaeans, 530
 many of them here in sea-girt Ithaca,
 young and old, one of whom could well be king,
 since lord Odysseus is now dead, but I
 will rule our home and servants, battle spoils
 which noble lord Odysseus won for me."

Then Eurymachus, son of Polybus, replied:

“Telemachus, these matters surely lie [400]
 in the gods’ laps—which of the Achaeans
 will rule in Ithaca. But you can keep
 all your possessions for yourself as king 540
 in your own home. Let no man come with force
 and seize your property against your will,
 no, not while men still live in Ithaca.
 But I would like to ask you, my good man,
 about that stranger. Where does he come from?
 From what country does he claim to be?
 Where are his family, his paternal lands?
 Does he bring news of your father’s coming,
 or is he here pursuing his own business?
 He jumped up so fast and left so quickly! 550
 He did not stay to let himself get known. [410]
 And yet to look at him, he did not seem
 a worthless man.”

Prudent Telemachus
 then answered him and said:

“Eurymachus,
 my father’s journey back to Ithaca
 is no doubt done for. I no longer trust
 in messages, no matter what the source.
 Nor do I care for any prophecy
 my mother picks up from those soothsayers
 she summons to these halls. That foreigner 560
 is a guest-friend of my father’s. He says
 that he’s from Taphos. His name is Mentès,
 son of wise Anchialus. He rules as king
 over oar-loving Taphians.”

He said this, [420]
 but in his heart Telemachus had recognized
 the immortal goddess. At that point, the suitors
 switched to dancing and to singing beautiful songs.
 They entertained themselves until dark evening fell.
 Then each of them retired to his own house to sleep.

Telemachus moved up to where his room was built, 570
 high in the splendid courtyard, with a spacious view,
 his mind much preoccupied on his way to bed.

BOOK ONE

Accompanying him, quick-minded Eurycleia
held two flaming torches. She was Ops's daughter, [430]
son of Peisenor. Some years ago Laertes
had purchased her with his own wealth—at the time,
she was in her early youth—paying twenty oxen.¹
In his home he respected her the way he did
his noble wife, but not once did he have sex with her,
because he wanted to avoid annoying his wife. 580
She was now carrying two blazing torches for him.
Of all the female household slaves she was the one
who loved him most, for she had nursed him as a child.
He opened the doors of the well-constructed room,
sat down on the bed, and pulled off his soft tunic,
gave it to the wise old woman, who smoothed it out,
and folded it, then hung the tunic on a peg
beside the corded bedstead. Then she left the room, [440]
closing the door by pulling its silver handle.
She pulled the bolt across, using its leather thong. 590
Telemachus lay there all night long, warmly wrapped
in sheep's wool, his mind reflecting on the journey
which Athena had earlier proposed to him.

¹Laertes, father of Odysseus, is now living on a farmyard estate in Ithaca, away from the city.

BOOK TWO
TELEMACHUS PREPARES FOR HIS VOYAGE

[Telemachus summons all the Achaeans to an assembly; Aegyptius speaks first; Telemachus complains about the suitors and threatens them; Antinous replies, blaming Penelope, describing how she has deceived the suitors, and issuing an ultimatum to Telemachus; Telemachus says he will never send his mother away; Zeus sends two eagles as an omen; Halitherses prophesies trouble for the suitors; Eurymachus replies with a threat and an ultimatum; Telemachus announces his intention of making a sea voyage; Telemachus prays to Athena, who reappears as Mentor and gives instructions for the trip; the suitors mock Telemachus; Telemachus tells Eurycleia to prepare supplies for the voyage; Athena organizes a ship and a crew for Telemachus and puts the suitors to sleep; Telemachus and the crew collect the supplies, load them onboard, and sail away from Ithaca.]

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
Odysseus's dear son jumped out of bed and dressed.
He laced up lovely sandals on his shining feet
and carried a sharp sword hanging from his shoulders.
Then he left his room, his face resembling a god's.
At once he asked the loud-voiced heralds to summon
all the long-haired Achaeans to an assembly.
They issued the call, and the Achaeans answered,
gathering quickly. When the assembly had convened,
Telemachus moved directly to the meeting,
gripping a bronze-tipped spear. He was not by himself—
two swift-footed hunting dogs accompanied him.
Athena cast down over him a god-like poise—
all the people were astonished at his presence,
as he entered and sat down in his father's chair,
while the senior men gave way. Among those present,
heroic Aegyptius was the first to speak,
an old man stooped with age, but infinitely wise.
His son, warrior Antiphus, had sailed to Troy,
that horse-rich city, along with lord Odysseus,
in their hollow ships. But in his cave the cyclops,
after killing him, had made him his final meal.¹
Aegyptius had three other sons. One of them,
Eurynomus, was with the suitors. The other two
were always working in their father's fields. But still,

10 [10]

20

[20]

¹The adventures of Odysseus and his companions with the cyclops are told later in the poem, in Book 9. It is not clear how Aegyptius could have learned of his son's death, since no one in Ithaca seems to have any knowledge of what has happened to Odysseus and his men since they left Troy.

BOOK TWO

Aegyptius could not forget the son who died.
And now, still racked with grief and mourning, he shed tears
as he addressed them:

“You men of Ithaca,
pay attention to what I have to say.
We have not held a general meeting
or assembly since the day Odysseus
sailed from here in his hollow ships. What man
has made us gather now? What’s his reason?
Is he a younger or a senior man?
Has he heard some news about the army
and will give us details of its journey home,
now that he has heard the news himself?
Or is it some other public business
he will bring up and talk to us about?
He has my blessing! I pray that Zeus
fulfills whatever he has in his heart
and makes his wishes work out for the best.”

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[30]
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Aegyptius spoke. Odysseus’ dear son rejoiced
at such auspicious words. But he did not sit long,
for he was very keen to speak. So he stood up
in the midst of the assembly, and Peisenor,
a herald who could offer shrewd advice, handed him
the sceptre.¹ Then Telemachus began to speak,
talking to Aegyptius first of all:

“Old man,
the one who called the people to this meeting
is not far off, as you will quickly learn.
I did. For I’m a man who suffers more
than other men. But I have no reports
of our returning army, no details
I’ve just heard myself to pass on to you,
nor is there any other public business
I will mention or discuss. The issue now
is my own need, for on my household here
troubles have fallen in a double sense.
First, my noble father’s perished, the man
who was once your king and my kind father.
And then there’s an even greater problem,

[40]
50
60

¹In a traditional assembly a sceptre was passed to the man who was to speak next.

BOOK TWO

which will quickly and completely shatter
this entire house, and my whole livelihood
will be destroyed. These suitors, the dear sons [50]
of those men here with most nobility,
are pestering my mother against her will.
They don't want to journey to her father,
Icarius, in his home, where he himself
could arrange a bride price for his daughter 70
and give her to the man he feels he likes,
the one who pleases him the most. Instead,
they hang around our house, day after day,
butchering oxen, well fed goats, and sheep.
They keep on feasting, drinking gleaming wine
without restraint, and they consume so much.
There's no man to guard our home from ruin,
as Odysseus did before. I cannot act
the way he used to and avert disaster. [60]
If I tried, I would be hopeless, a man 80
who had not learned what courage is. And yet,
if I had power, I would defend myself,
because we can't endure what's happening.
My home is being demolished in a way
that is not right. You men should be ashamed.
You should honour other men, your neighbours,
who live close by. And you should be afraid
of anger from the gods, in case their rage
at your impiety turns them against you.
I beg you by Olympian Zeus and Themis, 90
who summons and disperses men's assemblies,
restrain yourselves, my friends—leave me alone
to suffer my own bitter grief, unless [70]
Odysseus, my noble father, for spite
has hurt well-armed Achaeans, and so now,
in recompense for this, you angry gods
are harming me by urging these men on.¹
For me it would be better if you gods
ate up my landed property and flocks.
If gods were the ones feasting here, then soon 100
there might be compensation. All the time
they were doing that, we'd walk up and down,
throughout the city, asking for our goods

¹Themis is the goddess of divine order, custom, and natural law. She is a Titan, one of the divine presences from before the rule of Olympian Zeus.

BOOK TWO

to be returned, until the day each piece
was given back. But now you load my heart
with pain beyond all hope.”

Telemachus spoke, [80]
then in his anger threw the sceptre on the ground
and burst out crying. Everyone there pitied him,
so all the other men kept silent, unwilling
to give an angry answer to Telemachus. 110
Antinous was the only one to speak. He said:

“Telemachus you boaster, your spirit
is too unrestrained. How you carry on,
trying to shame us, since you so desire
the blame should rest on us. But in your case,
Achaean suitors aren’t the guilty ones.
Your own dear mother is, who understands
how to use deceit. It’s been three years now—
and soon it will be four—since she began
to deceive the hearts in our Achaean chests. 120 [90]
She gives hope to each of us, makes promises
to everyone, and sends out messages.
But her intent is different. In her mind
she has thought up another stratagem.
She had a large loom set up in her rooms
and started weaving something very big,
with thread that was quite thin. She said to us:

‘Young men, those of you who are my suitors,
since Odysseus is dead, you must wait,
although you are all keen for me to marry, 130
till I complete this cloak—for if I don’t,
my weaving would be wasted and in vain.
It is a shroud for warrior Laertes,
for the day a lethal fate will strike him.’¹ [100]
Then none of the Achaean women here
will be annoyed with me because a man
who acquired so many rich possessions
would lie without a shroud.’

¹The life of a mortal was often depicted as a thread, woven by the three Fates: Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos. Atropos was responsible for cutting the thread, thus determining the length and end of one’s life.

BOOK TWO

That's what she said.
And our proud hearts agreed. And so each day
she wove at her great loom, but every night 140
she set up torches and pulled the work apart.
Three years she fooled Achaeans with this trick.
They trusted her. But as the seasons passed,
the fourth year came. Then one of her women
who knew all the details spoke about them,
and we caught her undoing her lovely work.
So then we forced her to complete the cloak [110]
against her will. The suitors now say this,
so you, deep in your heart, will understand
and all Achaeans know—send your mother back. 150
Tell her she must marry whichever man
her father tells her and who pleases her.
But if she keeps on doing this for long,
teasing Achaea's sons because in her heart
she knows that she's been given by Athena,
more than any other woman, a skill
in making lovely things, a noble heart,
and cunning of a sort we never hear of
in any fair-haired woman of Achaea,
even the ones who lived so long ago— 160
like Tyro, Alcmene, and Mycene, [120]
the woman who wore the lovely headband—
not one of them had shrewdness which could match
Penelope's.¹ Yet in one thing at least
her scheme did not go well. Your livelihood
and your possessions will keep vanishing
as long as in her mind she follows plans
the gods have now put in her heart. And so,
while she is gaining a fine reputation,
you're sad about so much lost sustenance. 170
But we are not returning to our lands,
or someplace else, not until she marries
an Achaean man of her own choosing."

Prudent Telemachus then answered him and said:

¹Tyro, Alcmene, and Mycene are well known legendary figures. Tyro had sex with Poseidon, producing two twin sons Pelias and Neleus; Alcmene was the mother of Hercules (by Zeus) and Iphicles; Mycene was a daughter of Inachus.

BOOK TWO

“Antinous, there’s no way I will dismiss [130]
out of this house against her will the one
who bore and nursed me. As for my father,
he’s in a distant land, alive or dead.
It would be hard for me to compensate
Icarius with a suitable amount, 180
as I would have to do, if I sent her back.
If I did not pay him, then her father
would treat me badly, and some deity
would send other troubles, since my mother,
as she left this house, would call upon
the dreaded Furies.¹ Men would blame me, too.
That’s why I’ll never issue such an order.
And if your heart is angry about this,
then leave my home, go have your feasts elsewhere.
Eat up your own possessions, changing homes, 190 [140]
one by one. But if you think it’s better,
more in your interests, that one man’s goods
should all be consumed without repayment,
then use them up. But I will call upon
immortal gods to ask if somehow Zeus
will give me retribution. Then you’ll die
here in my home and never be avenged.”

Telemachus spoke. Then from a mountain peak
far-seeing Zeus replied by sending out two eagles,
flying high up in the sky. For some time they soared, 200
like gusts of wind, with their wings spread out, side by side.
But when they reached the middle of the crowded meeting, [150]
suddenly they beat their wings and wheeled around,
swooping down on everyone, destruction in their eyes.
Then with their talons they attacked each other
clawing head and neck, and flew off on the right,
past people’s homes, across the town. They were amazed
to see both birds with their own eyes. In their hearts
they were stirred up to think how everything would end.

Then old warrior Halitherses, Mastor’s son, 210
addressed them. He surpassed all men of his own time
in knowledge about birds and making prophecies
of what Fate had in store. With their common good in mind, [160]
he spoke up:

¹The Furies are the goddess of blood revenge, particularly within the family.

BOOK TWO

“Listen to me, men of Ithaca.
Hear what I say. In what I’m going to speak,
I’m talking to the suitors most of all.
A mighty ruin is rolling over them.
For Odysseus will not be away for long
from his own friends. In my view, even now
he’s near by, planning a disastrous fate 220
for all the suitors. And he’ll be a scourge
to many others in sun-filled Ithaca.
Long before that we should be considering
how to stop this. Or rather, these suitors
should end it by themselves. That would achieve
what’s best for them and do so right away.
For I am not unskilled in prophecy— [170]
I understand things well. To Odysseus
I say that everything is turning out
just as I told him. Back when Achaeans, 230
with resourceful Odysseus in their ranks,
were sailing off to Troy, I prophesied
he’d suffer many troubles and would lose
all his shipmates before returning home
in twenty years, unknown to anyone.
Now everything I said is coming true.”

Then Eurymachus, Polybus’s son, spoke out:

“Old man, you should go home and prophesy
to your own children, so that something bad
does not happen to them later. In these things 240
I can foretell events better than you can. [180]
There are lots of birds flying here and there
beneath the sunshine, and not all of them
are omens of disaster. Odysseus
has perished far away, and how I wish
you had died there with him. For if you had,
you would not utter prophecies like these
or be encouraging Telemachus
when he’s enraged, in hopes you’ll get a gift,
some present he might give you for your house. 250
But I tell you this—and it will happen.
You may know many things an old man knows,
so if your words deceive a younger man
made him grow enraged, then, first of all, [190]

BOOK TWO

he'll be much worse off, and, with these men here,
will not have the slightest power to act.
And on you, old man, we'll lay a penalty
that will pain your heart to pay—your sorrow
will be difficult to bear. But now here,
among you all, I will myself provide 260
Telemachus advice. He must command
his mother to return home to her father.
They will prepare a wedding, offering
as many lovely presents as befit
a well-loved daughter. Before that happens,
I do not think Achaea's sons will end
their unwelcome wooing, for there's no one
we're afraid of yet—not Telemachus, [200]
for all his wordiness—nor do we care
about a prophecy which you, old man, 270
may spout. For it won't come to fruition,
and people will despise you all the more.
And his possessions will be eaten up
in this shameful way. There will never be
compensation given, so long as she
keeps putting off Achaeans in this marriage.
Because she's so desirable, we wait here,
day after day, as rivals, and don't seek
different women, any one of whom
might be suitable for us to marry." 280

Shrewd Telemachus then said in reply:

“Eurymachus,
all you other noble suitors, no longer
will I make requests of you or speak of it, [210]
for gods and all Achaeans understand.
Just give me a swift ship and twenty men—
so I can make a journey and return
to various places, to sandy Pylos,
then to Sparta, to see if I can find
some news about my father's voyage home—
he's been gone so long—if any mortal man 290
can tell me. Or I'll hear Zeus's voice perhaps,
which commonly provides men information.
If I hear my father is still living
and returning home, I could hold out here
for one more year, although it's hard for me.

BOOK TWO

If I learn he's dead and gone, I'll come back [220]
to my dear native land, build him a tomb,
and there perform as many funeral rites
as are appropriate. And after that,
I will agree—she must choose a husband.” 300

Telemachus said this, then sat down. Next Mentor,
who had been noble Odysseus's companion,
stood up among them. When he'd sailed off in his ships,
Odysseus had made Mentor steward of his household,
charging them to follow what the old man ordered
and telling Mentor to keep all property secure.
Keeping in mind their common good, he spoke to them:

“Men of Ithaca, listen now to me.
Hear the things I have to say. From now on [230]
let no king ever be considerate 310
or kind or gentle. Let him in his heart
ignore what is right, act with cruelty,
and strive for evil, for nobody here,
none of those whom divine Odysseus ruled,
remembers him, yet in his role as father,
he was compassionate. Not that I object
to these proud suitors and the violent acts
which they, with their malicious minds, commit,
for they are putting their own heads at risk,
when they use force to drain Odysseus' home 320
of its resources and claim he won't return.
But at this point it's the other people
I am angry with, you who sit in silence [240]
and don't say anything to criticize
or make the suitors stop, even though
their numbers are much smaller than your own.”

Leocritus, son of Euenor, spoke in reply:

“Mentor, you're making mischief now, your wits
have wandered off. What are you suggesting,
urging men to stop us? It would be hard 330
to fight against those who outnumber you—
and about a feast. Even if Odysseus,
king of Ithaca, were to come in person,
eager in his heart to drive out of his halls
these noble suitors eating up his home,

BOOK TWO

his wife would not rejoice at his arrival,
although she yearned for him. For if he fought
against so many men, then he would meet [250]
a shameful death right here. What you've just said
is quite irrelevant. So come on now, 340
you people should disperse, each one of you
returning to his home. And Telemachus—
well, Mentor and Halitherses, comrades
of his ancestral house from years ago,
will speed him on his way. But still, I think
he will be sitting here a long time yet,
collecting his reports in Ithaca.
He's never going to undertake that trip."

Leocritus spoke, and the meeting soon dissolved.
The men dispersed, each one going to his own house. 350
The suitors went inside godlike Odysseus' home.

Telemachus walked away, along the ocean shore. [260]
There, once he'd washed his hands in grey salt water,
to Athena he addressed this prayer:

"O hear me,
you who yesterday visited my home
as a god and ordered me to set off
in a swift ship across the murky seas,
to learn about my father's voyage back
after being away so long. All this
Achaean are preventing, most of all, 360
the suitors with their evil arrogance."

As he said this prayer, Athena appeared to him,
looking and sounding just like Mentor. She spoke out—
her words had wings:

"Telemachus, [270]
in future days you will not be worthless
or a stupid man, if you have in you now
something of your father's noble spirit.
He's the sort of man who, in word and deed,
saw things to their conclusion. So for you
this trip will not be in vain or pointless. 370
If you're not sprung from Penelope and him,
then I have no hope that you'll accomplish

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what you desire to do. It's true few men
are like their fathers. Most of them are worse.
Only very few of them are better.

But in future you'll not be unworthy
or a fool, for you do not completely lack
Odysseus's wisdom, so there is hope [280]
you will fulfil your mission. Set aside
what idiotic suitors have advised. 380

They lack all judgment, all sense of justice,
for they do not think of death, the dark fate
encircling them, when in a single day
they will all perish. You must not delay
that trip you wish to make. I am a friend
of your ancestral home, so much so that I
will furnish a fast ship for you and come
in person with you. Now you must go home.

Mingle with the suitors. Collect provisions,
and put everything in some containers— 390
wine in jars and barley, which strengthens men, [290]
in thick leather sacks. I'll go through the town
and quickly round up a group of comrades,
all volunteers. In sea-girt Ithaca,
I'll choose from the many ships, new and old,
the finest one for you, and when that ship
has been made ready and is fit to sail,
we'll launch it out into the wine-dark sea."

Athena, Zeus's daughter, ended her advice.
Telemachus did not remain there very long, 400
once he had heard what the goddess said. He set off
towards his home, a weight upon his heart, and there
he found the arrogant suitors in the palace,
all through the courtyard, skinning goats and singeing pigs. [300]
Antinous came up laughing at Telemachus.
He grabbed his hand and spoke to him:

“Telemachus,
you're such a braggart—an untamed spirit.
You should never allow that heart of yours
to harbour any further nasty words
or actions. I think you should eat and drink, 410
just as you did before. Achaeans here
will certainly see to it you acquire
all the things you need—some hand-picked oarsmen

BOOK TWO

and a ship, so you can quickly travel
to sacred Pylos in search of some report
about your noble father.”

Prudent Telemachus
then answered him and said:

“Antinous, [310]
it’s quite impossible for me to eat
and stay quiet in your high-handed group
or enjoy myself with my mind at ease. 420
Is it not sufficient that in days past,
while I was so much younger, you suitors
consumed so much of my fine property?
But now that I’ve grown up and teach myself
by listening to others and my spirit
gets stronger here inside me, I will try
to counteract the wicked fate you bring,
either by going to Pylos, or else here,
in this community. For I will set out,
and the voyage which I have talked about 430
will not be useless, even though I sail
as a passenger and not the master
of the ship or oarsmen. It seems to me
you think this will benefit the suitors.” [320]

Telemachus spoke and casually pulled his hand
away from Antinous’ grasp. Meanwhile, the suitors,
preoccupied with feasting in the house, mocked him
and kept up their abusive insults. One of them,
some haughty, over-proud young man, would speak like this:

“It seems Telemachus really does intend 440
to murder us. He’ll bring men to help him
back from sandy Pylos or from Sparta.
That’s how fearsome his resolution is.
Or else he wants to head off to Ephyre,
that rich land, so he can bring back from there
some lethal medicines and then throw them
in the wine bowl, and thus destroy us all.” [330]

And after that another proud young man would say:

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“Who knows whether he might destroy himself,
once he sets off in his hollow ship, roaming
far away from friends, just like Odysseus?
If so, he’ll provide still more work for us.
We’ll have to split up everything he owns
and hand this palace over to his mother
and the man she marries.”

450

That’s how the suitors talked.
But Telemachus just walked away, going down
to the high-roofed chamber which stored his father’s wealth,
a wide and spacious place, bronze and gold in stacks,
and clothing packed in chests and stores of fragrant oil.
Huge jars of old sweet wine stood there—each one contained
drink fit for gods, none of it yet mixed with water—
arranged in rows along the wall, in case Odysseus,
after so many hardships, ever reached his home.
The close-fitting double doors were securely closed,
and a female steward guarded it day and night,
protecting everything, the shrewd Eurycleia,
daughter of Ops, Peisenor’s son. Telemachus
called her into the storage room, then said:

460 [340]

“Old Nurse,
pour out some sweet wine into jars for me,
the very best you’ve got after the stock
you’re planning to store here for Odysseus,
that ill-fated man, born from Zeus, in case,
after evading death and fate, he shows up
from somewhere.¹ Fill twelve jars and fit them all
with covers. Pour me out some barley grain
in well-stitched leather sacks. Make sure there are
twenty measures of ground-up barley meal.
But keep this knowledge to yourself. Just get
all these things assembled. In the evening,
once my mother goes up into her room
to get some sleep, I’ll come to collect them.
I’m off to sandy Pylos and to Sparta,
to see if I can get some information

470 [350]

480

¹The phrase “born from Zeus” is commonly linked to Odysseus. It is a tribute to his nobility and is not to be taken literally: Odysseus is not a mortal child of Zeus (although he is descended from Zeus).

BOOK TWO

about my dear father travelling home, [360]
if there is any news I can find out.”

Telemachus spoke. The dear nurse Eurycleia
let out a cry and began to weep. Then she spoke—
her words had wings:

“O my dear child,
how did this thought gain entry to your heart?
Where on this earth do you intend to roam, 490
with you an only son and so well loved?
In some distant land among strange people
Odysseus, a man born from Zeus, has died.
As soon as you have left here, the suitors
will start their schemes to hurt you later on—
how they can have you killed by trickery
and then apportion out among themselves
all your possessions. You must remain here
to guard what’s yours. You don’t need to suffer
what comes from wandering the restless sea.” 500 [370]

Shrewd Telemachus then answered her and said:

“Be brave, dear nurse, for I have not planned this
without help from a god. But you must swear
you won’t mention this to my dear mother,
until eleven or twelve days from now,
until she misses me or learns I’ve gone—
she must not mar her lovely face with tears.”

Once Telemachus said this, the old woman swore
a mighty oath by all the gods she’d tell no one.
When she had sworn and the oath had been completed, 510
she went immediately to pour wine into jars
and fill the well-stitched leather sacks with barley meal. [380]
Telemachus went up into the dining hall,
once more mingling in the company of suitors.

Then goddess Athena with the glittering eyes
thought of something else. Looking like Telemachus,
she roamed through the city. To every man
Athena met she issued the same instructions,
telling them to meet by the fast ship that evening.
Next, she asked Noemon, fine son of Phronius, 520

BOOK TWO

for a swift ship, and he was happy to oblige.
Then the sun went down, and all the roads grew dark.
Athena dragged the fast ship down into the sea
and stocked it with supplies, all the materials [390]
well-decked boats have stowed on board, and moved the ship
to the harbour's outer edge. There they assembled,
that group of brave companions, and the goddess
filled them with new spirit in their hearts. Then Athena,
goddess with the gleaming eyes, thought of one more thing.
She set off, going to noble Odysseus's home. 530
There she poured sweet drowsiness on all the suitors.
She made them wander around as they were drinking,
knocking wine cups from their hands. So once sweet Sleep
overpowered their eyes, the suitors felt an urge
not to stay sitting there for any length of time,
but to get themselves some rest down in the city.¹
Then bright-eyed Athena ordered Telemachus
to come outside, by the entrance to the spacious hall. [400]
In her voice and form she resembled Mentor:

“Telemachus, your well-armed companions 540
are already sitting beside their oars,
waiting for you to launch the expedition.
Let's be off, so we don't delay the trip
a moment longer.”

With these words, Pallas Athena
quickly led the way, and Telemachus followed
in her footsteps. After they'd come down to the sea
and had reached the ship, on the shore they came across
their long-haired comrades. Telemachus spoke to them
with strength and power:

“Come, my friends, let's gather [410]
our supplies. They've already been piled up, 550
all together in the hall. My mother
knows nothing of all this, and the women
of the household are in the dark, as well.
I've mentioned this to only one of them.”

¹In this translation the word Sleep is capitalized when it refers to the god of sleep and is not capitalized when it refers to the state of being asleep.

BOOK TWO

After saying this, Telemachus led them away,
and the group then followed. They carried everything
to the well-decked ship and stowed it all in place,
as Odysseus' dear son instructed them to do.
Then, with Athena going on board ahead of him,
Telemachus climbed in, too. She sat in the stern. 560
Telemachus sat right beside her, as the men
untied the stern ropes and clambered aboard the ship,
each of them moving to a place beside an oar.
Bright-eyed Athena arranged a fair breeze for them, [420]
a strong West Wind blowing across the wine-dark sea.
Telemachus then called out to his companions
to set their hands to the ship's rigging. Once they heard,
they went to work, raising the mast cut out of fir,
setting it in its hollow socket, securing it
with forestays, and hoisting the white sail high aloft 570
with twisted ox-hide thongs. The belly of the sail
filled out with wind, and the crew were underway.
As the ship sliced through the swell on its way forward,
around the bow began the great song of the waves.
When they had lashed the rigging on that fast black ship, [430]
they set out bowls brimful of wine and poured libations
to the eternal ageless gods, and of them all
especially to Athena, Zeus's bright-eyed child.
Then all night long and well beyond the sunrise,
their ship continued sailing on its journey. 580

BOOK THREE
TELEMACHUS VISITS NESTOR IN PYLOS

[Telemachus and his crew reach Pylos and are welcomed by Nestor; Nestor describes events at Troy and on the voyage home; Nestor gives an account of Aegisthus's plan to seduce Clytaemnestra and murder Agamemnon; Nestor sacrifices to Poseidon, then invites Athena and Telemachus to stay the night with him; Athena declines, but Telemachus goes with Nestor; Nestor and his sons offer a sacrifice to Athena; Polycaste gives Telemachus a bath; Nestor orders a chariot; Telemachus and Peisistratus leave Pylos, spend the night in Pherae, then continue their journey.]

When the sun had left the splendid sea and risen up
into an all-bronze heaven, giving light to gods
and mortal creatures and grain to farmers' fields,
the ship and crew reached Pylos, a well-built city
ruled by Nestor. There by the sea the city folk
were preparing black bulls as holy offerings
to lord Poseidon, dark-haired Shaker of the Earth.¹
There were nine groups of them, each one five hundred strong,
and nine offerings of bulls ready for sacrifice.
As they were sampling some of the inner organs 10
and cooking thigh parts for the gods, the ship and crew
were heading straight for shore. The crew hauled in and furled [10]
the sails on their trim ship, moored it, and disembarked.
With Athena showing the way, Telemachus
stepped from the ship. The bright-eyed goddess spoke to him:

“Telemachus, no need to feel ashamed,
not in the least, for this is why you've sailed
across the sea, to get information
about your father—where he is buried
and what fate has befallen him. Come now, 20
go directly to horse-taming Nestor.
Let's find out what advice his heart contains.
You yourself must beg him to tell the truth.
He will not lie, for he is truly wise.” [20]

Prudent Telemachus then answered her and said:

“Mentor, how shall I go there and greet him?
I've had no practice with such formal speech.

¹Poseidon is god of the sea and of earthquakes (hence, two common epithets applied to him: “encircler of the earth” and “shaker of the earth” or “earthshaker”).

BOOK THREE

And then, when a young man seeks to question
an older one, his words could bring him shame.”¹

Athena, goddess with the gleaming eyes, then said: 30

“Telemachus, your heart will think of something,
and power from heaven will provide the rest.
For I don’t think that you were born and raised
without being favoured by the gods.”

She spoke.

Pallas Athena quickly led them along the shore
Telemachus followed in the goddess’s footsteps. [30]

They reached the group of Pylians assembled there,
where Nestor sat among his sons. All around them,
his companions were getting ready for the feast,
cooking meat and setting other pieces onto spits. 40

When they observed the strangers, they came thronging round,
clasping them by their hands, inviting them to sit.
Peisistratus, son of Nestor, approached them first,
took Athena and Telemachus both by the hand,
and invited them to sit on cushions on the beach
and to eat beside his brother Thrasymedes
and his father. He gave them portions of the innards,
and then into a cup of gold he poured some wine. [40]

Making a toast to Pallas Athena, daughter
of aegis-bearing Zeus, he spoke to her and said:² 50

“Stranger, you must pray to lord Poseidon—
this celebration you have chanced upon
is in his honour. When you have offered
your libation and have prayed, as is right,
hand your comrade the cup of honey wine,
so he can pour out his libation, too,
for he looks like someone who offers prayers
to the immortals. All men need the gods.
Since he’s a younger man of my own age,
I’ll start by giving you this golden cup.” 60 [50]

¹As in Book 2, Athena has the form and voice of Mentor. Hence Telemachus addresses her by that name.

²The aegis is a shield borne by Zeus (or by a god to whom he lends it), symbolic of the storm cloud. Its powers make men afraid and run off in a panic.

BOOK THREE

Saying this, he set the cup of sweet wine in her hand.
Athena rejoiced at such a wise and righteous man,
because he had offered the gold cup to her first.
At once she made a solemn prayer to lord Poseidon:

“Hear me, Poseidon, you who enfold the earth—
do not hold back from bringing to fulfillment
those events we pray for. And to begin with,
give Nestor and his sons a glorious name,
and then grant all other men of Pylos
a pleasing recompense in answer to 70
these lovely offerings. And in addition,
grant that Telemachus and I get back,
once we have accomplished all those things [60]
for which we came here in our swift black ship.”

That is the prayer Athena uttered, while she herself
was taking care that everything would work out well.
She gave Telemachus the fine two-handled cup.
Odysseus’s brave son then made a prayer like hers.
Once they finished roasting the upper cuts of meat
and had pulled them off the spits, they served out portions 80
and had a sumptuous feast. When every one of them
had taken food and drink to his own heart’s content,
Nestor, the Geranian horseman, began to speak:¹

“It seems to me that it’s a good time now
to ask our guests to tell us who they are,
now they’ve enjoyed our food. And so, strangers, 70
who are you? What country did you sail from,
when you set your course across the water?
Are you on business? Or are you roaming
on the seas at random, like those pirates 90
who sail here and there, risking their own lives,
posing a threat to men from other lands?”

Then prudent Telemachus spoke up in reply,
and boldly, too, for Athena herself had put
fresh courage in his heart, so he might talk about
his absent father and acquire for himself
a noble reputation:

¹Nestor is frequently called the “Geranian horseman,” presumably because as a young lad he was raised in Gerania, away from his family in Pylos.

BOOK THREE

“Nestor, son of Neleus,
great glory of Achaeans, you asked us
the land we come from, so I will tell you. [80]
We’re from Ithaca below Mount Neion. 100
My business, which I’ll mention, is private,
not a public matter. I am pursuing
wide-spread rumours of the brave Odysseus,
my father, who, they say, fought at your side
and utterly destroyed the Trojans’ city.
We have heard reports about the others,
those who went to war against the Trojans—
where each met his piteous fate—but Zeus,
son of Cronos, has made Odysseus’ death
something unknown, for none of us can say 110
with any confidence where he was killed,
whether he was overwhelmed by enemies [90]
on land or killed at sea by waves stirred up
by Amphitrite.¹ That’s why I have come
to sit now in your home, for there’s a chance
you could provide some news of how he died,
something you may have seen with your own eyes.
Or perhaps you’ve heard about his wanderings
from someone else. For his mother bore him
to go through trouble more than other men. 120
Do not pity me or, from compassion,
just offer me kind words of consolation,
but tell me truly how you chanced to see him.
If in word or deed, my father, Odysseus,
ever made a promise and kept his word,
when you two were there among the Trojans,
where the Achaeans suffered such distress, [100]
I ask you now—remember what he did,
and give me the truth.”

Responding to Telemachus,
Geranian horseman Nestor said:

“My friend, 130
you make me call to mind the suffering
and boundless courage of Achaea’s sons
in all they went through over there, the things

¹Amphitrite, a sea goddess, is wife to Poseidon. Her name may be a reference to the Atlantic Ocean.

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we had to endure while on board the ships,
as we roamed across the misty waters,
in search of loot, with Achilles in the lead,
all the fights around great Priam's city,
where so many of our finest men were killed,¹
where warlike Ajax and Achilles lie,
and Patroclus, too, a man whose counsel
was like the gods'. My own dear son fell there,
Antilochus, as strong as he was noble,
outstanding for his speed and fighting skill.
And we endured countless other hardships
apart from these. Who could possibly describe
every detail of the men who perished?
If you were to spend five or six years here
questioning me about the brave Achaeans
and the troubles they went through, you'd grow tired
and sail back home well before I'd finished.
Nine years we spent scheming to bring them down
with every sort of trick, but Cronos' son
made all our plans so hard to carry out.
Over there no one ever tried to claim
he could match Odysseus's shrewd advice.
In devising every kind of devious scheme
he was easily the best, your father,
if indeed you are his son. Looking at you,
I am astonished, for you truly speak
the way he did. No one would ever think
a younger man could talk so much like him.
All that time back then, never once did I
and lord Odysseus, in council or assembly,
disagree. We spoke with a single heart
and gave the Argives wise and useful views
about how those events would best turn out.
But when Priam's lofty city was destroyed
and our ships set off, the Achaean fleet
was scattered by some god. And even so,
Zeus planned in his heart to give Achaeans
a sorrowful return. They had not been wise
or righteous, so many met a nasty fate,
thanks to the mortal anger of Athena,
bright-eyed goddess with a mighty father.
She incited both sons of Atreus

140 [110]
150
[120]
160
[130]
170

¹Priam was king of Troy during the Trojan War. He was killed during the capture of the city.

BOOK THREE

to quarrel with each other. The two men
had quickly called Achaeans to assembly,
not in the usual way, but at sunset.
Achaëa's sons arrived all flushed with wine.
Both kings delivered speeches. They explained 180 [140]
why they had called the meeting. Menelaus
told Achaeans to plan on going home
on the broad back of the sea. What he said
did not please Agamemnon in the least,
because he wished to keep the army there,
so they could all offer sacrifices
to appease Athena's dreadful anger.
The fool! He didn't know there was no chance
that she was going to hear what he would say.
For the minds of gods, who live forever, 190
are not altered quickly. So these two men
stood there, trading hard words with each other.
The armed Achaeans jumped up on their feet,
making a huge din. Two different plans [150]
were popular among them, and that night
no one slept, as both sides kept arguing,
each one with harsh opinions of the other,
for Zeus was bringing us a wretched fate.
In the morning, some of us dragged our ships
down to the sparkling sea, put goods on board— 200
our women, too, who wore their girdles low.
But half the soldiers stayed, remaining there
with Agamemnon, son of Atreus,
shepherd of his army. So half of us
embarked and rowed away. Our ships moved fast—
some god had made the yawning sea grow calm.
We came to Tenedos and sacrificed
to all the gods, still keen to get back home.¹
But even then Zeus had not decided [160]
to let us all return—a stubborn god! 210
He stirred up a second vicious quarrel.
So some men turned their curving ships around
and sailed back, among them lord Odysseus,
that wise and cunning man, with his soldiers.
Once again he favoured Agamemnon,
son of Atreus. Then I fled away
with the remaining ships, which followed me.

¹Tenedos is an island near Troy.

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I knew a god was planning something bad.
 And Diomedes, son of Tydeus,
 urged his comrades on to act as we did. 220
 But fair-haired Menelaus and his ships
 sailed later and caught up with us at Lesbos.
 We'd been arguing about the major stretch—
 should we sail to the north of rugged Chios [170]
 towards the island of Psyria, keeping
 Chios on our left, or take the southern route,
 below Chios and past stormy Mimas.
 So we asked a god to give us a sign.
 He did and ordered us to carve our way
 across the great sea straight to Euboea— 230
 for that way we would escape from trouble
 as quickly as we could.¹ A blustery wind
 began to blow, and so our ships moved fast
 across the fish-filled seas. That very night
 we landed at Geraestus, where we offered
 many bulls' thighs to Poseidon, our thanks
 for crossing the great sea. On the fourth day,
 crews of Diomedes, son of Tydeus,
 tamer of horses, berthed their well-built ships [180]
 in Argos, but I sailed on to Pylos.² 240
 Once a god sent that wind to blow us home,
 it never once let up. And so, my lad,
 I made it back. But of the Achaeans—
 the ones who died and those who got back home—
 I didn't learn a thing. I just don't know.
 But what I have found out, as I've sat here,
 in my own home, you'll hear. You have that right.
 I'll not conceal it from you. People say
 spear-fighting Myrmidons reached home safely,
 led by the brilliant son of brave Achilles, 250
 as did the noble son of Poias, too,
 Philoctetes. And Idomeneus
 got all his comrades back to Crete, the ones [190]

¹The choice of routes back home offers a number of options, particularly if the fleet wishes to move from island to island (a slow but safer course). The god advises a straight rush across open water ("the great sea") to Euboea, a large island just off the mainland of Attica, a faster but potentially more dangerous course.

²Diomedes is king of Argos, a town in the Peloponnese. It is not the same as the Argos ruled by Agamemnon, which is in the south-east Peloponnese (and sometimes called Achaean Argos, a city often identified as Mycenae, although these two are also at times identified as two neighbouring places).

BOOK THREE

who'd made it through the war. Not one of them
was lost at sea. As for Agamemnon,
although you live a long way off, you've heard
of his return—how he came home and then
how Aegisthus planned his vicious slaughter
and later paid a terrible reckoning.
That's why it's good for any murdered man
to leave a worthy son. For Orestes
got his revenge against his father's killer,
sly Aegisthus, who'd killed Agamemnon,
that splendid man. And you, my friend, I see
that you're a powerful, fine-looking man,
but you must act with courage, so those born
in future years will say good things of you."

260

[200]

Shrewd Telemachus then said in reply:

"Nestor,
son of Neleus, great glory of Achaeans,
yes, indeed, Orestes got his revenge.
Achaeans all will celebrate his fame
and sing of it to men in years to come.
If gods would only give me strength like that,
so I could pay these haughty suitors back—
they bring me such distress. In all their pride
they keep on plotting evil things for me,
and happiness like that the gods deny
me and my father. But in spite of that,
I must keep going."

270

Geranian horseman Nestor
then said to Telemachus:

[210]

"My friend,
you mentioned this and made me think of it—
they say that many suitors in your home,
seeking to become your mother's husband,
keep devising hostile schemes against you,
over your objections. So tell me this—
are you being oppressed with your consent?
Or in response to what some god has said,
have the people turned against you? Who knows
whether Odysseus will return some day
to pay them back for all their violence,

280

290

BOOK THREE

either alone or with a combined force
of Achaean warriors? How I wish
Athena with her bright eyes were willing
to cherish you the way she cared back then
for fine Odysseus in the land of Troy, [220]
where we Achaeans had to undergo
such grievous times. For I have never seen
the gods display their love so openly
as Pallas Athena did supporting him.
If she was keen to love you in that way 300
and to take you to her heart, those suitors
would soon forget about being married.”

Shrewd Telemachus then answered Nestor, saying:

“Old man, I do not think what you’ve described
will ever come to pass. What you have said
is too much to expect. I am surprised
you mention it. I entertain no hopes
that it could happen to me, even if
the gods themselves were willing.”

Then Athena,
bright-eyed goddess, answered him:

“Telemachus, 310 [230]
what words just passed the barrier of your teeth!
A god could easily bring someone home
from a long way off, if he wanted to.
But I’d prefer to suffer many hardships
and see the day when I got back again
and reached my home, than to complete my trip
only to be butchered by my own hearth,
the way that Agamemnon was cut down,
tricked by his own wife and by Aegisthus.
But the gods cannot protect a man from death— 320
which comes to all—even to ones they love,
once the destroying fate of a harsh doom
has him in its grip.”

Prudent Telemachus
then said in answer to Athena:

BOOK THREE

“Mentor,
though we’re sad, let’s not discuss this further. [240]
For him there’ll be no more returning home.
No. For by this time the immortal gods
have planned some dismal fate for him. I’d like
to change the subject and question Nestor.
He’s a righteous and intelligent man, 330
more so than others. He’s been king, they say,
over three generations of mortal men.
As I look at him, he seems immortal.
O Nestor, son of Neleus, tell me this:
How did wide-ruling lord Agamemnon,
son of Atreus, meet his death? And where
was Menelaus? As for Aegisthus,
that deceitful man, what did he devise
to kill a man much finer than himself?
Was Menelaus not in Achaean Argos, 340 [250]
but wandering around some foreign land?
Was that what made Aegisthus brave enough
to carry out the killing?”

Geranian horseman Nestor
then answered Telemachus and said:

“My boy,
I’ll tell you all this and speak frankly, too.
You yourself obviously understand
what would have happened if Menelaus,
Atreus’ fair-haired son, had reached his home
from Troy and found Aegisthus living there,
in his own house. He would have killed the man. 350
No one would have heaped up a tomb for him—
he’d have been eaten by the dogs and birds,
as he lay on the plain outside the town. [260]
And not one of the Achaean women
would have lamented him, the one who planned
the monstrous act. While we were there in Troy,
fighting hard in battle after battle,
he was enjoying himself, tucked away
in horse-breeding Argos, seeking to seduce
the wife of Agamemnon with his talk.
Lady Clytaemnestra at first turned down 360
such a repulsive crime, for she possessed
a noble heart. Besides, she had with her

BOOK THREE

a singer whom the son of Atreus
had firmly charged to watch out for his wife,
when he'd embarked for Troy. But then, when Fate
sent from the gods caught her and she succumbed,
Aegisthus took that singer far away, [270]
to a lonely island, and abandoned him,
a trophy for the birds to prey upon. 370
And when he wished to take her to his home,
she agreed to go. Then Aegisthus burned
many thigh cuts on the holy altars
dedicated to the gods and offered
all sorts of treasure, woven goods and gold,
for he had managed a tremendous act
and found success beyond his fondest dreams.
Well, once we'd left Troy, we sailed together,
Menelaus and myself. At the time,
our relationship was very friendly. 380
But when we came to holy Sunium,
the Athenian headland, Phoebus Apollo
with his gentle arrows struck down and killed [280]
the helmsman on Menelaus's ship, Phrontis,
Onetor's son, as he gripped the steering oar
on the swift-moving ship.¹ He was a man
preeminent among the tribes of men
in piloting a ship through stormy winds.
Now, though Menelaus was still very keen
to keep going on his trip, he stayed there, 390
to bury his companion and provide
the funeral rites. But when he re-launched
his hollow ships upon the wine-dark sea
and quickly reached the steep crag of Malea,
far-seeing lord Zeus carried out a scheme
to make his voyage dreadful. He sent down
blasting winds and immense waves, like mountains. [290]
Once he'd split Menelaus's fleet in two,
Zeus pushed some to Crete, where Cyndians live
beside banks of river Iardanus. 400
There's a steep cliff there, rocks facing the sea,
right in the misty surf, on Gortyn's borders,
where South-West Wind forces gigantic waves
against the promontory on the left,

¹The line about the "gentle" arrows of Apollo refers to some fatal but non-violent illness (like a fever), for which Apollo (or sometimes his sister Artemis) is considered responsible.

BOOK THREE

by Phaestus. A small rock in that spot holds back
the mighty waves. Some of his ships came there.
After making desperate efforts, the men
escaped destruction, but on that very rock
the ships were smashed to pieces by the waves.
The wind then drove five other dark-nosed ships 410
over the waves, taking them to Egypt, [300]
where Menelaus and his ships then sailed
among some folk who spoke a foreign tongue,
and gathered plentiful supplies and gold,
while at home Aegisthus planned the murder.
After he killed the son of Atreus,
Aegisthus ruled Mycenae seven years.
Under his kingship people were oppressed.
But in the eighth year brave Orestes came
back from Athens—bad news for Aegisthus. 420
Orestes slew his father's murderer,
sly Aegisthus, because he had cut down
his famous father. Once he'd killed the man,
he held a funeral feast for all the Argives,
in remembrance of his hateful mother
and cowardly Aegisthus. That same day, [310]
Menelaus, so good at battle shouts,
arrived, bringing large amounts of treasure,
as much as his remaining ships could hold.
So now, my friend, you must not wander off 430
and stay away from home too long, leaving
your possessions there, with such shameless men
in your own house, in case they take away
all your wealth or eat it up. That would make
your voyage here quite useless. I'd urge you—
and this I strongly recommend—to go
to Menelaus. For he's just come home
from foreign places very recently,
when no one in his heart had any hope
he might be returning from those people. 440
For stormy winds had driven him off course, [320]
at first into a sea so large that birds
take a year or more to fly back from there.
That's how huge and terrifying it is.
But you and your companions should leave now
in your ship. If you'd like to go by land,

BOOK THREE

I have chariots and horses for you.¹
My sons will help, as well, and be your guides
to fair-haired Menelaus, where he lives
in noble Sparta. Make sure you ask him
to speak to you and to be quite candid.
He will not lie, for he is far too wise.”

450

As Nestor finished talking, the sun was setting,
and dark night coming on. At that point, Athena,
the bright-eyed goddess, said to them:

[330]

“Old man,
what you’ve just said is true and relevant.
But now you should slice out the victims’ tongues
and mix the wine, so we can make libations
to lord Poseidon and to other gods,
and then think of rest. It’s that time of day.
Now the light has slid below the darkness,
and it’s not right for us to linger here
at feasting for the gods. We must get back.”

460

Zeus’s daughter spoke, and they heard what she had said.
Heralds poured out water for them to wash their hands,
and young boys filled up wine bowls to the brim with drink,
and served them all, pouring wine out into the cups,
the first drops for libations. They threw the bulls’ tongues
on the fire and, standing up, made their offerings.
That tribute done, they drank wine to their heart’s content.
Then both Athena and godlike Telemachus
wished to get back to their hollow ship. But Nestor,
wanting them to stay there, appealed to them and said:

[340]

470

“Zeus and other eternal gods forbid
that you should leave my home for your fast ship,
as if you were departing from a man
who has no clothes or riches, some pauper,
whose home lacks a store of cloaks or blankets
to give him and his guests a gentle sleep.
My house has coverlets and lovely rugs.
Surely the dear son of brave Odysseus
will not lie down to sleep on a ship’s deck,

[350]

480

¹Nestor offers Telemachus a choice of routes here, but it is difficult to imagine how Telemachus could sail directly to Sparta, which is far inland.

BOOK THREE

not while I'm alive and still have children
left in my own halls to welcome strangers,
whoever visits me in my own home."

Athena, bright-eyed goddess, then answered Nestor:

"No doubt what you have said, old friend, is wise,
and Telemachus should follow your advice.
It would be better if he did. But now,
when he goes back with you to get some sleep 490
in your own home, I'll go to our black ship, [360]
to rally the morale of our companions
and tell them everything. Among our group
I'm the only one who can make the claim
that I'm an older man. The rest are young,
all the same age as brave Telemachus.
They follow us because they are our friends.
I'll lie down on the hollow ship tonight
and in the morning go to the Caucones,
for they owe me a still outstanding debt, 500
not a small amount. Since Telemachus
has visited your home, give him horses,
the strongest and the fastest ones you have.
Send him off in a chariot with your son." [370]

Glittery-eyed Athena said these words and left,
taking on the form of a sea eagle. Amazement
overwhelmed Achaeans watching—and old Nestor
was filled with wonder, as his eyes took in the sight.
He grabbed Telemachus's hand and said to him:

"My friend, I don't think you'll turn out to be 510
a bad or feeble man, if gods follow you
to be your guide, when you're so very young.
Of all those who live on Mount Olympus,
that is none other than Zeus's daughter,
the glorious Tritogeneia, the god
who held your splendid father in such honour
among the Argives.¹ But now, dear goddess,
be gracious and give me a noble fame, [380]
me, my children, and the wife I cherish.

¹Tritogeneia means "Trito-born" (thrice born?) and is an epithet often given to Athena. Its precise significance is not clear.

BOOK THREE

And in return I'll sacrifice to you
a broad-faced heifer, as yet unbroken—
no man has put that beast beneath the yoke—
I'll offer her to you with gold-wrapped horns.” 520

Nestor spoke this prayer, and Pallas Athena heard him.
Then Geranian horseman Nestor led them away,
with his sons and sons-in-law, to his lovely home.
Once they had reached the splendid palace of the king,
they sat down in rows on high-backed chairs and couches.
When all of them came in, the old man mixed for them [390]
a bowl of sweet wine ten years old, which his steward 530
opened after loosening the lid. The old man
had some of it mixed in a bowl, and then poured out
libations, as he prayed in earnest to Athena,
daughter of aegis-bearing Zeus. Others did the same.
Then they drank the wine to their heart's content and left,
each one to his own home, to get some sleep. Nestor,
the Geranian horseman, told Telemachus,
godlike Odysseus's dear son, to sleep right there,
on a corded bed in the echoing corridor,
with spear-fighter Peisistratus, leader of men, 540 [400]
there beside him in the palace. Of all his sons,
he was the only one who was not yet married.
Nestor himself slept in an inner chamber
inside the high-roofed house, with his noble wife,
who had prepared the bed, lying down beside him.

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
Geranian horseman Nestor got out of bed,
went outside, and sat down before his high white doors
on polished stones, which glistened as if rubbed with oil.
Neleus in earlier times used to sit on them, 550
a man whose wise advice was equal to the gods.
But Fate had overtaken him by now. He'd gone [410]
to Hades, so now Geranian horseman Nestor,
the protector of Achaeans, sat on those stones,
a sceptre in his hand. His sons came from their rooms
and gathered round him in a throng—Echephron,
Stratius, Perseus, Aretus, and Thrasymedes.
Then the sixth son joined them, warrior Peisistratus.
They brought in godlike Telemachus, asking him
to sit among them. Geranian horseman Nestor 560
then began to speak to them:

BOOK THREE

“My dear children,
you must act on my desires, and quickly,
so I can propitiate Athena,
before the other gods. She came to me
in manifest form, at Poseidon’s feast. [420]
So come—one of you must fetch a heifer
out there in the plain. And to guarantee
the beast gets here as quickly as it can,
have the cattle herder drive it to me.
Then someone must set off for the black ship 570
of brave Telemachus and bring back here
all his companions, leaving only two.
And tell the goldsmith Laerces to come,
so he can wrap the heifer’s horns with gold.
All the rest of you stay here together.
You must tell the inside household servants
to prepare a fine banquet in the house,
with chairs and logs set all around. Make sure
they bring fresh water.”

Once Nestor finished speaking, [430]
the men all set to work. The heifer from the plain 580
was driven in, and brave Telemachus’s comrades
arrived from their fine ship. The goldsmith came, as well,
carrying the bronze tools he needed for his trade,
an anvil, hammer, and well-crafted tongs, the things
he used to work the gold. Athena also came,
ready to receive the sacrifice. Then Nestor,
the old chariot fighter, produced the gold. The smith
crafted it into a rich design and wrapped it
around the heifer’s horns, so that the goddess,
when she saw the offering, would rejoice. Stratius 590
and Echephron led in the heifer by the horns,
as Aretus entered from a room inside the house, [440]
bringing water in a basin etched with flowers
for them to wash their hands. In his other hand
he carried in a basket filled with barley grains.
Steadfast Thrasymedes stood holding a sharp axe
to cut down the heifer. And Perseus held a bowl
to catch the victim’s blood. Then old man Nestor,
the chariot fighter, began the ritual washing
and sprinkled barley grains, intoning many prayers 600
offered to Athena. As the initial gift,

BOOK THREE

from the heifer's head he cut off a single hair
and threw it on the fire. Once they made their prayers
and scattered grains of barley, then Thrasymedes,
Nestor's courageous son, approached the animal
and struck it. The axe sliced through sinews on its neck,
and the spirit of the beast ebbed out. The women—
Nestor's daughters, his sons' wives, and his cherished wife, [450]
Eurydice, eldest daughter of Clymenus—

raised the sacred cry, as the men then lifted up 610
the animal's head above the much-travelled earth.

Peisistratus, leader of men, slit the beast's throat,
and its black blood flowed out. The spirit left its bones.
They carved the body quickly, cutting thigh bones out,
all in proper order, and then covered them up
in double folds of fat and set raw meat on top.

Next, the old man burned those offerings on split wood
and over them poured out gleaming wine. Beside Nestor
stood young men with five-pronged forks in hand. Once the thighs [460]
had been completely burned and they had sampled innards, 620
they sliced up the remaining meat, placed it on spits,
and held the pointed skewers out, above the fire.

Then beautiful Polycaste, youngest daughter
of old Nestor, son of Neleus, bathed Telemachus.

When the bath was finished, she rubbed him with rich oil
and offered him a tunic and fine cloak to wear.

As he came from his bath, he looked just like a god.

He went and sat by Nestor, the people's shepherd.

After they had roasted the upper cuts of meat [470]
and pulled the pieces off the spits, they sat and ate. 630

The servers were distinguished men, who poured the wine
in goblets made of gold. Once they had all eaten
their fill of food and drink, Geranian horseman Nestor
was the first to speak. He said:

“Come now, my sons,
hitch up some fine-maned horses to a chariot,
so Telemachus can start his journey.”

Nestor spoke. They heard and carried out his orders,
eagerly and quickly harnessing swift horses
onto the chariot. In it a servant woman
stored bread and wine and special delicacies, too, 640
various assortments that those kings Zeus cherishes [480]
eat with such delight. Then Telemachus climbed up

BOOK THREE

inside the splendid chariot, and Nestor's son
Peisistratus, leader of men, stepped up as well,
beside him in the chariot, grabbing the reins,
and cracking the whip. The chariot team of horses
raced willingly across the plain, leaving behind
the steep citadel of Pylos, and all day long
they rattled the yoke and harness across their necks.
Then the sun set, and darkness covered all the roads. 650
The two men reached the home of Diocles in Pherae.
He was the son of Ortilochus, whose father
was Alpheus. They spent the night in Pherae [490]
Diocles offered them the hospitality
he owed to strangers who visited him as guests.
Then, as soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
they hitched their horses, climbed in the splendid chariot,
and set off from the echoing portico and gate.
With a touch of the whip, the horses raced along,
eager to run. The two men reached plains full of wheat, 660
in a hurry to complete their trip, so quickly
did that pair of speeding horses pull them onward.
And then the sun went down, and all the roads grew dark.

TELEMACHUS VISITS MENELAUS AND HELEN IN SPARTA

[Telemachus and Peisistratus arrive at Menelaus's home in Sparta; Menelaus welcomes them, talks of Agamemnon and Odysseus; Helen questions Menelaus about the guests, drugs the wine, tells the story of Odysseus visiting Troy disguised as a beggar; Menelaus talks about the Trojan Horse; Telemachus asks Menelaus for advice; Menelaus gives a long account of his travels in Egypt, especially his adventures with the Old Man of the Sea, the death of the lesser Ajax, and the death of Agamemnon; Menelaus invites Telemachus to stay, but Telemachus declines; the suitors hatch a plan to kill Telemachus; Penelope hears of their plans and is anxious; Athena sends her a phantom to reassure her; some of the suitors sail off to set an ambush for Telemachus.]

When Telemachus and Peisistratus reached
the Lacedaemon plain and its surrounding hills,
they went straight to splendid Menelaus's palace.¹
They found him inside his house, at a marriage feast
he was providing for his many relatives,
a celebration for his noble son and daughter.
He was sending her away to Neoptolemus,
son of man-destroying Achilles—back in Troy
he had first promised he would offer her to him.
He pledged his word, and now the gods were making sure
the marriage would take place. He was seeing her off
with chariots and horses at her departure
for the illustrious city of the Myrmidons,
whom her husband ruled. For his son, Menelaus
was bringing Alector's daughter home to Sparta.
That son, mighty Megapenthes, born to a slave,
was his favourite, for the gods had granted Helen
no more children after she had given birth
to the lovely girl Hermione, as beautiful
as golden Aphrodite. So they were feasting
in the impressive palace with its high-pitched roof—
neighbours and relatives of glorious Menelaus,
all enjoying themselves. Among them was a singer,
accompanying his godlike song by playing the lyre.
As he began to sing, two tumblers ran and jumped,
moving here and there, through the middle of the crowd.

¹Sparta is the name of the city in the district of Lacedaemon in the Peloponnese. The two names, Sparta and Lacedaemon, are sometimes used interchangeably.

BOOK FOUR

As the two visitors, heroic Telemachus [20]
and Nestor's noble son, stood at the palace gate
with their two horses, lord Eteoneus came out,
a diligent attendant to noble Menelaus. 30
When he noticed them, he went back inside the house,
to tell the shepherd of his people what he had seen.
Standing close to Menelaus, he spoke to him—
his words had wings:

“Menelaus, raised by gods,
there are two strangers here, two men who look
as if they are descended from great Zeus.
So tell me if we should, on their behalf,
take their team of horses out of harness,
or send them off to find some other host
who'll welcome them as friends.”

These words he uttered 40
really irritated fair-haired Menelaus,
so he replied as follows: [30]

“Before today,
Eteoneus, son of Boethous,
you have not been a fool. But now you talk
just like a silly child. For both of us
often feasted on the hospitality
of other men before we got back here,
hoping that Zeus would give us some relief
from later hardship. Unhitch those horses
the strangers brought, and bring the men inside, 50
so they may dine.”

Menelaus finished.
Then Eteoneus left, hurrying from the hall
and calling out to other diligent attendants
to accompany him. They took the sweating horses
from their harnesses and hitched them in the stables, [40]
scattering wheat for them, mixed with white barley grains,
leaned the chariot against the luminescent wall,
and then led the men into the godlike building.
Telemachus and Peisistratus were amazed
by the things they noticed in the regal palace— 60
for the high-roofed home of splendid Menelaus,
a man raised by Zeus, was shimmering in the light,

BOOK FOUR

as if illuminated by the sun or moon.

When their eyes had gazed at it with great delight,
the two men had a bath in well-polished bathing tubs.
After the household slaves had given them a bath,
rubbed them down with oil, and offered them fresh clothing—
thick cloaks and tunics—then they both sat down on chairs [50]
right by Menelaus, the son of Atreus.

A servant woman brought a pitcher made of gold. 70
It was filled with water for them to clean their hands.
She poured the water out into a silver basin,
so they could wash. Then in front of them she pulled up
a polished table. A valued female servant
carried in the bread and set it down before them,
adding many tasty delicacies, as well,
generous offerings from the food she had in store.
A carver lifted platters with all sorts of meat
and served them, setting down in front of the two men
goblets made of gold. Then fair-haired Menelaus 80
welcomed both of them and said:

“Help yourselves. [60]
Enjoy our food. And once you’ve had your meal,
we’ll ask you who you are. For in you two
your parents’ breeding has not been destroyed,
since you are from a royal human stock,
from god-nurtured kings who wield a sceptre.
Worthless men could not father sons like you.”

Menelaus spoke. Then with his own hands he picked up
the roasted meat and set it down in front of them,
the fat back cut of beef they had placed before him, 90
a mark of honour. So the two men helped themselves,
eating the fine meal prepared and served out to them.
When they had had their heart’s content of food and drink,
Telemachus leaned his head close to Nestor’s son,
so no one else could overhear, and spoke to him: [70]

“Son of Nestor, who brings my heart such joy,
look at how, throughout this echoing hall,
there’s such a quantity of bronze and gold,
electrum, silver, ivory—to me
it’s the interior of Zeus’s home 100
on Mount Olympus, so much untold wealth—

BOOK FOUR

I'm amazed just looking at it."¹

As he said this,
fair-haired Menelaus heard what he said and spoke
to both of them—his words had wings:

“Dear lads,
no mortal man can really rival Zeus,
since his possessions and his palaces
last forever. But among mortal men,
some other king might challenge me or not [80]
about our wealth. My ships brought riches back
after we had suffered so much hardship, 110
while we were wandering. We made it home—
it took us more than seven years. We roamed
to Cyprus, Egypt, and Phoenicia.
We even reached the Ethiopians,
Sidonians, and Erebi—Lydia, too,
where lambs are born with horns and ewes give birth
three times in one full year. No master there,
nor any shepherd, ever lacks sweet milk
or cheese or meat, and through the entire year
their flocks are ready to produce their milk. 120
While I was wandering around these lands, [90]
gathering possessions, another man
slaughtered my own brother unexpectedly,
in secret, thanks to the duplicity
of his murderous wife. So you can see
there is no joy for me in being king
of these possessions. You may have heard this
from your fathers, whoever they may be.
I suffered many troubles and allowed
a really well-established home, endowed 130
with many noble riches, to collapse.
I'd prefer to live with one third my wealth
here in my house, if those men could be safe,
the ones who died in the wide land of Troy,
far from Argos, where horses breed. And yet,
although I often sit around at home [100]
feeling sorry, in mourning for them all,
sometimes groaning to relieve my spirit,
sometimes calling for a end to moaning,

¹Electrum is a naturally occurring alloy of gold and silver with other trace mineral elements.

BOOK FOUR

for one can quickly get too much of grief, 140
still, for all my pain, I do not lament
all those men as much as I do one man,
who, when I think of him, makes me despise
both sleep and food, for of all Achaeans
no one toiled as hard as did Odysseus,
who took so much upon himself. For him,
it seems, there would be no end of trouble,
and I cannot forget to grieve for him.
He's been away so long. And we don't know
if he's alive or dead. Old Laertes, 150
I would think, is still in mourning for him, [110]
and so is sensible Penelope,
and Telemachus, as well, whom he left
a new-born child at home."

Menelaus spoke.

What he said stirred strong feelings in Telemachus,
a yearning for his father. So from his eyelids
he shed a tear onto the ground, as he listened
to what Menelaus said about Odysseus,
and with both his hands he pulled up the purple cloak
to hide his eyes. Noticing this, Menelaus 160
debated in his mind and heart: Should he allow
Telemachus to say something about his father,
or should he first ask him questions and sound him out
on each and every detail? As he thought of this [120]
in his mind and heart, Helen came into the room,
emerging from her sweet-scented high-roofed chamber.
She looked like golden-arrowed goddess Artemis.
Adreste came in, too. She set in place for Helen
a finely crafted chair. Alcippe carried in
a soft wool rug. Phylo brought a silver basket, 170
a gift that Helen had received from Alcandre,
wife to Polybus, who lived in Thebes in Egypt,
where the most stupendous hoards of rich possessions
lie in people's homes. He had given Menelaus
a pair of tripods and two silver bathing tubs,
as well as ten gold talents. And in addition, [130]
his wife presented Helen with some lovely gifts,
a golden spinning staff and a silver basket—
it had wheels underneath and rims of plated gold.
The servant woman Phylo brought this basket in 180
and placed it by her side, filled with fine-spun yarn.

BOOK FOUR

On it lay the spinning rod full of purple wool.
Helen sat on the chair, a stool beneath her feet.
Right away she started speaking to her husband,
asking him some detailed questions.

“Do we know,
my divinely cherished Menelaus,
who these two men who’ve come into our home
claim to be? Shall I speak up and pretend,
or shall I tell the truth? My heart tells me
I must be frank. I can’t say I’ve ever seen
someone who looks so much like someone else,
whether man or woman. When I see it,
I’m amazed—this man looks just like the son
of brave Odysseus—I mean Telemachus,
who, when he left home, was a new-born child,
when, because I’d acted so disgracefully,
you Achaeans all sailed away to Troy,
your hearts intent on brutal warfare.”¹

[140]
190

Fair-haired Menelaus then answered her and said:

“This likeness you’ve just noticed, my dear wife,
I’ve seen, as well. His feet are similar,
as are his hands, the glances from his eyes,
his head, and his hair on top. And just now,
as I was remembering Odysseus,
discussing all the troubles he’d endured
because of me, he let a bitter tear
fall from his eyes and raised the purple cloak
across his eyes.”

200
[150]

Then Peisistratus, Nestor’s son,
spoke out and said:

“Menelaus, son of Atreus,
leader of your people, cherished by Zeus,
this man here is indeed, as you have said,

210

¹ The immediate cause of the Trojan War was Helen’s elopement with Paris, a prince of Troy, while he was visiting Sparta. Helen’s husband, Menelaus, and other Achaean leaders demanded Helen’s return, but the Trojans refused. So the Achaeans organized an army and sailed to Troy, with Agamemnon, Menelaus’s brother, in command. When Troy was captured and destroyed, Helen returned to Sparta with Menelaus.

BOOK FOUR

Odysseus' son. But he's a prudent man—
in his heart he is too ashamed to come
on his first visit and put on a show
with some assertive speech in front of you,
whose voice we listen to with great delight, [160]
as if it were a god's. I've been sent here
by Geranian horseman Nestor as his guide.
He wants to see you and get your advice,
in word or deed. For with his father gone, 220
a child has many troubles in his home,
and there is no one there to help him out.
That is what has happened with Telemachus.
His father's vanished, and now there's no one
to save his house from ruin."

Fair-haired Menelaus
then answered Peisistratus, saying:

"Well now,
this is strange indeed—to my home has come
the offspring of a man I cherish, someone
who, on my behalf, endured much hardship. [170]
If he'd returned, I thought, of all the Argives, 230
I'd welcome him the most, should far-seeing Zeus
on Mount Olympus let the two of us
arrive back home by sea in our swift ships.
I would have offered him an Argive town
and built a home for him, where he could live,
brought him from Ithaca with all his wealth,
his son, and his own people. I'd have emptied
some neighbouring city in the region,
whose people all acknowledge me as king.
Then we could live here and be together, 240
and nothing would have separated us.
We could often entertain each other,
getting joy from one another's company,
until Death's black cloud came to embrace us. [180]
But god himself must have been envious,
to make that ill-starred man the only one
who did not get back home."

Menelaus finished.
What he had said made all of them feel like weeping.
Argive Helen, daughter of Zeus, began to cry,

BOOK FOUR

as did Telemachus and Menelaus, too, 250
son of Atreus. Nestor's son could not keep the tears
out of his eyes. In his heart he was remembering
brave Antilochus, killed by Dawn's courageous son.¹
With him in mind, Peisistratus spoke—his words had wings:

“Son of Atreus, old warrior Nestor [190]
used to say, when we conversed together
and someone in the house mentioned your name,
that, as far as sound thinking was concerned,
you were preeminent among all men.
So, if it seems somehow appropriate, 260
you should listen to me. I don't enjoy
weeping at dinner time, and early Dawn
will soon be here. I don't think it shameful
to cry for any mortal man who's died
and met his fate. In fact, this ritual
is the only ceremony we give
for these unhappy men—we cut our hair
and let the tears run down our cheeks. I have
a brother who was killed, not the worst man
among the Argives. Perhaps you knew him. 270
I never met him, never even saw him, [200]
but they say Antilochus surpassed all men
in running fast and fighting.”

Fair-haired Menelaus
then answered Peisistratus, saying:

“My friend,
your words have truly covered everything
a man whose mind is just might say or do,
even someone far older than yourself.
The quality of the man you sprang from
enables you to speak so sensibly.
To recognize someone's inheritance 280
is easy, when the son of Cronos spins
good fortune's threads at marriage and at birth,
the way he now has done for noble Nestor,
granting him for all his days continually
to reach a ripe old age in his own home, [210]

¹Antilochus, Peisistratus's brother (mentioned in Book 3) was killed at Troy by Memnon, son of Dawn. He was buried with Achilles and Patroclus at Troy.

BOOK FOUR

with sons who are, in turn, intelligent
and great spear fighters, too. But we must stop,
let that earlier weeping cease. Let's have
water poured on our hands, then once again
turn our minds to dinner. In the morning
there'll be stories for Telemachus and me
to tell each other to our heart's content."

290

He finished speaking. Then one of his attendants,
faithful Asphalion, poured water on their hands,
and they reached for the rich food spread out before them.

Then Helen, Zeus's daughter, thought of something else.
She quickly dropped into the wine they were enjoying
a drug that relieved men's pains and irritations, [220]
making them forget their troubles. A drink of this,
once mixed in with wine, would guarantee no man
would let a tear fall on his cheek for one whole day, 300
not even if his mother and his father died,
or if, in his own presence, men brandishing swords
hacked down his brother or his son, as he looked on.
Zeus's daughter had effective healing potions,
like that drug, which she'd obtained from Polydamna,
wife of Thon, who came from Egypt, where the country,
so rich in grain, produces the greatest crop of drugs,
many of which, once dissolved, are beneficial,
and many poisonous.¹ Each person living there
is a physician whose knowledge of these potions
surpasses that of every other human group,
for through their ancestry they stem from Paeon.²
When Helen had stirred in the drug and ordered them
to serve the wine, she rejoined the conversation
and spoke up once again:

310 [230]

“Menelaus, son of Atreus,
whom gods cherish, and you sons of noble men—
since both good and bad are given by Zeus,
sometimes to one man and, at other times,
to someone else, for he is capable
of all things, you should now sit in the hall
and dine. After that, enjoy your stories.

320

¹Helen is the daughter of Zeus and the mortal Leda.

²Paeon is the god of healing who knows all the remedies available for human ills.

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I'll tell you one I think is suitable.
I will not speak of, nor could I recite, [240]
everything about steadfast Odysseus,
all hardships he went through. But there's that time
when you Achaeans were in such distress
and that strong man endured and did so much—
right in homeland of those Trojans, too!
With savage blows he battered his own body, 330
threw a ragged garment on his shoulders,
so he looked like a slave, and then snuck in,
along the broad streets of that hostile town.
He hid his own identity, pretending
he was someone else, a beggar—something
he'd never been among Achaean ships—
and then went in the city. No Trojan there
suspected him. I was the only one [250]
who recognized him, in spite of his disguise.
I questioned him, but his skill in deception 340
made him elusive. Still, when I had bathed him,
rubbed him with oil, and helped him to get dressed—
once I'd sworn a solemn oath not to reveal
to any Trojans that he was Odysseus
until he reached the swift ships and the huts—
he told me all about Achaean plans.
Then his long sword slaughtered many Trojans,
and he returned, bringing the Achaeans,
a full report on Troy. Trojan women
began to cry aloud, but I was glad. 350
My heart by then had changed—it now desired [260]
to go back. I was sorry for that blindness
Aphrodite brought, when she led me there,
far from my own land, abandoning my child,
my bridal room, and my own husband, too,
who lacked nothing in good looks or wisdom.”

In reply to Helen, fair-haired Menelaus said:

“Yes, indeed, dear wife, everything you say
is true. Before now, I've come to understand
the minds and plans of many warriors. 360
I've roamed many lands. But these eyes of mine
have never seen a man to match Odysseus.
How I loved his steadfast heart! What about [270]
the things that forceful man endured and did

in the wooden horse? Achaea's finest men—
 all of us—were crouching in it, carrying
 a lethal fate to Trojans. Then you came,
 perhaps instructed by some god who wished
 to give a glorious triumph to the Trojans.
 And, where you walked, noble Deïphobus 370
 followed, too.¹ You circled around three times,
 feeling that hollow trap. Your voice called out,
 naming the best men among Danaans,
 and you spoke up exactly like the voice
 of each man's Achaeian wife. I was there,
 sitting with Odysseus in the middle, [280]
 and with Tydeus' son. We heard you call.
 Two of us—Diomedes and myself—
 were eager to get up and charge outside
 or else to answer back from where we sat, 380
 inside the horse. But Odysseus stopped us—
 we wished to speak, but he held us in check.
 All the other sons of the Achaeans
 kept their mouths shut, except for Anticlus,
 the only one about to raise his voice
 and answer you. Odysseus clapped his hand
 firmly on Anticlus's mouth and held him,
 thus rescuing all Achaeians. He kept
 his grip on Anticlus until Athena
 escorted you away.”

Then shrewd Telemachus replied: 390 [290]

“Menelaus, son of Atreus, loved by Zeus,
 leader of your people, that incident
 is more painful still—it could not save him
 from bitter death, not even if the heart
 inside his chest had been made of iron.
 But come, send us off to bed, so sweet Sleep
 can bring us joy, once we lie down to rest.”

Once Telemachus spoke, Helen told her servants
 to set up mattresses within the corridor
 and spread out lovely purple blankets over them, 400

¹Deïphobus was a prince of Troy, son of king Priam. After Paris was killed in the war, Helen became the wife of Deïphobus. He was killed in the sack of Troy by Menelaus or, in some accounts, by Helen herself.

BOOK FOUR

with rugs on top, and over these some woollen cloaks.
The women left the hall with torches in their hands
and arranged the beds. A herald led the guests away.
And so they slept there in the palace vestibule,
prince Telemachus and Nestor's noble son.
The son of Atreus slept in an inner room,
inside the high-roofed home, with long-robed Helen,
goddess among women, lying there beside him.

[300]

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
Menelaus, skilled at war shouts, got out of bed
and put on his clothes, slinging around his shoulders
a sharp sword. Then he laced up beautiful sandals
over his sleek feet, and, looking just like a god,
he left his room. He sat beside Telemachus
and then addressed him, saying:

410

[310]

“Prince Telemachus,
what do you need that's brought you all this way
on the sea's broad back to lovely Sparta?
Is it a public or a private matter?
Tell me about it, and be frank.”

Shrewd Telemachus
then said in reply:

“Menelaus, son of Atreus,
cherished by Zeus, leader of your people,
I've come to see if you could give me news
about my father. My home's being eaten up,
my rich estates destroyed. My house is full
of enemies who keep on butchering
flocks of sheep and shambling bent-horned cattle.
They are suitors for my mother—their pride
makes them supremely arrogant. That's why
I've now come to your knee, to see if you
perhaps can tell me of his mournful death,
in case your own eyes witnessed it somewhere,
or else you've found out from some other man
the tale of where he's gone. For his mother
delivered him into a life of sorrow,
more so than other men. And do not speak
from pity, or console me with your words,
but tell me truly how you chanced to see him.

420

[320]

430

BOOK FOUR

I beg you, if ever in word or deed
my father, brave Odysseus, over there,
on Trojan soil, where you Achaean men
bore so much hardship, made you a promise
and later kept his word, speak to me now,
and give me the truth."

440 [330]

Fair-haired Menelaus,
annoyed by what he'd heard, replied:

"It's disgraceful
how despicable cowards want to lie
in that brave warrior's bed, as if a deer
had lulled her new-born suckling fawns to sleep
in a lion's den and then gone roaming
through mountain fields and grassy valleys
in search of forage—then the lion comes
back to his lair and brings to both of them
a shameful death. That just how Odysseus
will bring those suitors their disgraceful doom.
O Father Zeus, Athena, and Apollo,
how I wish Odysseus would make it back
and meet the suitors with the strength he had
when he stood up in well-built Lesbos once
in a wrestling match with Philomeleides.
Using his great power, he threw him down,
and all Achaean men rejoiced. Those suitors
would soon enough see their bitter courtship
end in a swift death. As for what you ask,
what you've begged me to tell—I'll not digress
to speak of other things, nor will I lie.
No. What the Old Man of the Sea told me—
and did so truthfully—I will not hide.
I won't conceal a single word.

450

[340]

460

In Egypt,
though I was eager to get home, the gods
prevented me—I had not offered them
a full and proper sacrifice, and gods
always demand obedience to their will.
Now, just in front of Egypt is an island,
right in the crashing sea—it's called Pharos—
as far from shore as hollow ships can sail
in one whole day, when a favouring breeze

[350]

470

BOOK FOUR

blows up behind them. There's a harbour there
with excellent moorage, and from that spot
men launch well-balanced ships into the sea,
once they have taken on supplies of water.
For twenty days the gods detained me there. 480 [360]
Not once was there a favourable wind,
the sort of offshore breeze which makes men's ships
race out across the broad back of the sea.
Then my provisions would have all been spent,
together with the spirit in my crew,
if a goddess had not taken pity
and rescued us—goddess Eidothea,
a daughter of the Old Man of the Sea,
great Proteus. For I had moved her heart,
more so than other men. When she met me, 490
I was by myself and had wandered off,
away from my companions, who'd gone out,
as they always did, to scour the island,
fishing with bent hooks, their stomachs cramped
from hunger. She came close to me and said: [370]

'Stranger, are you a slow-witted idiot,
or are you happy just to let things go
and find delight in your own suffering?
You've been stranded so long on this island,
unable to discover signs of help, 500
while your companions' spirits waste away.'

That's what she said. So then I answered her:

'Whoever you may be among the gods,
I'll tell you I have not been pent up here
with my consent. Something must have happened
to make me act against immortal gods,
who occupy wide heaven. Tell me this—
for gods know all things—which immortal one
keeps my feet shackled here and blocks my way? [380]
Tell me how I can find my way back home, 510
how I may sail across the fish-filled seas.'

I finished speaking. The lovely goddess
gave me her answer right away. She said:

BOOK FOUR

‘All right, stranger, I’ll be truthful with you.
The Old Man of the Sea comes here from Egypt,
infallible and immortal Proteus,
a god who knows the depths of every sea,
Poseidon’s servant and, so people say,
my father, too, the one who sired me.
If somehow you men could set an ambush 520
and catch hold of him, he’d tell you the way.
He’d chart the course for your return and map
how you could sail across the fish-filled seas. [390]
And, Zeus-fostered man, if you were willing,
he’d tell you all the good and evil things
which have been taking place in your own house
while you’ve been travelling away from home
on such a long and arduous journey.’

When she told me this, I replied and said:

‘Could you yourself produce a strategy 530
to ambush this divine old man, in case
he sees me first and, knowing all my plans,
escapes me. It’s difficult for mortal men
to overcome a god.’

Once I said this,
the lovely goddess answered me and said:

‘Stranger, I’ll be quite frank—tell you the truth
in all things. When the sun has made its way 400
up into the middle of the heavens,
that infallible Old Man of the Sea
emerges from the brine, where he’s concealed 540
by murky waves stirred up by West Wind’s breath.
Once he gets here, he stretches out to rest
in these hollow caves, and around him sleeps
a herd of seals—they are the offspring born
to the daughter of the sea and swim up,
out of the grey water. Their breath gives off
the sharp salt smell of the deep sea. At dawn,
I’ll take you there and arrange an ambush.
You must carefully select three comrades,
the best men in those well-decked ships of yours. 550
Now I’ll describe for you all the sly tricks [410]
that old man has. First, he’ll inspect the seals.

BOOK FOUR

He'll count them, numbering them off by fives.
Once he has checked on them, he will lie down
in their midst, like a shepherd with his sheep.
As soon as you see him stretched out to sleep,
then you must use all your strength and courage
to hold him there for all his desperate moves,
as he struggles to escape. For he'll attempt
to change himself into all sorts of shapes
of everything that crawls across the earth,
or into water or a sacred flame.
You must not flinch—keep up your grip on him—
make it even tighter. And finally,
when he begins to speak and questions you
in the same shape you saw him go to sleep,
then, warrior king, you can relax your grip
and let the old man go. Ask him which god
is angry at you and how you'll get back,
charting a course across the fish-filled seas.'

560

[420]

570

She spoke and plunged back in the crashing sea.
I went to where my ships were on the beach,
my dark heart weighted down with many things.
After I'd reached our ships along the shore,
we prepared a meal and ate our dinner.
When immortal night arrived, we lay down
beside the breaking surf. Then, as the light
of rose-fingered early Dawn streaked the sky,
I walked along the shores of that wide sea
praying in earnest to the gods. I took
three companions, the ones I trusted most
in any enterprise. That sea goddess,
who'd plunged into the bosom of the sea,
brought up four seal skins from the ocean depths,
each one freshly skinned, then set up the plot
against her father. She scooped out in the sand
some pits to hide in, and then waited there.
Once we'd come up really close beside her,
she made us lie down in a row and threw
a seal skin over each of us. That ambush
could well have been too horrible to bear,
for the atrocious stench of sea-born seals
was dreadful. Who would let himself lie down
with creatures from the sea? But Eidothea
personally helped us by thinking up

[430]

580

[440]

590

BOOK FOUR

a remedy—she got ambrosia,
sweet-smelling oil of the immortal gods,
and put it under each man's nose. That killed
the foul stink coming from those animals.
With patient hearts we waited there all morning. 600
Crowds of seals emerged and then lay down
in rows along the shoreline of the sea.
At noon the old man came up from the waves, [450]
discovered the plump seals, looked at each one,
and made his count, beginning first with us,
whom he included with the animals.
His heart did not suspect there was a trick.
Then he lay down. We charged up with a shout
and grabbed him in our arms. But the old man
did not forget his skilful tricks. At first, 610
he turned himself into a hairy lion,
and then into a serpent and a leopard,
then a huge wild boar. He transformed himself
to flowing water and a towering tree.
We did not flinch but kept our grip on him.
Our hearts were resolute. When the old man, [460]
for all his evasive skills, got tired out,
he spoke up and started questioning me:

‘Son of Atreus, which god helped your plan
and forged a scheme so you could lie in wait 620
and ambush me against my will? And why?
What do you need?’

When he'd said this to me,
I answered him and said:

‘You know that, old man,
so why mislead me with such questioning?
I've been stranded too long on this island
and can't discover any sign of help.
The heart is growing faint inside my chest.
So tell me, for you gods know everything,
which one of the immortals chains my feet
and blocks my way. And speak to me as well 630
about my journey back, how I may sail [470]
across the fish-filled seas.’

BOOK FOUR

When I'd said that,
he answered me at once:

‘Before you left,
you should have offered a fine sacrifice
to Zeus and other gods, so you could sail
across the wine-dark sea and then arrive
in your own land as fast as possible.
Your fate decrees you will not see your friends
or reach your homeland or your well-built house,
till you have gone back once more to Egypt,
to the waters of that Zeus-fed river,
and offered sacrifices to the gods,
the immortal ones who hold wide heaven.
The gods will then give you that journey home
which you so yearn for.’

As the old man spoke,
my fond heart was breaking up inside me,
because he'd told me I must go once more
across the misty seas, on that long trip
to Egypt, a painful journey. But still,
I answered him and spoke these words:

‘Old man,
I will carry out what you have told me.
But come now, tell me—and speak truthfully—
did Argives and their ships get safely back,
all those men Nestor and myself left there
when we set out from Troy? Did any die
a bitter death on board, or in the arms
of those who loved them, after they’d tied up
the loose threads of the war?’

That's what I asked,
and he gave me his answer right away:

‘Son of Atreus, why question me on this? 660
You don’t need to know or to read my mind.
For once you’ve learned the details of all this,
you’ll not hold back your tears for very long.
Many Achaean warriors were destroyed,
and many men survived. Among the Argives
armed in bronze, only two leading warriors

BOOK FOUR

were killed on their way home. As for the fights,
you were there yourself. There is one leader
held back by the sea, still alive somewhere.
Ajax perished among his long-oared ships— 670
at Gyrae Poseidon first drove his boat [500]
against huge rocks, then saved him from the sea.¹
For all Athena's hate, he'd have been saved,
if he had not been insanely foolish—
he stated he had managed to escape
the sea's huge depths, in spite of all the gods.
Poseidon heard him make this boastful claim.
Immediately those mighty hands of his
picked up his trident and then brought it down
on that rock at Gyrae, splitting it apart. 680
One piece stayed in place—but the other one
sheared off and fell into the sea, the part
where Ajax was sitting when he became
so utterly deluded. He fell down
into the endless surging waves and died, [510]
swallowing salt water. But your brother
escaped that fate—he and his hollow ships
made it home, for queen Hera rescued him.
And then, when he was just about to reach
the steep height at Malea, winds caught him. 690
As he groaned in distress, they carried him
across the fish-filled seas to distant lands
where Thyestes used to live, now the home
of Thyestes' son Aegisthus.² But then,
once the gods had changed the wind's direction, [520]
it seemed that he could make it safely back.
So he got home. And he was full of joy
to set foot on his native land once more.
He embraced the earth and kissed it—shedding
numerous warm tears. He was delighted 700
at the sight. But a watchman spied him out,
someone Aegisthus had placed as lookout,
to promote his plot, promising the man,
as his reward, two gold talents. He'd been there,

¹This is a reference to Oïlean Ajax, king of Locris (or the "Lesser" Ajax), not to Ajax, king of Salamis, the greatest Achaean warrior after Achilles, who had died and was buried at Troy (as Nestor has pointed out in Book 3).

²Thyestes was the brother of Atreus (father of Agamemnon and Menelaus). Atreus had killed Thyestes's small sons and fed them to him at dinner. Aegisthus, the remaining son, took his revenge on Agamemnon and killed him, in collaboration with Agamemnon's wife.

BOOK FOUR

watching the shore for one whole year, in case
Agamemnon managed to make it home
without being noticed and remind them all
of his fearsome power. The watchman went
straight to the palace to report the news
to Aegisthus, shepherd of the people, 710
who then arranged a treacherous attack.
He picked out twenty of the finest men [530]
in the whole town and set up an ambush.
Then, in another section of the house,
he had a feast made ready and went off
with chariot and horses to lead back
Agamemnon, shepherd of his people,
all the while intending to destroy him.
Aegisthus then accompanied him home—
he suspected nothing of the murder— 720
and then, after the feast, he butchered him,
just as one slays an ox in its own stall.
Of those comrades of the son of Atreus
who followed him, not one was left alive.
Nor were any of Aegisthus' comrades—
all of them were slaughtered in the palace.'

The old man finished speaking. My fond heart
was shattered, and, as I sat in the sand,
I wept—my spirit had no wish to live [540]
or gaze upon the daylight anymore. 730
When I'd had my fill of rolling in the sand
and shedding tears, the Old Man of the Sea
spoke frankly to me, saying,

'Son of Atreus,
you must not squander so much time like this,
in constant weeping. That's no help to us.
No. You must strive, as quickly as you can,
to get back to your home. For it may be
you'll find Aegisthus is still living there,
or else Orestes has preceded you
and killed the man. If so, then there's a chance 740
you'll get back for Aegisthus' funeral feast.'

The old man finished speaking. In my chest
my heart and spirit, for all my grieving,
felt strong once again. So I answered him— [550]

BOOK FOUR

my words had wings:

‘Now I understand
what has happened to these men. But tell me
about the third one—whether he still lives,
held back by the wide sea, or has been killed.
I wish to hear that, for all my sorrow.’

I spoke. He immediately replied:

750

‘You mean Laertes’ son, from Ithaca.
I saw him on an island. He was weeping
in the palace of the nymph Calypso,
who keeps him there by force. He has no way
of getting back to his own land—he lacks
companions. He has no ships equipped with oars,
to carry him across the sea’s broad back.
As for you, Zeus-fostered Menelaus,
it’s not ordained that you will meet your fate
and die in horse-rich Argos. No. The gods
will send you off to the Elysian fields,
and to the outer limits of the earth—
the place where fair-haired Rhadamanthus lives
and for human beings life is easy—
there’s no snow or bad storms or even rain,
and Oceanus sends a steady breeze,
as West Wind blows to keep men cool and fresh.¹
They’ll do this because Helen is your wife—
for they’ll treat you as the man who married
Zeus’s daughter.’

[560]

760

After saying these words,
the old man plunged back in the surging sea.
I went to my ships and godlike shipmates.
As I walked, my heart was darkly troubled,
but once I’d reached my ships beside the sea
and we’d prepared a meal, immortal night
descended, and we slept there on the shore.

770 [570]

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
we dragged our boats into the sacred sea,

¹Rhadamanthus, son of Zeus and Europa, was a legendary king of Crete, famous for his wisdom and judgment.

BOOK FOUR

then fitted masts and sails on our trim ships.
The men climbed in, went to their rowing seats, 780
and, sitting well in order, raised their oars [580]
and struck the grey salt sea. So I sailed back
once more to Egypt's heaven-fed river,
and there I offered a full sacrifice.
Once I'd appeased the anger of those gods
who live forever, I made a funeral mound
for Agamemnon, to make sure his fame
would never die, and when I'd finished that,
I set off on my journey home. The gods
gave me fair winds and brought me with all speed 790
back to the native land I love.

But come now,
you must stay with me in my palace here
ten or eleven days, and after that
I'll send you off with honour. I'll give you
lovely gifts—a finely polished chariot
and three horses, too, and, as well as these, [590]
a gorgeous cup. You can pour libations
to eternal gods and remember me
for all your days to come.”

Shrewd Telemachus
then answered Menelaus:

“Son of Atreus, 800
you must not hold me up for very long.
To tell the truth, I'd like to stay right here,
sitting in your palace an entire year,
and I'd not miss my parents or my home,
for I get such astonishing delight
from what you say and from the tales you tell.
But my comrades are already restless
back in sacred Pylos, and time has passed
while you've detained me here. As for presents,
give me whatever you wish. Let it be 810 [600]
something you treasure. But I will not take
those horses back with me to Ithaca.
I'll leave them in Sparta to bring you joy.
For you are king of an extensive plain
in which huge quantities of lotus grow,
with sedge, broad-eared white barley, wheat, and rye.

BOOK FOUR

But there are no wide plains in Ithaca,
no meadows. It has grazing land for goats,
something I prefer to lush horse pasture.
No island sloping down into the sea 820
has land suitable for raising horses,
and that's especially true of Ithaca."

At that, the great war-shouter Menelaus smiled,
patted Telemachus with his hand, and said to him: [610]

"My lad, the way you've spoken out proclaims
your noble blood. So I'll exchange those gifts.
That I can do. Of all the things stored up
here in my home, I'll give you the finest,
the most expensive one. I'll offer you
a beautifully crafted mixing bowl. 830
It's all silver, with rims of hammered gold.
Hephaestus made it. Warrior Phaedimus,
the Sidonian king, offered it to me
when I went there and his home sheltered me.
I'd like to give that mixing bowl to you."

So these men kept conversing with each other. [620]

Meanwhile, back in Telemachus's Ithaca,
the banqueters had reached the royal palace,
driving sheep before them and carrying strong wine.
Their splendidly dressed wives were sending bread for them. 840
As these men were in the hall preparing dinner,
the suitors gathered outside Odysseus's home,
enjoying themselves by throwing spears and discus
on level ground in front—with all the arrogance
they usually displayed. The two men who led them,
Antinous and Eurymachus, a handsome man,
were sitting there—by far the noblest of the suitors. [630]
Noemon, Phronius's son, came up to them
to question Antinous. He said:

"Antinous,
in our hearts do we truly know or not 850
the day Telemachus is coming back
from sandy Pylos? He left Ithaca,
taking a ship of mine which I now need
to make the trip across to spacious Elis,

BOOK FOUR

where I have twelve mares and sturdy mules
still sucking on the teat, not yet broken.
I want to fetch and break in one of them.”

He finished. In their hearts the suitors were amazed.
They had no inkling that Telemachus had gone
to Pylos, land of Neleus, and still believed 860
he was visiting the flocks on his estates
or the swineherd. So in answer to Noemon, [640]
Antinous, Eupheithes’ son, replied:

“Tell me the truth—
when did he leave? What young men went with him?
Did he take citizens of Ithaca,
or were his shipmates his slaves and servants?
That’s something he could do. And tell me this—
I want the truth, so I know what happened—
did he take that black ship against your will,
by force, or did you volunteer to give it, 870
because he begged you?”

Noemon, son of Phronius,
then answered Antinous:

“I agreed to give it.
Would anyone have acted otherwise,
when a man like him, with a grieving heart, [650]
makes a request? It would be difficult
to deny him what he asked. The young men—
the ones who went with him—are excellent,
except for us, the best this land affords.
As they embarked, I observed their leader,
Mentor, or some god who looks just like him. 880
I’m surprised at that—at dawn yesterday
I saw noble Mentor, though by that time
he’d already gone on board for Pylos.”

Once he finished speaking, Noemon went away,
back to his father’s house. But those two suitors,
Antinous and Eurymachus, had angry hearts.
They quickly got the suitors to give up their games
and had them sit down all together in a group.
Antinous, son of Eupheithes, then spoke to them. [660]
He was extremely angry, black heart filled with rage, 890

BOOK FOUR

his flashing eyes a fiery blaze:

“Here’s trouble.

In his overbearing way Telemachus,
with this voyage of his, has now achieved
significant success. And we believed
he would never see it through. Against our will,
this mere youngster has simply gone away,
launching a ship and choosing our best men,
the finest in the land. He’ll soon begin
creating problems for us. I hope Zeus
will sap his strength before he comes of age
and reaches full maturity. Come now,
give me a swift ship and twenty comrades,
so I can watch for him and set an ambush,
as he navigates his passage through the strait
dividing Ithaca from rugged Samos,
and bring this trip searching for his father
to a dismal end.”

900

[670]

When Antinous had finished,
the suitors all agreed, and they instructed him
to carry out what he proposed. Then they got up
and went back inside the palace of Odysseus.

910

Now, Penelope was not ignorant for long
of the schemes those suitors were hatching in their hearts.
For the herald Medon told her. He’d been listening
outside the hall, as they were making plans inside,
weaving their plot. Medon proceeded through the house
to tell Penelope the news. As he came out
just across the threshold, Penelope called him:

[680]

“Herald, why have these distinguished suitors
sent you out here? Are you supposed to tell
the female household slaves of lord Odysseus
to stop their work and then make them a feast?
After this whole courtship, I hope those men
never gather somewhere else. And today,
may they make the banquet in this palace
their latest and their last, all those of you
who by collecting here consume so much,
the wealth of wise Telemachus. It seems,
when you were children all those years ago,

920

BOOK FOUR

you did not pay attention to your fathers,
as they discussed the kind of noble man 930
Odysseus was among their generation—
in Ithaca he never did or said [690]
a hurtful thing to anyone, unlike
the usual habits of our godlike kings,
who hate one man and love another one.
He never did the slightest injury
to any man. But your heart and wicked acts
are plain to see—you show no gratitude
for kindness shown to you in earlier days.”

Then Medon, an intelligent man, said to her: 940

“My queen, I wish that what you’ve just described
were the worst of it. But now these suitors
are planning something much more dangerous
and troubling—I hope the son of Cronos
never permits them to succeed. They mean
to kill Telemachus with their sharp swords, [700]
as he comes home. He’s sailed off to Pylos
and then to sacred Sparta, seeking news
about his father.”

As Medon spoke, Penelope
felt her heart and knees give way where she was standing. 950
For a long time she could not speak a word to him—
both her eyes were full of tears, and she lost her voice.
But finally she spoke to him and said:

“Herald,
why did my son leave? There was no need
for him to go on board swift-moving ships,
men’s salt-water horses, to sail across
enormous seas. Did he do it to make sure
he’d never leave a name among all men?” [710]

Wise Medon then answered Penelope and said:

“I don’t know if some god was urging him 960
or if his own heart prompted him to sail
for Pylos, to learn about his father—
whether he was ever returning home

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or had met his fate.”

After saying this,
Medon went away, down through Odysseus’s home.
Clouds of heart-destroying grief fell on Penelope.
She had no strength and could not sit down on a chair—
and there were several in the room. She collapsed,
crouching on the threshold of that splendid chamber,
moaning in distress. Around her, all her servants
cried out, too, all those inside the house, young and old. 970
Still weeping with that group, Penelope spoke out: [720]

“Friends, listen. For Zeus has given me
more sorrows than any other woman
born and raised with me. Many years ago
I lost my noble husband—a fine man
who had a lion’s heart and qualities
which made him stand out among Danaans
in all sorts of ways, a courageous man,
whose famous name is well known far and wide 980
throughout all Hellas and middle Argos.¹
And now, without a word, the storm winds sweep
my son, whom I so love, away from home,
and I don’t even hear about his trip.
You are too cruel. In your minds, no one
thought to rouse me from my bed, though you knew, [730]
deep in your hearts, the moment he embarked
in his black hollow ship. If I had known
he was going to undertake this journey,
he would have stayed at home. He truly would, 990
for all his eagerness to make the trip.
Or else I would have perished in these rooms
before he left me. But now one of you
must quickly summon old man Dolius,
my servant, whom my father gave to me
before I ever came to Ithaca,
the one who tends my orchard full of trees,
so he may go as quickly as he can,
to sit beside Laertes and tell him
this disastrous news. Perhaps Laertes 1000
in his thinking can somehow weave a plan,
then go and weep his case before those men

¹Hellas is a name for the geographical totality of the numerous Greek-speaking states.

intent on wiping out his family, [740]
the whole race of heavenly Odysseus.”

The good nurse Eurycleia answered Penelope:

“Dear lady, you may kill me with a sword
or keep me in the house, but I’ll not hide
a word from you. I knew all about this.
I gave him everything he asked me to, 1010
including bread and wine. He made me swear
a powerful oath I would not tell you,
until he’d been away eleven days
or you yourself should miss him and find out,
in case you harmed that lovely skin of yours [750]
with your laments. But you should have a bath,
put clean clothing on your body, then go—
take your attendants to your room upstairs
and make your prayers there to Athena,
daughter of great Zeus who bears the aegis.
She may rescue him from death. Don’t bother 1020
old man Laertes with still more troubles.
I don’t think the family of Arcesius
is so completely hated by the gods,
that one of them is unable somehow
to guard this high-roofed home and its estates,
so rich and far away.”¹

Eurycleia spoke.

What she said eased the sorrow in Penelope,
whose eyes stopped weeping. She left to bathe herself,
put fresh clothing on her body, and went away,
taking her female servants to her room upstairs. 1030 [760]
She scattered some grains of barley in a basket
and then prayed to Athena:

“O untiring child
of aegis-bearing Zeus, hear my prayer.
If resourceful Odysseus in his home
ever offered a sacrifice to you—
plump cattle thighs or sheep—recall that now,
I pray. Save my dear son and keep him safe

¹Arcesius was the father of Laertes, hence Odysseus’s grandfather.

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from those suitors and their murderous pride.”

With these words, Penelope raised a sacred cry,
and the goddess heard her prayer.

But the suitors
were still carousing down in those shadowy halls.
One overbearing youth would say something like this:

1040

“Ah ha, the lady with so many suitors
is making preparations for the marriage,
knowing nothing of the plans we’re hatching
for the killing of her son.”

[770]

That’s the sort of thing
any one of them would say, in his ignorance
of how things finally would end. Then Antinous
addressed them all and said:

“Noble lords,
you must not speak out so intemperately—
no more such talk. Someone may report it,
especially to those inside the house.
Come now, let’s get up quietly and work
to carry out that scheme which all our hearts
responded to with such delightful joy.”

1050

After saying this, Antinous picked out his men,
twenty of the best. They went down to the shore
and dragged a swift black ship out into deep water.
They set the mast in place, carried sails on board,
and fitted oars into their leather rowing loops,
all in proper order, then spread out the white sail.
Their proud attendants brought their weapons on the ship.
They moored the ship quite near the shore, then disembarked
and ate a meal there, waiting until evening fell.

[780]

1060

Wise Penelope lay there in her upstairs room,
taking no food at all—she would not eat or drink—
worrying if her fine son could avoid being killed,
or if those arrogant suitors would slaughter him.
Just as a lion grows tense, overcome with fear,
when encircled by a crowd of crafty hunters,
that’s how her mind was working then, as sweet sleep

[790]

1070

BOOK FOUR

came over her. Then she lay back and got some rest,
and all her limbs relaxed.

But then Athena,
goddess with the glittering eyes, thought of something else.
She made a phantom shape, exactly like a woman,
Iphthime, daughter of the brave Icarius
and wife to Eumelus, who lived in Pherae.¹
Athena sent this shape to lord Odysseus' home,
while Penelope was in distress and grieving, [800]
to advise her she should end her tears and sorrow. 1080
The phantom shape passed through the thong which held the bolt
and went into Penelope's room. Standing there
above her head, it spoke to her:

“Penelope,
is your heart anxious as you lie asleep?
It shouldn't be. The gods who live at ease
will not bring you distress and suffering—
your son will still get home. For he's someone
who's never been offensive to the gods.”

Wise Penelope remained deep in her sweet sleep
beside the gate of dreams. But she replied and said: 1090

“Sister, why are you now here? Up to now [810]
you haven't come—your home's so far away.
You tell me to end my cries and grieving,
all the pain afflicting my mind and heart.
But I've already lost my noble husband,
that lion-hearted man, whose qualities
made him preeminent among Danaans
in all sorts of ways—a brave warrior,
whose glory is widely known in Hellas
and middle Argos. Now the son I love 1100
has set off in a hollow ship—poor child—
with no idea of how men struggle on
or conduct themselves in meetings. That's why
I grieve for him much more than for Odysseus.
He makes me tremble—I am so afraid [820]
he'll run into troubles with those people
in the land he's visiting or at sea.

¹In other words, Athena takes on the form of Penelope's sister.

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Many enemies are now planning schemes,
in their eagerness to hurt or kill him,
before he gets back to his native land.”

1110

The dim phantom form then answered Penelope:

“Be brave. And do not let your mind and heart
succumb to fear too much. He has with him
the sort of guide whom other men have prayed
to stand beside them, and she has power—
yes, Pallas Athena. While you’ve been grieving,
she’s taken pity on you. She’s the one
who sent me here to tell you this.”

Wise Penelope

[830]

then spoke out in reply:

“If you’re indeed a god
and have listened to Athena when she speaks,
then tell me news of that ill-fated man.
I’m begging you. Is Odysseus still alive
and looking at the light, or is he dead,
already down in the realm of Hades?”

1120

The faint image then answered Penelope and said:

“No, no. I cannot talk of him in detail
and tell you whether he’s alive or dead.
It’s a bad thing to chatter like the wind.”

After saying these words, the phantom slipped away,
vanishing through the door bolt in a breath of wind.
The daughter of Icarius woke from her sleep,
her heart encouraged that such a vivid dream
had raced towards her in the middle of the night.

1130

[840]

The suitors climbed aboard their ship and sailed away
on their voyage across the sea, minds fully bent
on slaughtering Telemachus. Well out to sea,
half way between Ithaca and rugged Samos,
lies rocky Asteris. The island is not large,
but ships can moor there in a place with openings
in both directions. The Achaeans waited there
and organized their ambush for Telemachus.

1140

[The assembled gods decide to send Hermes to tell Calypso she must let Odysseus go home; Calypso welcomes Hermes on her island, hears Zeus's orders; Calypso helps Odysseus construct a raft; Odysseus sets sail from Calypso's island and gets within sight of Phaeacia; Poseidon sends a storm which destroys the raft; Odysseus gets help from the sea goddess Leucothea; Odysseus has trouble finding a place to come ashore, finds a river mouth, climbs ashore, and falls asleep in the bushes near the river.]

“Father Zeus and you other blessed gods
who live forever, let no sceptred king
be prudent, kind, or gentle from now on,
or think about his fate. Let him instead
always be cruel and treat men viciously,
since no one now has any memory
of lord Odysseus, who ruled his people
and was a gentle father. Now he lies
suffering extreme distress on that island
where nymph Calypso lives. She keeps him there
by force, and he’s unable to sail off
and get back to his native land—he lacks
a ship with oars and has no companions
to send him out across the sea’s broad back.
And now some men are setting out to kill
the son he loves, as he sails home. The boy
has gone to gather news about his father,
off to sacred Pylos and holy Sparta.”

“My child,
what a speech has slipped the barrier of your teeth!
Did you not come up with this plan yourself,
so that Odysseus, once he made it home,

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could take out his revenge against those men? 30
As for Telemachus, you should use your skill
to get him to his native land unharmed—
that's well within your power. The suitors
will sail back in their ship without success."

Zeus spoke and then instructed Hermes, his dear son:

"Hermes, since in every other matter
you are our herald, tell the fair-haired nymph [30]
my firm decision—the brave Odysseus
is to get back home. He'll get no guidance
from the gods or mortal men, but sail off 40
on a raft of wood well lashed together.
He'll suffer hardships, but in twenty days
he'll reach the fertile land of Scheria,
the territory of the Phaeacians,
people closely connected to the gods.
They will honour him with all their hearts,
as if he were divine, then send him off,
back in a ship to his dear native land.
They'll give him many gifts of bronze and gold
and clothing, too, a greater hoard of goods 50
than Odysseus could ever win at Troy,
even if he made it back safe and sound [40]
with his share of the loot they passed around.
For that's how Fate decrees he'll see his friends
and reach his high-roofed house and native land."

Once Zeus finished speaking. The killer of Argus,
his messenger, obeyed him. At once he laced up
on his feet those lovely golden ageless sandals
which carry him as fast as stormy blasts of wind
across the ocean seas and boundless tracts of land. 60
He took with him the wand he uses to put to sleep
or wake up the eyes of anyone he chooses.¹
With this in hand, the mighty killer of Argus
flew away—speeding high above Pieria,
then leaping from the upper sky down to the sea. [50]
Across the waves he raced, just like a cormorant,
a bird which hunts for fish down in the perilous gulfs
below the restless sea, soaking his thick plumage

¹Hermes is often depicted carrying his small staff, the caduceus.

BOOK FIVE

in the brine—that how Hermes rode the crowded waves.
But when he reached the distant island, he rose up, 70
above the violet sea, and moved in onshore,
until he came to an enormous cave, the home
of the fair-haired nymph Calypso. He found her there,
a huge fire blazing in her hearth—from far away
the smell of split cedar and burning sandal wood [60]
spread across the island. With her enchanting voice
Calypso sang inside the cave, as she moved **round**,
back and forth, before her loom—she was weaving
with a golden shuttle.¹ All around her in the cave
trees were in bloom, alder and sweet-smelling cypress, 80
and poplar, too, with long-winged birds nesting in them—
owls, hawks, and chattering sea crows, who spend their time
out on the water. A garden vine, fully ripe
and loaded with rich grapes, trailed through the hollow cave.
From four fountains, close to each other in a row, [70]
clear water streamed out in various directions,
and all around soft meadows spread out in full bloom
with fresh violets and parsley. Even a god,
who lives forever, coming there, would be amazed
to gaze at it, and his heart would fill with pleasure. 90
The killer of Argus, god’s messenger, stood there,
marvelling at the sight. But after his spirit
had contemplated all these things with wonder,
he went inside the spacious cave. And Calypso,
that lovely goddess, when she saw him face to face,
was not ignorant of who he was, for the gods
are not unknown to one another, even though
the home of some immortal might be far away. [80]

But Hermes did not find Odysseus in the cave—
that great-hearted man sat lamenting on the shore, 100
just as before, breaking his heart with tears and groans,
full of sorrow, as he looked out on the restless sea
and wept. Calypso invited Hermes to sit down
on a lustrous shining chair. Then the lovely goddess
questioned him:

“Hermes, honoured and welcome guest,
why have you come here with your golden wand?

¹A shuttle is an instrument used in weaving (carrying the weft thread back and forth between the strands of warp thread).

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You have not been a visitor before.
Tell me what's on your mind. My heart desires
to perform what you request, if I can,
and if it's something fated to be done.
But bear with me now, so I can show you
the hospitality I give my guests."

110 [90]

After this speech, Calypso set out a table
laden with ambrosia, then mixed red nectar.¹
And so the messenger god, killer of Argus,
ate and drank. When his meal was over and the food
had comforted his heart, Hermes gave his answer,
speaking to Calypso with these words:

"You're a goddess,
and you're asking me, a god, why I've come.
Since you've questioned me, I'll tell you the truth.
Zeus told me to come here against my will.
For who would volunteer to race across
that huge expanse of sea—so gigantic
it cannot be described? There's no town there
where mortal men can offer sacrifice
or choice gifts to the gods. But there's no way
that any other god can override
or shun the will of aegis-bearing Zeus.
He says that you have here with you a man
more unfortunate than all the others
who fought nine years around king Priam's city,
which in the tenth year they destroyed and left
to get back home.² But on that voyage back
they sinned against Athena, and she sent
tall waves and dangerous winds against them.
All his other noble comrades perished,
but winds and waves still carried him ahead
and brought him here. Now Zeus is telling you
to send him off as soon as possible.
For it is not ordained that he will die
far from his friends. Instead his fate decrees
he'll see his family and make it home
to his own high-roofed house and native land."

120

[100]

130

[110]

140

¹Ambrosia and red nectar are foods of the gods, who do not consume the same foods as mortals.

²Priam's city is Troy.

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Hermes finished. Calypso, the lovely goddess,
trembled as she replied to him—her words had wings:

“The gods are cruel and far too jealous—
more so than others. They are unhappy
if goddesses make mortal men their partners,
taking them to bed for sex. That’s how it was [120]
when rose-fingered Dawn wanted Orion— 150
you gods that live at ease were jealous of her,
until golden-throned sacred Artemis
came to Ortygia and murdered him
with her gentle arrows.¹ In the same way,
when fair-haired Demeter was overcome
with passion and had sex with Iasion
in a thrice-ploughed fallow field, soon enough
Zeus heard of it and utterly destroyed him
by throwing down his dazzling lightning bolt.
Now once again you gods are envious, 160
because a mortal man lives here with me.
I saved him when he was all by himself, [130]
riding his ship’s keel—his swift ship was smashed
by a blow from Zeus’s flaming lightning,
while in the middle of the wine-dark sea,
where all his other brave companions died.
Wind and waves brought him here. This is a man
I cherished and looked after, and I said
I would make him ageless and immortal
for all days to come. But since there’s no way 170
another god can override the plans
of aegis-bearing Zeus or cancel them,
let him be off across the restless seas,
if Zeus has so commanded and decreed.
But I’ll have no part of escorting him [140]
away from here—I have no ships with oars
nor any crew to take him on his way
across the broad back of the sea. But still,
I can make sincere suggestions to him
and keep nothing hidden, so he can reach 180
his native land and get back safe and sound.”

¹Orion is a mythical hunter, son of Poseidon. By some accounts he was killed by Artemis in an archery contest with Apollo.

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Then the killer of Argus, Zeus's messenger,
said to Calypso:

“Yes, send him away.
Think of Zeus's rage. He may get angry
and make things hard for you in days to come.”

The killer of Argus, the gods' great messenger,
said these words and left. The regal nymph Calypso,
once she heard Zeus's message, went away to find [150]
great-hearted Odysseus. She met him on the shore,
sitting by the sea, his eyes always full of tears, 190
because he was squandering his sweet life, mourning
for his return. The nymph no longer gave him joy.
At night he slept beside her in the hollow cave,
as he was forced to do—not of his own free will,
though she was keen enough. But in the daylight hours
he'd sit down on the rocks along the beach, his heart
straining with tears and groans and sorrow, as he gazed,
through his tears, over the restless sea. Moving up,
close to him, the lovely goddess spoke:

“Poor man, [160]
spend no more time grieving on this island, 200
wasting your life away. My heart agrees—
the time has come for me to send you off.
So come now, cut long timbers with an axe,
and make a raft, a large one. Build a deck
high up on it, so it can carry you
across the misty sea. I'll provision it
with all the food and water and red wine
you're going to need to satisfy your wants.
I'll give you clothes and send a favouring wind
blowing from your stern, so you may reach 210
your own native land unharmed, if the gods
are willing, the ones who hold wide heaven,
whose will and force are mightier than mine.”

Calypso finished her speech. Odysseus trembled,
then replied to her—his words had wings:

“Goddess,
in all this you're planning something different.
You don't want me to get home, when you tell me

BOOK FIVE

to go across that huge gulf of the sea
and in a raft—a harsh and dangerous trip.
Not even swift well-balanced ships get through 220
when they enjoy fair winds from Zeus. Besides,
without your consent I'd never board a raft,
not unless you, goddess, would undertake
to swear a mighty oath on my behalf
you'll not come up with other devious plans
to injure me."

Odysseus finished speaking. [180]
Calypso, the lovely goddess, smiled, caressed him,
and then replied by saying:

"You're a cunning man,
with no lack of wit—to even consider
answering me like that. But let the earth 230
stand as witness, and wide heaven above,
and flowing waters of the river Styx—
the mightiest and most terrible oath
the blessed gods can make—I will not plan
any other injury against you.¹ No.
I'll think of things and give advice, as if
I was scheming for my own advantage,
if ever I should be in such distress.
For my mind is just, and inside my chest [190]
there is no iron heart—it feels pity, 240
just like your own."

The beautiful goddess
finished speaking, then quickly led him from the place.
Odysseus followed in her footsteps. Man and goddess
entered the hollow cave. He sat down in the chair
Hermes had just risen from, and the nymph set out
all kinds of food to eat and drink, the sort of things
mortal human beings consume. She took a seat
opposite god-like Odysseus, and her servants
placed ambrosia and nectar right beside her.
The two of them reached out to take the tasty food 250 [200]
spread out in front of them. When they had had their fill

¹The river Styx is one of the five major rivers of the underworld (Acheron, Cocytus, Phlegethon, Lethe, and Styx). It marks the boundary between Earth and Hades.

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of food and drink, beautiful divine Calypso
was the first to speak:

“Nobly born son of Laertes,
resourceful Odysseus, so you now wish
to get back to your own dear native land
without delay? In spite of everything,
I wish you well. If your heart recognized
how much distress Fate has in store for you
before you reach your homeland, you’d stay here
and keep this home with me. You’d never die, 260
not even if you yearned to see your wife,
the one you always long for every day. [210]
I can boast that I’m no worse than her
in how I look or bear myself—it’s wrong
for mortal women to compete with gods
in form and beauty.”

Resourceful Odysseus
then answered her and said:

“Mighty goddess,
do not be angry with me over this.
I myself know very well Penelope,
although intelligent, is not your match 270
to look at, not in stature or in beauty.
But she’s a human being and you’re a god.
You’ll never die or age. But still I wish,
every moment to get back to my home, [220]
to see the day of my return. And so,
even if out there on the wine-dark sea
some god breaks me apart, I will go on—
the heart here in my chest is quite prepared
to bear affliction. I’ve already had
so many troubles, and I’ve worked so hard 280
through waves and warfare. Let what’s yet to come
be added in with those.”

Odysseus finished.
Then the sun went down, and it grew dark. Both of them
went in the inner chamber of the hollow cave
and lay down there beside each other to make love.

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As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
Odysseus quickly put on a cloak and tunic,
and the nymph dressed in a long white shining robe, [230]
a lovely lightly woven dress. Around her waist
she fixed a gorgeous golden belt and placed a veil 290
high on her head. Then she gathered up the tools
that brave Odysseus would need for his departure,
handing him a huge axe, well suited to his grip,
made of two-edged bronze, with a finely crafted shaft
of handsome olive wood. Next she provided him
a polished adze. Then she led him along a path
down to the edges of the island, where tall trees grew,
alder, poplar, and pine that reached the upper sky,
well-seasoned, dried-out wood, which could keep him afloat. [240]
Once she had shown the location of these trees, 300
Calypso, the lovely goddess, returned back home.
Odysseus then began to cut the wood. He worked
as quickly as he could and chopped down twenty trees.
Using his bronze axe, he trimmed and deftly smoothed them,
then lined them up. Calypso, that lovely goddess,
brought him an auger, so he could bore the timbers,
fasten them to one another, and tighten them
with pins and rope.¹ Odysseus made a giant raft,
as wide as the broad hull of a large cargo ship
traced out by someone very skilled in carpentry. 310 [250]
Then he worked to fasten the deck, attaching it
onto the close-set timbers and then finished it
with extended gunwales. Next he set up a mast
with a yardarm fastened to it and then carved out
a steering oar to guide the raft. From stem to stern
he wove a lattice of willow reeds reinforced
with wood to protect him from the waves. Calypso,
the enchanting goddess, brought him woven linen
to make a sail—which he did very skilfully.
On it he tied bracing ropes and sheets and halyards.² 320 [260]
Then he levered the raft down to the shining sea.

By the fourth day he had completed all this work.
So on the fifth beautiful Calypso bathed him,
dressed him in sweet-smelling clothes, and ordered him
to leave her island. She had stowed on board the raft

¹An auger is a tool used for making holes in wood.

²Halyards are ropes used to raise and lower sails.

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a sack full of dark wine and another large one,
filled with water, and a sack of food, containing
many tasty things for him to eat. She sent him
a warm and favouring wind, and lord Odysseus
was happy as he set his sails to catch the breeze. 330
He sat beside the steering oar and used his skill [270]
to guide the raft. Sleep did not fall across his eyelids,
as he watched the constellations—the Pleiades,
the late-setting Boötes, and the Great Bear,
which men call the Wain, always turning in one place,
keeping watch over Orion—the only star
that never takes a bath in Ocean.¹ Calypso,
the lovely goddess, had told him to keep this star
to his left as he moved across the sea. He sailed
for ten days on the water, then for seven more, 340
and on the eighteenth day shadowy hills appeared,
where the land of the Phaeacians, like a large shield [280]
riding on the misty sea, lay very close to him.

But at that moment, the powerful Earthshaker,
returning from the Ethiopians, saw him
from the distant mountain tops of the Solymi.
Poseidon watched Odysseus sailing on the sea,
and his spirit grew enraged. So he shook his head
and spoke to his own heart:

“Something’s wrong!
The gods must have changed what they were planning 350
for Odysseus, while I’ve been far away
among the Ethiopians. For now
he’s hard by the land of the Phaeacians,
where he’ll escape the great extremes of sorrow
which have come over him—so Fate ordains.
But still, even now I think I’ll push him [290]
so he gets his fill of troubles.”

Poseidon spoke.
Then he drove the clouds together, seized his trident,
and stirred up the sea. He brought on blasting tempests

¹The Great Bear or Wain (in modern times often called the Plough) turns more or less around the same spot in the night sky and at the latitudes of the eastern Mediterranean never disappears below the horizon (that is, bathes in the Ocean). The Boötes (Herdsman) is the constellation Arcturus.

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from every kind of wind, concealing land and sea 360
with gloomy clouds, so darkness fell from heaven.
East Wind clashed with South Wind, while West Wind, in a rage,
smashed straight into North Wind, born in the upper sky,
pushing a massive wave. Odysseus' knees gave way,
his spirit fell, and in great distress he cried out,
addressing his great heart:

“I’m facing a disaster!
How is all this going to end up for me? [300]
I’m afraid everything the goddess said
was true, when she claimed that out at sea,
before I got back to my native land, 370
I’d have my fill of troubles. And right now
all that is taking place—just look how Zeus
has covered the wide sky with clouds, stirred up
the sea with howling blasts from different winds
swooping down on me. My sheer destruction
is now beyond all doubt. O those Danaans,
three and four times blest, who perished back there
in spacious Troy, while doing a favour
for the sons of Atreus!¹ How I wish
I’d died as well and met my Fate that day 380
when companies of Trojans hurled at me
their bronze-tipped spears, as we battled it out [310]
around the corpse of Peleus’s son.²
Then I’d have received my funeral rites,
and Achaeans would have made me famous.
But now I’m fated to be overwhelmed
and die a pitiful death.”

As he said these words,
that massive wave charged at him with tremendous force,
swirled round the raft, and then, from high above, crashed down.
Odysseus let go his grip on the steering oar 390
and fell out, a long way from the raft. Ferocious gusts
of howling winds snapped the mast off in the middle.
The sail and yardarm dropped away, down in the sea,

¹The sons of Atreus are Menelaus and Agamemnon, for whose sake many Achaean kings joined the expedition to Troy, because of a promise they had made that they would, if called upon, assist whoever married Helen.

²Peleus’s dead son is a reference to Achilles and to a famous incident in the Trojan war when the Achaean leaders fought to protect the body of Achilles.

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some distance off. For many moments he was held
under the water—he found it impossible
to rise above the power of that mighty wave, [320]
because the clothes he'd got from beautiful Calypso
dragged him down. But finally he reached the surface,
spitting tart salt water from his mouth, as it streamed
down from his head. But even so, though badly shaken, 400
he did not forget about the raft. Through the waves
he swam up, grabbed hold, and crouched down in the middle,
trying to escape destructive Fate. The huge wave
carried him along its course this way and that.
Just as in autumn North Wind sweeps the thistledown
along the plain, and the tufts bunch up together,
that's how the winds then blasted his raft to and fro [330]
across the stormy sea. Sometimes South Wind would toss it
over to North Wind to carry. At other times,
East Wind would allow West Wind to lead the chase. 410

Then Ino with the lovely ankles noticed him—
Cadmus' child, once a mortal being who could speak,
but now, deep in the sea, she was Leucothea
and had her share of recognition from the gods.¹
She felt pity for Odysseus as he suffered
in such perilous distress. She rose up from the waves,
like a sea gull on the wing, climbed onto the raft,
and spoke to him, saying:

“You poor wretch,
why do you put Earthshaker Poseidon
in such a furious temper, so that he 420
keeps stirring up all this trouble for you? [340]
No matter what he wants, he won't kill you.
It seems to me you've got a clever mind,
so do just what I say. Take off these clothes,
and jump out of the raft. Drift with the winds.
But paddle with your hands, and try to reach
the land of the Phaeacians, where Fate says
you will be rescued. Come on, take this veil—
it's from the gods—and tie it round your chest.
Then there's no fear you'll suffer anything 430
or die. But when your hand can grab the shore,

¹Ino was the daughter of Cadmus and Harmonia (king and queen of Thebes). After her death Zeus changed Ino into a goddess of the sea, Leucothea.

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then take it off and throw it far from land
into the wine-dark sea and turn away.” [350]

The goddess said this, handed him the veil, and left,
diving like a sea bird down in the heaving sea.
A dark wave swallowed her. Resourceful Odysseus,
who had endured so much, considered what to do,
speaking, in great distress, to his courageous heart:

“I’m in trouble. I hope none of the gods
is weaving dangers for me once again 440
with this advice of hers to leave the raft.
Well, I won’t follow what she says—not yet.
For I can see with my own eyes how far
that land is where she said I would be saved.
So I will do what now seems best to me— [360]
as long as these raft timbers hold in place,
I’ll stay here and bear whatever happens,
but once the waves have smashed my raft apart,
I’ll swim for it. There is no better way.”

As his mind and heart were thinking about these things, 450
Earthshaker Poseidon set the seas in motion
with a monstrous, menacing, and terrifying wave,
arching high above his head, and drove it at him.
Just as a storm wind scatters dry straw in a heap,
blowing pieces here and there in all directions—
that’s how that huge wave split the long planks on the raft.
But while straddling a board, as if astride a horse, [370]
Odysseus stripped away the clothing he received
from fair Calypso. He wound the veil across his chest,
and then, with arms outstretched, fell face first in the sea, 460
trying to swim. The mighty Shaker of the Earth
saw him, shook his head, and then spoke to his own heart:

“So now, after suffering so much anguish,
keep roaming on the sea until you meet
a people raised by Zeus. Still, I don’t think
you’ll be laughing at the troubles still in store.”

With these words Poseidon lashed his fine-maned horses [380]
and left for Aegae where he has his splendid home.

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Then Athena, Zeus's daughter, thought of something.
She blocked off the pathways of every wind but one
and ordered all of them to stop and check their force,
then roused the swift North Wind and broke the waves in front,
so that divinely born Odysseus might yet meet
the people of Phaeacia, men who love the oar,
avoiding death and Fates.

So for two days and nights
he floated on the ocean waves—his heart was filled
with countless thoughts of death. But when the fair-haired Dawn
gave rise at last to the third day, the wind died down,
the sea grew calm and still. Odysseus was raised up
by a large swell, and as he quickly looked ahead,
he could see the land close by. Just as young children
rejoice to see life in a father who lies sick,
in savage pain through a lengthy wasting illness,
with a malicious god afflicting him, and then,
to their delight, the gods release him from disease,
that is how Odysseus rejoiced when he could see
the land and forests. He swam on ahead, eager
to set foot on the shore. But when he came in closer,
as far as man's voice can carry when he shouts,
he heard the crashing of the sea against the rocks—
huge waves with a dreadful roar smashing on dry land
and foaming clouds of spray concealing everything—
there were no harbours fit for ships to ride or coves,
but jutting headlands, cliffs, and boulders—at that point
Odysseus felt both his knees and spirit give way,
and in despair he spoke to his great heart:

“What's this?
great Zeus has given me a glimpse of land,
just when I'd lost hope, and I've made my way
cutting across this gulf, but I can't find
a place where I can leave this cold grey sea.
There's an outer rim of jagged boulders
where waves come crashing on them with a roar.
The rock face rises sheer, the water there
is deep—there's no way to gain a foothold
and escape my death. If I try to land,
a huge wave may pick me up and smash me
on those protruding rocks, and my attempt
would be quite useless. But if I keep swimming

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and hope I'll find a sloping beach somewhere
or havens from the sea, then I'm afraid 510
the stormy winds will grab me once again
and carry me, for all my heavy groans, [420]
across the fish-filled seas, or else some god
may set some monstrous creature of the sea
against me—illustrious Amphitrite
raises many beasts like that. I know well
the rage the great Earthshaker feels for me.”¹

As he debated in his mind and heart like this,
a huge wave carried him toward the rocky shore.
His skin would have been ripped and all his bones smashed up, 520
but the goddess with the gleaming eyes, Athena,
put a thought inside his mind. As he surged ahead,
he grabbed a rock with both his hands and held it,
groaning, until that giant wave had passed him by.
So he escaped. But as the wave flowed back once more, [430]
it charged, struck, and flung him back out to sea. Just as
an octopus is dragged out from its den, its suckers
full of clinging pebbles, that's how his skin was scraped
from his strong hands against the rocks, as that great wave
engulfed him. And then unfortunate Odysseus 530
would have perished there, something not ordained by Fate,
if bright-eyed Athena had not given him advice.
Moving from the surf where it pounded on the shore,
he swam out to sea, but kept looking at the land,
hoping to come across a sloping beach somewhere [440]
or a haven from the sea. He kept swimming on
until he reached the mouth of a fair-flowing river,
which seemed to him the finest place to go onshore.
There were no rocks, and it was sheltered from the wind.
Odysseus recognized the river as it flowed 540
and prayed to it deep in his heart:

“Hear me, my lord,
whoever you may be. I've come to you,
the answer to my many prayers, fleeing
Poseidon's punishment from the deep sea.
A man who visits as a wanderer
commands respect, even with deathless gods—
just as I've now come to your stream and knees,

¹ Amphitrite, a sea goddess, is the divine wife of Poseidon.

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after suffering so much. So pity me,
my lord—I claim to be your suppliant.” [450]

Odysseus spoke. At once the god held back his flow, 550
checked the waves, calmed the water up ahead of him,
and brought him safely to the river mouth. Both knees bent,
he let his strong hands fall—the sea had crushed his heart.
All his skin was swollen, and water flowed in streams
up in his mouth and nose. He lay there out of breath,
without a word, hardly moving—quite overcome
with terrible exhaustion. But when he revived
and spirit moved back into his heart, he untied
the veil the goddess gave him and let the river [460]
take it as it flowed out to the sea. A great wave 560
carried it downstream, and then without delay
Ino’s friendly hands retrieved it. But Odysseus
turned from the river, collapsed down in the rushes,
and kissed life-giving earth. Then in his anxiety,
he spoke to his great heart:

“What now? What’s next for me?
How will I end up? If I stay right here
all through the wretched night, with my eye on
the river bed, I fear the bitter frost
and freshly fallen dew will both combine
to overcome me when, weak as I am, 570
my spirit’s breath grows faint—the river wind
blows cold in early morning. But if I climb [470]
uphill to the shady woods and lie down
in some thick bushes and so rid myself
of cold and weariness, sweet Sleep may come
and overpower me, and then, I fear,
I may become some wild beast’s prey, its prize.”

He thought about what he should do and resolved
to move up to the woods. Close by the water
he found a place with a wide view. So he crept in, 580
beneath two bushes growing from a single stem—
one was an olive tree, the other a wild thorn.
Wet winds would not be strong enough ever to blow
through both of these, nor could the bright sun’s rays shine in,
and rain would never penetrate—they grew so thick, [480]
all intertwined with one another. Under these
Odysseus crawled, and his strong hands quickly made

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a spacious bed for him—for all around that spot
there were fallen leaves, enough to cover two or three
on a winter night, however bad the weather.

590

When resourceful lord Odysseus noticed that,
he was delighted and lay down in the middle
and piled heaps of fallen leaves around his body.

Just as someone on a farm without a neighbour
hides a torch beneath black embers, and in this way
saves a spark of fire and does not need to kindle it
from somewhere else, that is how he spread out the leaves
on top of him. Athena poured sleep on his eyes,
covering his eyelids, so he could find relief,
a quick respite from his exhausting troubles.

[490]

600

BOOK SIX
ODYSSEUS AND NAUSICAA

[Athena visits Nausicaa while she is sleeping in the palace and tells her to take the washing to the river; Nausicaa asks her father to provide a wagon and mules; Nausicaa goes with her attendants to the river, washes the clothes, and inadvertently wakes up Odysseus; Odysseus emerges naked and talks to Nausicaa; she agrees to help him; Odysseus bathes, dresses, and eats; they set off for the city and reach the outskirts; Odysseus prays to Athena.]

While much-enduring lord Odysseus rested there,
overcome with weariness and sleep, Athena
went to the land of the Phaeacians, to their city.¹
Many years ago these people used to live
in wide Hypereia, close to the Cyclopes,
proud arrogant creatures and much more powerful,
who kept on robbing them. So god-like Nausithous
had taken them away and led them off to settle
in Scheria, far from any men who have to work
to earn their daily bread. He'd had them build a wall
around the city, construct new homes, raise temples
to the gods, and portion out the land for farming.
But some time past his fate had struck him—he had gone
down to the house of Hades. Now Alcinous ruled,
a mortal being infused with wisdom by the gods.
Athena, bright-eyed goddess, went to this man's home,
to arrange a journey home for brave Odysseus.
She moved into a wonderfully furnished room
where a young girl slept, like an **immortal goddess**
in form and loveliness. She was Nausicaa,
daughter of great-hearted Alcinous. Close by her,
beside each door post, her two servant women slept,
girls whose beauty had been given by the Graces.²
The shimmering doors were closed. Like a gust of wind,
Athena slipped over to the young girl's bedside,
stood there beside her head, and then spoke to her.
Her appearance changed to look like Dymas' daughter—
a man celebrated for the many ships he owned.

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[10]

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[20]

¹The precise location of Phaeacia is disputed. Some have identified it with the island of Corfu, relatively close to Ithaca. Others have argued that it is much further away, perhaps in the Atlantic Ocean.

²The Graces are the goddesses of charm and graceful temperament. There are three of them: Aglaia, Euphrosyne, and Thalia.

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His daughter was the same age as Nausicaa,
whose heart was well disposed to her. In that disguise, 30
bright-eyed Athena spoke out and said:

“Nausicaa,
how did your mother bear a girl so careless? [30]
Your fine clothes are lying here untended,
and soon enough you’ll have your wedding day,
when you must dress up in expensive robes
and give them to your wedding escort, too.
You know it’s things like these that help to make
a worthy reputation with our people
and please your honoured mother and your father.
Come, at daybreak let’s wash out the clothing. 40
I’ll go as well to help you, so with all speed
you can prepare yourself—it won’t be long
before you, too, are a married woman.
You have already heard men from this land
asking for your hand in marriage, the finest
in all Phaeacia, from whom you yourself
derive your lineage. So come on now,
ask your noble father to provide you,
this morning early, a wagon and mules,
so you can carry the bright coverlets, 50
the robes and sashes. That would be better
than going on foot, because the washing tubs
stand some distance from the town.” [40]

With these words,
bright-eyed Athena went back to Olympus,
where, so men report, gods’ home endures forever,
undisturbed by winds and never drenched with rain
or covered by the snow—instead high overhead
the air is always bright. There blessed gods are happy
every day. That’s where the bright-eyed goddess went
when she had finished speaking to Nausicaa. 60

When rose-coloured Dawn arrived on her golden throne
and woke fair-robed Nausicaa, she was curious
to learn about her dream. So she sped through the house [50]
to tell her father and her mother. She found them
in the house—her mother was sitting by the hearth
with her attendant women, spinning purple yarn.
She came across her father as he was leaving

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to meet some prominent kings in an assembly—
he had been summoned by Phaeacian noblemen.
Nausicaa went to stand close by her father
and then spoke to him:

70

“Dear father, can you prepare
a high wagon with sturdy wheels for me,
so I can carry my fine clothing out
and wash it in the river? It’s lying here
all dirty. And it’s appropriate for you
to wear fresh garments on your person
when you’re with our leading men in council.
You have five dear sons living in your home—
two are married, but three are now young men
still unattached, and they always require
fresh-washed clothing when they go out dancing.
All these are matters I must think about.”

[60]

80

Nausicaa said this because she felt ashamed
to remind her father of her own happy thoughts
of getting married. But he understood all that
and answered, saying:

“I have no objection,
my dear child, to providing mules for you,
or any other things. Go on your way.
Slaves will get a four-wheeled wagon ready
with a high box framed on top.”

[70]

Once he’d said this,
he called out to his slaves, and they did what he asked.
They prepared a smooth-running wagon made for mules,
led up the animals, and then yoked them to it.
Nausicaa brought her fine clothing from her room.
She placed it in the polished wagon. Her mother
loaded on a box with all sorts of tempting food.
She put in delicacies, too, and poured some wine
into a goat skin. The girl climbed on the wagon.
Her mother also gave her some smooth olive oil
in a golden flask, so she and her attendants,
when they bathed, could cleanse their skin. Then Nausicaa
took the bright reins and whip and lashed the mules ahead.
With a clatter of hooves, the mules moved quickly off,

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100

[80]

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carrying clothing and the girl, not by herself,
for she took her attendant girls with her, as well.

When they reached the stream of the fair-flowing river,
where the washing tubs were always standing ready,
full of fresh water flowing up from underneath
and spilling over, enough to clean one's clothing,
even garments really soiled, the girls took the mules 110
out of their wagon harnesses and let them loose
along the banks beside the eddying river,
to let them to graze on clover sweet as honey. [90]
The girls gathered the clothing from the wagon,
carried it in their arms down to the murky stream,
and then trampled it inside the washing trenches,
each trying to work more quickly than the others.
Once they had washed the clothes and scrubbed off all the stains,
they laid the laundry out in rows along the shore,
in a place where waves which beat upon the coastline 120
had washed the pebbles clean. When they had bathed themselves
and rubbed their bodies well with oil, they ate a meal
beside the river mouth, waiting for the clothes to dry
in the sun's warm rays. When they had finished eating,
the girl and her attendants threw their head scarves off [100]
to play catch with a ball, and white-armed Nausicaa
led them in song. Just as when archer Artemis
moves across the mountains, along lofty ridges
of Erymanthus or Taygetus, full of joy,
while she pursues wild boars and swiftly running deer, 130
with nymphs attending on her, daughters of great Zeus,
who bears the aegis, taking pleasure in the hunt,
and Leto's heart is filled with joy, while Artemis
stands with her head and eyebrows high above them all,
so recognizing her is easy, though all of them
are beautiful—that's how that young unmarried girl
stood out from her attendants.

But when Nausicaa [110]

was going to harness up the mules and start to fold
the splendid clothes to make the journey homeward,
Athena, bright-eyed goddess, thought of something else, 140
so that Odysseus might wake up and then could see
the lovely girl, who would escort him to the city
of Phaeacian men. So when the princess threw the ball
to one of those attendants with her, she missed the girl,

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and it landed in the deep and swirling river.
They gave a sharp cry, rousing Odysseus from sleep.
So he sat upright, thinking in his heart and mind:

“Here’s trouble! In this country I have reached,
what are the people like? Are they violent
and untamed, without a sense of justice? 150 [120]
Or are they kind to strangers? In their minds
do they fear the gods? Some young women’s shouts
rang out around me—nymphs who live along
steep mountain peaks and by the river springs
and grassy meadows. Could I somehow be
near men with human speech? Well, come on then,
I’m going to have to find out for myself.”

With these words, Odysseus crept out from the thicket.
In his strong hands, he snapped off from the bushes
a leafy branch to hold across him and conceal 160
his naked groin. Then he emerged, moving just like
a mountain lion which relies on its own strength— [130]
though hammered by the rain and wind, it creeps ahead,
its two eyes burning, coming in among the herd
of sheep or cattle, or else stalking a wild deer—
his belly tells him to move in against the flocks,
even within a well-built farm—that’s how Odysseus
was making his way out out to face those fair-haired girls,
although he was stark naked. He was in distress,
but, caked with brine, he was a fearful sight to them, 170
and they ran off in fear and crouched down here and there
among the jutting dunes of sand. The only one
who did not rush away was Alcinous’ daughter.
For Athena had instilled her heart with courage [140]
and taken from her arms and legs all sense of fear.
So she stood there facing up to him. Odysseus
wondered if it was wise to grasp the lovely girl
around her knees and plead his case or stay away,
remaining where he stood, and with reassuring words
entreat her to inform him where the city was 180
and provide him clothing.¹ As he thought about it,
it seem to him a better plan to stand apart
and appeal to her with a sympathetic speech,

¹Grasping someone’s knee (or knees) is a ritual gesture made when one is asking someone for a great favour.

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in case her heart grew angry when he clasped her knee.
So he quickly used his cunning and spoke to her
with soothing language:

“O divine queen,
I come here as a suppliant to you.
Are you a goddess or a mortal being?
If you’re one of the gods who hold wide heaven, [150]
I think you most resemble Artemis, 190
daughter of great Zeus, in your loveliness,
your stature, and your shape. If you’re human,
one of those mortals living on the earth,
your father and your mother are thrice-blest,
and thrice-blest your brothers, too. In their hearts
they must glow with pleasure for you always,
when they see a child like you moving up
into the dance. But the happiest heart,
more so than all the rest, belongs to him
who with his wedding gifts will lead you home. 200
These eyes of mine have never gazed upon [160]
anyone like you—either man or woman.
As I look at you, I am gripped with wonder.
In Delos once I saw something like this—
a youthful palm-tree sapling growing up
beside Apollo’s altar. I’d gone there,
with many others in my company,
on a journey where Fate had planned for me
so many troubles. But when I saw that,
my heart looked on a long time quite astonished— 210
I’d never noticed such a lovely tree
springing from the earth. And, lady, that’s how
I am amazed at you, lost in wonder,
and am very much afraid to clasp your knee.
But great distress has overtaken me.
Yesterday, my twentieth day afloat, [170]
I escaped the wine-dark sea. Before that,
waves and swift-driving storm winds carried me
from Ogygia island. And now a god
has tossed me on shore here, so that somehow 220
I’ll suffer hardships in this place as well.
For I don’t think my problems will end now.
Before that day, there are still many more
the gods will bring about. But, divine queen,
have pity. You’re the first one I’ve approached,

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after so much grief—and I do not know
any people here, none of those who hold
the city and its land. Show me the town.
Give me some rag to throw around myself,
perhaps some wrapping you brought for the clothes
when you came here. As for you, may gods grant
everything your heart desires—may they give
a husband, home, and mutual harmony,
a noble gift—for there is nothing better
or a stronger bond than when man and wife
live in a home sharing each other's thoughts.
That brings such pain upon their enemies
and such delight to those who wish them well.
They know that too, more so than anyone.”

White-armed Nausicaa then answered him and said: 240

“Stranger, you don’t seem to be a wicked man,
or foolish. Olympian Zeus himself
gives happiness to bad and worthy men,
each one receiving just what Zeus desires.
So he has given you your share, I think.
Nonetheless, you must still endure your lot. [190]
But now you have reached our land and city,
you’ll not lack clothes or any other thing
we owe a hard-pressed suppliant we meet.
I’ll show the town to you, and I’ll tell you 250
the name our country bears—the Phaeacians
own this city and this land. As for me,
I am the daughter of brave Alcinous—
Phaeacian power and strength depend on him.”

Nausicaa finished speaking. Then she called out to her fair-haired attendants:

“Stand up, you girls,
 Have you run off because you’ve seen a man?
 Surely you don’t think he is our enemy? [200]
 For there’s no man alive or yet to be
 who’ll visit this realm of the Phaeacians 260
 bringing war, because gods truly love us,
 and we live far off in the surging sea,
 the most remote of people. Other men
 never interact with us. So this man

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is some poor wanderer who's just come here.
We must look after him, for every stranger,
every beggar, comes from Zeus, and any gift,
even something small, is to be cherished.
So, my girls, give this stranger food and drink.
Then bathe him in the river, in a place
which offers him some shelter from the wind.”

270 [210]

Nausicaa finished. They stood up and called out
to one another. They took Odysseus aside,
to a sheltered spot, following what Nausicaa,
daughter of great-hearted Alcinous, had ordered.
They set out clothing for him, a cloak and tunic,
and gave him the gold flask full of smooth olive oil.
They told him to bathe there in the flowing river,
but noble Odysseus said to the attendants:

“Would you young girls move some distance away,
so I can wash salt water from my shoulders
by myself and then rub on olive oil?
It's a long time since oil was on my skin.
I will not wash myself in front of you,
for it would shame me to stand stark naked
in the presence of such fair-haired young girls.”

280 [220]

Once he said this, the two attendants moved away
and spoke to Nausicaa. Then lord Odysseus
washed his body in the stream, rinsing off the salt
caked on his broad shoulders and covering his back,
and wiping the encrusted brine out of his hair.
When he'd washed himself all over and rubbed on oil,
he put on clothes the unmarried girl had given.
Then Athena, Zeus's daughter, made him appear
taller and more powerful. On his head she curled
his hair—it flowed up like a flowering hyacinth.
Just as a skilful workman sets a layer of gold
on top of silver, a craftsman who has been taught
various arts by Athena and Hephaestus,
and his creations are all truly beautiful,
that's how the goddess transformed his head and shoulders.
Then Odysseus went to sit down some distance off,
beside the sea shore, glowing with charm and beauty.
Nausicaa gazed at him in admiration,
then spoke to her fair-haired attendants, saying:

290 [230]
300

“Listen to me, my white-armed followers—
 I have something to say. This person here
 has not come among god-like Phaeacians
 against the will of those immortal gods [240]
 who hold Olympus. Earlier I thought 310
 he was uncouth and rough, but now he seems
 like the gods who occupy wide heaven.
 Would a man like that could be my husband,
 living here, happy to remain. But come,
 my girls, offer the stranger food and drink.”

When Nausicaa had spoken, they heard her words
 and quickly did what they’d been told. They set out
 food and drink before resourceful lord Odysseus.
 He ate and drank voraciously—much time had passed [250]
 since he last tasted food. Then white-armed Nausicaa 320
 thought of something else. She folded up the clothing,
 stowed it in the handsome wagon, and harnessed up
 the team of strong-hooved mules. She climbed up by herself
 and called out to Odysseus, saying these words to him:

“Get up now, stranger, and go to the town.
 I’ll show you the way to my wise father’s house,
 where, I assure you, you will get to meet
 all the finest of Phaeacians. You seem
 to me to have good sense, so act as follows—
 while we are moving through the countryside 330
 past men’s farms, walk fast with my attendants [260]
 behind the mules and wagon. I’ll lead the way.
 Then we’ll reach the city. A lofty wall
 runs round it, and there are lovely harbours
 on both sides—each has a narrow entrance,
 with curving boats drawn up along the road,
 since each man has a place for his own ship.
 The ground where we assemble is there, too,
 around the splendid temple to Poseidon,
 built with huge stones set deep within the earth. 340
 Here the people look after their black ships,
 busy with the gear—fixing ropes and sails
 and shaping tapered oars. The Phaeacians
 have no use for bows or quivers, but for masts, [270]
 boat oars, and well-trimmed ships, in which with joy
 they cross the grey salt sea. Their talk is crude,

BOOK SIX

and that I would avoid, in case someone
 insults me later—among the people
 there are really insolent men, and thus
 one of the nastier types might well say,
 if he bumped into us: 350

‘Who is that man
 following Nausicaa? A stranger—
 he’s tall and handsome! Where did she find him?
 No doubt he’ll be her husband. She’s brought here
 some shipwrecked vagrant, a man whose people
 live far away, for no one dwells near us,
 or else he’s some god come down from heaven, [280]
 answering those prayers she’s always making.
 She’ll have him as her husband all her days.
 It’s better that way, even if she went 360
 and found herself a husband far away,
 from some other place. She has no respect
 for those Phaeacians, her own countrymen—
 the many fine men here who’d marry her.’

That’s what some men would say, and their remarks
 would injure me. But I would do the same
 to some other girl who acted like that,
 who, while her father and her mother lived,
 against their wishes hung around with men
 before the day she married one in public. 370
 So, stranger, listen now to what I say—
 with all the speed you can get my father
 to arrange an escort for your trip home. [290]
 You’ll walk past a fine grove to Athena—
 it’s near the road, a clump of poplar trees.
 There’s a fountain, with meadows all around.
 My father has a fertile vineyard there,
 some land, too, within shouting distance
 of the town. Sit down there, and wait a while,
 as we move into the city and reach 380
 my father’s house. When we’ve had time enough
 to get back home, go into the city
 of the Phaeacians and inquire about
 my father’s house, great-hearted Alcinous.
 It’s easy to pick out—an infant child [300]
 could lead you to it. For Phaeacians homes
 are built in a style utterly unlike

BOOK SIX

the palace of heroic Alcinous.

Once past the courtyard and inside the house,
move through the great hall quickly till you reach 390

my mother, Arete, seated by the fire,
against a pillar, spinning purple yarn—
a marvellous sight. Servants sit behind her.

My father's chair is beside the pillar,
where, like a god, he sits and sips his wine.

Move on past him. Then with your arms embrace [310]
my mother's knees, if you desire to see
the joyful day of your return come soon,
even though your home is far away.

If her heart and mind are well-disposed to you, 400
then there is hope you'll see your friends and reach
your well-built house and your own native land."

Saying this, Nausicaa cracked the shining whip
struck the mules, and quickly left the flowing river.

The wagon moved briskly forward at a rapid pace.
Using her judgment with the whip, she drove ahead [320]
so Odysseus and her servants could keep up on foot.

Just at sunset, they reached the celebrated grove,
sacred to Athena. Lord Odysseus sat down there
and quickly made a prayer to great Zeus's daughter: 410

"Hear me, you child of aegis-bearing Zeus,
unwearied goddess, listen to me now,
for you did not respond to me back then,
when I was being beaten down at sea
and the great Earthshaker destroyed my raft.
Grant that I arrive at the Phaeacians
as a friend, someone worthy of their pity."

So he prayed there. And Pallas Athena heard him.

But she did not reveal herself to him directly—
she feared her father's brother, who was still angry, 420 [330]
and would keep raging against godlike Odysseus
until he finally reached Ithaca, his home.

BOOK SEVEN
ODYSSEUS AT THE COURT OF ALCINOUS IN PHAEACIA

[Nausicaa reaches the palace; Odysseus sets out for the city and meets Athena on the way, disguised as a young girl; she leads him to the palace; Odysseus admires Alcinous's palace and the nearby orchard; Odysseus enters the palace and talks to Arete, the queen; the Phaeacians offer Odysseus a meal; Odysseus converses with Arete and Alcinous, telling them of his voyage from Ogygia and his meeting with Nausicaa; Alcinous offers to help Odysseus get home; servants prepare a bed for him, and he goes to sleep out in the portico.]

Lord Odysseus, who had endured so much, prayed there,
while two strong mules took Nausicaa to her home.
After she had reached her father's splendid palace,
she halted at the outer gates, while her brothers,
godlike men, crowded round her. They unhitched the mules,
then brought the clothes inside. The girl went to her room.
There her old chambermaid kindled a fire for her—
Eurymedusa, an old woman from Apeire.
Curved ships had carried her from there some years ago,
when she'd been chosen as a prize for Alcinous,
because he ruled all the Phaeacians as their king
and people listened to him as if he were a god.
She had raised white-armed Nausicaa in the palace.
Now she lit the fire and set food out in the room.

10 [10]

Then Odysseus got up and set off for the town.
Athena took good care to veil him in thick mist,
so that no bold Phaeacian who ran into him
would cast verbal taunts and enquire about his name.
As he was about to enter the fine city,
gleaming-eyed Athena met him—she was disguised
as a girl carrying a pitcher. When she stopped
in front of him, noble Odysseus addressed her:

20 [20]

“My child, could you direct me to the home
of the man called Alcinous. He's the king
of people here, and I'm a foreigner,
visiting from a country far away.
I've suffered a great deal, and I don't know
any of the men who own this city
or the farmland.”

Gleaming-eyed Athena
then said in reply:

“Honoured stranger, 30
in that case I’ll show you the very house
you’ve just questioned me about. It’s nearby,
close to my father’s home. Go quietly, [30]
and I will lead the way. You must not look
at anyone or raise any questions.
The people here are not fond of strangers—
they do not extend a friendly welcome
to those from other lands, but put their trust
in their swift ships to carry them across
vast gulfs of the sea, something Poseidon 40
has permitted them, for their ships move fast,
as swift as birds in flight or as a thought.”

That said, Pallas Athena led off rapidly—
he followed closely in the goddess’s footsteps.
The Phaeacians, men celebrated for their ships,
did not see him in their midst as he made his way
into the city. Athena, fearful goddess, [40]
would not permit that. In her heart she cared for him,
so she cast around him a mysterious mist.

Odysseus was amazed when he saw the harbours, 50
well-tended ships, and the grounds for the assembly,
where those heroes gathered, alongside lofty walls,
topped with palisades—it was a marvellous sight.
When they reached the imposing palace of the king,
bright-eyed Athena was the first to speak:

“Honoured stranger,
here is the house you asked me to point out.
You’ll find Zeus-fostered kings in there feasting. [50]
But go inside, and do not be afraid.
In a man, boldness is always better
at getting good results, even in the case 60
where he’s a stranger from another land.
Inside the palace, you’ll first greet the queen.
Her name is Arete, born of the same line
as Alcinous, the king. Originally,
Nausithous was born to the Earthshaker,
Poseidon, and to Periboea,

BOOK SEVEN

loveliest of women, youngest daughter
to great-hearted Eurymedon, once king
of the rebellious Giants.¹ But he destroyed
his reckless people and was killed himself. 70 [60]
Poseidon then had sex with Periboea,
who bore him a son, courageous Nausithous,
who ruled Phaeacians and who had two sons,
Rhexenor and Alcinous. Rhexenor,
a married man but with no sons, was killed
by Apollo's silver bow in his own home.
He left an only daughter, Arete.
Alcinous made her his wife and honoured her
beyond all other women on this earth,
all the wives who now govern their own homes 80
under the direction of their husbands.
That's how much she is honoured from the heart
by her dear children, by Alcinous himself, [70]
and by the people, too, who look on her
as if she were a goddess, when they greet her
walking through the city. She does not lack
a fine intelligence, and for women
to whom she's well disposed she can resolve
all disputes between them and their husbands.
So if you win her favour, there is hope 90
you'll see your friends and make that journey back
to your own high-roofed home and native land."

Bright-eyed Athena finished. Then she went away,
across the restless sea, leaving lovely Scheria.
She came to Marathon and the streets of Athens [80]
and entered the well-built home of Erechtheus.²

Odysseus moved towards Alcinous' splendid home.
He stood there, his heart thinking over many things,
before he came up to the threshold made of bronze.
Above the high-vaulted home of brave Alcinous 100
here was a radiance, as if from sun or moon.
Bronze walls extended out well beyond the threshold
in various directions to the inner rooms.

¹The Giants were a race of powerful fighters, born from the blood of the primordial god Uranus, which fell to the ground when he was castrated by his son Cronos. They were prominent in a rebellion against Zeus and the Olympian gods.

²Erechtheus is a legendary early king of Athens.

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They had a blue enamel cornice. Golden doors
 blocked the way into the well-constructed palace.
 The bronze threshold had silver doorposts set inside
 and a silver lintel. The handles were of gold. [90]
 On both sides of the door stood gold and silver dogs,
 ageless, immortal creatures who would not grow old,
 created by Hephaestus' matchless artistry, 110
 to guard the palace of great-hearted Alcinous.¹
 On both sides within, seats were set against the wall,
 from the doorway right through to the inner room,
 with soft rugs covering them, elegantly woven
 women's handiwork. On these, Phaeacian leaders
 would sit to eat and drink from their abundant stores.
 Gold statues of young men stood on firm pedestals, [100]
 holding torches in their hands to give light at night
 for people feasting in the hall. And Alcinous
 had fifty female servants working in his home— 120
 some toiling at the millstone ground up yellow grain,
 some wove fabric, or sitting on stools, twisted yarn,
 hands fluttering like leaves on a tall poplar tree,
 while olive oil dripped down.² Just as Phaeacian men
 have more skill than others at sailing a fast ship
 across the sea, so their women are more adept [110]
 at working on the loom, for Athena gave them,
 more so than all the rest, a skill with handiwork
 and a keen intelligence. Beyond the courtyard,
 but close to the door, stands an enormous orchard, 130
 four measures of land, with a hedge on either side.³
 Huge, richly laden trees grow there—pomegranates,
 pears, and apple trees with glistening fruit, sweet figs,
 and fertile olive trees. And in this huge orchard
 no fruit deteriorates or dies in winter time
 or in the summer. It lasts all year long. West Wind,
 as he blows in, is always bringing some fruits to life
 and ripening others—pear growing above pear, [120]
 apple on apple, grapes in cluster after cluster,
 and fig after fig. Inside that fruitful orchard, 140
 Alcinous has a fertile vineyard planted, too.

¹Hephaestus, a divine son of Zeus, is the artisan god, celebrated for his craftsmanship, especially with metals.

²Olive oil was and in some places still is an important ingredient in some weaving processes, working as a mild bleaching agent and strengthening the fibres.

³The size of the orchard is not clear. The phrase "four measures" is often translated as "four acres."

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In part of it, a sunny patch of level ground,
grapes are drying in the sun. In another place
men are gathering up and treading other grapes.
In front the unripened grapes are shedding blossoms,
while others are changing to a purple colour.
Beside the final row of vines there are trim beds
with all varieties of plant growing all year round.
There are two springs inside—one lets its water flow
throughout the garden, and on the opposite side
the other runs below the threshold of the yard,
where people of the town come to get their water,
beside the high-roofed palace. These glorious things
were gifts from the gods to the home of Alcinous.
Lord Odysseus, who had endured so much, stood there
and gazed around. When his heart had marvelled at it,
he moved quickly past the threshold into the house.

150 [130]

There he found Phaeacian counsellors and leaders
making libations to honour keen-eyed Hermes,
killer of Argus. They poured him a final tribute
whenever they intended to retire to bed.
Long-suffering Odysseus, still enclosed in mist,
the thick covering poured around him by Athena,
went through the hall until he came to Arete
and king Alcinous. With both his arms Odysseus
embraced the knees of Arete—at that moment
the miraculous mist dissolved away from him.
All the Phaeacians in the palace were struck dumb,
as they gazed upon the man, overcome with wonder
at the sight. Odysseus then made this entreaty:

160

[140]

170

“Arete, daughter of godlike Rhexenor,
I’ve come to you and to your husband here,
to your knees, in supplication to you—
a man who has undergone much hardship—
and to those feasting here. May gods grant them
happiness in life. May they each pass on
riches in their homes to all their children,
and noble honours given by the people.
Please rouse yourself to help me travel home,
to get back quickly to my native soil.
For a long time I have been in great distress
and far away from friends.”

[150]

180

BOOK SEVEN

Odysseus finished.

Then he sat down by the fire, right on the ashes
inside the hearth. All the people there were silent.
No one said a word. Then, finally, an old man,
lord Echeneus, a Phaeacian elder statesman,
a skillful orator full of ancient wisdom,
with their common good in mind, spoke up and said:

“Alcinous, it is not at all appropriate
or to our credit that this stranger sits
on the ground at our hearth, in the ashes.
The people here are holding themselves back,
waiting for your word. Come, tell the stranger
to get up. Then invite the man to sit
on a silver-studded chair. Tell the heralds
to mix wine, so we may make an offering
to thunder-loving Zeus, who accompanies
all pious suppliants. And tell the steward
to provide this stranger with a dinner
from what she has in store.”

190 [160]

When he heard these words,
courageous, kingly Alcinous stretched out his hand,
reaching for Odysseus, that wise and crafty man,
raised him from the hearth, and invited him to sit
in a shining chair, after he had asked his son,
handsome Laodamas, the son he loved the most,
who sat beside him, to stand up and offer it.
An attendant carried in a fine gold pitcher,
then poured some water into a silver basin,
so that he could wash his hands. A polished table
was set up beside him, and then the housekeeper,
a well-respected female servant, brought in food,
set it in front of him, with many tempting treats
offered freely from her store. And so Odysseus,
that noble, long-suffering man, could eat and drink.
Then royal Alcinous called out to his herald:

200

[170]

210

“Pontonous, prepare wine in the mixing bowl,
then serve it to all people in the hall,
so we may pour libations out to Zeus,
who loves lightning, for he accompanies
all pious suppliants.”

[180]

BOOK SEVEN

Once Alcinous said this, 220
Pontonous prepared the honeyed wine and poured out
the first drops for libation into every cup
They made their offering and drank their fill of wine,
Then Alcinous addressed the gathering and said:

“You Phaeacians counsellors and leaders,
pay attention to me so I can say
the things the heart here in my chest commands.
Now that all of you have finished eating,
return back to your homes and get some rest.
In the morning we’ll summon an assembly 230
with more elders, entertain this stranger [190]
here in our home, and also sacrifice
choice offerings to the gods. After that,
we’ll think about how we can send him off,
so that this stranger, with us escorting him,
without further pain or effort, may reach
his native home, no matter how far distant.
Meanwhile he’ll not suffer harm or trouble,
not before he sets foot on his own land.
After that, he’ll undergo all those things 240
Destiny and the dreaded spinning Fates
spun in the thread for him when he was born,
when his mother gave him birth.¹ However,
if he’s a deathless one come down from heaven,
then gods are planning something different. [200]
So far they’ve always shown themselves to us
in their true form, when we offer up to them
a splendid sacrifice. They dine with us,
sitting in the very chairs we also use.
If someone travelling all by himself 250
meets them, they don’t hide their true identity,
because we are close relatives of theirs,
like Cyclopes and wild tribes of Giants.”²

Resourceful Odysseus then answered Alcinous:

¹The three Fates, who are sisters, are called Atropos, Lachesis, and Clotho. At a person’s birth they allot his or her share of pain and suffering and good. According to some accounts, Clotho sets the wool around the spindle, Lachesis spins the yarn, and Atropos cuts the thread when death comes. The Olympian gods cannot or will not alter the decisions of the Fates.

²The Cyclopes are divinely born creatures of ambiguous origin, who supported Zeus in his struggle against his father, Cronos; they are famous for having only one eye in their foreheads and for being gigantic, aggressive, and uncivilized.

“Alcinous, you should not concern yourself
 about what you’ve just said—for I’m not like
 the immortal gods who hold wide heaven,
 not in my form or shape. I’m like mortal men. [210]
 If, among human beings, you know some
 who bear a truly heavy weight of trouble, 260
 I might compare myself with them for grief.
 Indeed, I could recount a longer story—
 all those hardships I have had to suffer
 from the gods. But let me eat my dinner,
 though I’m in great distress. For there’s nothing
 more shameless than an unhappy stomach,
 which bids a man to think about its needs,
 even if he’s sad or many troubles
 sit heavy on his heart, the way my spirit
 is now full of sorrow, yet my belly 270
 is always telling me to eat and drink, [220]
 forgetting everything I’ve had to bear,
 and forcing me to gorge myself with food.
 But when Dawn appears, you can stir yourselves
 to set me in my miserable state
 back on my own soil, for all I’ve suffered.
 If I can see my goods again, my slaves,
 my large and high-roofed home, then let life end.”

Once Odysseus finished, they all approved his words,
 and, because he’d spoken well and to the point, 280
 agreed their guest should be escorted on his way.
 Then, after they had poured libations and had drunk
 to their heart’s content, each of them returned back home
 to get some rest.

In the hall, Odysseus was left [230]
 sitting by Arete and godlike Alcinous.
 Servants cleared away the remnants of the feast.
 White-armed Arete spoke first, for when she observed
 his cloak and tunic, she recognized his lovely clothes
 as ones made by her servant women and herself.
 So she spoke to him—her words had wings:

“Stranger, 290
 first of all, I’ll ask you this: Who are you?
 What people do you come from? And those clothes—

BOOK SEVEN

who gave them to you? Did you not tell us
you came here wandering across the sea?"

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

[240]

"O queen, it would be hard to tell the story
of my miseries from start to finish—
heavenly gods have given me so many.
But in answer to what you have asked me
I can tell you this. There is an island

300

called Ogygia far off in the sea.
On it lives a cunning, fearful goddess,
fair-haired Calypso, Atlas's daughter.
None of the gods associates with her,
nor any mortal men. One of the gods
led me in my misfortune to her hearth.
I was alone, for Zeus had struck my ship
with his bright lightning bolt and shattered it,
right in the middle of the wine-dark sea.
All my other fine companions perished,
but I clung to the keel of my curved ship
and drifted for nine days. The tenth black night,
gods brought me to Ogygia, the island
where that fair-haired, fearful goddess lives—
I mean Calypso. She received me kindly,
loved and fed me. She promised she'd make me
an immortal—ageless for eternity.

[250]

310

But she never won the heart inside my chest.
I stayed there seven years, the entire time,
always soaking the immortal clothing
Calypso gave me with my constant tears.
But, as the circling years kept moving past me,
the eighth year came. Then she commanded me,
with her encouragement, to sail back home—
either because she'd got some news from Zeus,
or else her mind had changed. She sent me off
on a well-lashed raft, and she provided
many things—food and sweet wine. She dressed me
in immortal clothing, and sent a wind,
a warm and gentle breeze. Seventeen days
I sailed across the sea. On the eighteenth
the shadowy mountains of your country
came in sight, and my fond heart was happy.
But I had no luck—I still had to bear

320

[260]

330

[270]

BOOK SEVEN

great torments, which the Shaker of the Earth,
Poseidon, sent at me. He stirred up winds
against me, blocked my route, and shook the sea
in an amazing way. The surging waves
did not allow the raft to carry me,
for all my heavy groaning, since that storm 340
smashed my raft to pieces. But I swam on,
cutting through the gulf, until wind and wave
pushed me ahead and left me on your shore.
If I'd tried to land there, the pounding surf
would have tossed me up onshore, throwing me
against huge rocks in a perilous place.
So I moved back again, kept on swimming, [280]
until I reached a river, which I thought
the best place I could land—it had no rocks,
and there was shelter from the wind, as well. 350
I staggered out and fell down on the beach,
gasping for breath. Immortal night arrived.
So I climbed up from that heaven-fed stream,
gathered leaves around me in the bushes,
and fell asleep. Some god poured over me
an endless sleep, so there among the leaves,
my fond exhausted heart slept through the night,
past daybreak and noon—not until the sun
was in decline did that sweet sleep release me.
Then I observed your daughter's servant girls 360 [290]
playing on the shore, and she was with them,
looking like a goddess. I pleaded with her,
and she revealed no lack of noble sense,
the sort you would not hope to come across
at a first encounter with one so young—
for youthful people act so thoughtlessly.
She gave me lots of food and gleaming wine,
bathed me in the river, and gave me clothes.
Though I'm in pain, I've told the truth in this."

Alcinous then answered him and said:

"Stranger, 370
my child was truly negligent this time.
She did not escort you with her servants [300]
here to our home, although it was to her
that you first made your plea."

BOOK SEVEN

Resourceful Odysseus
then said in answer to the king:

“My lord,
in this you must not criticize your daughter,
I beg you, for she is quite innocent.
She did indeed tell me to follow her
with her attendants, but I was unwilling,
afraid and shamed, in case, when you saw us, 380
you might be offended, for on this earth
groups of men are quick to lose their temper.”

Alcinous said in answer to Odysseus:

“Stranger,
the heart here in my chest is not like that.
It does not get incensed without a reason.
It’s better in all things to show restraint. [310]
By Father Zeus, Athena, and Apollo,
I wish, given the kind of man you are,
one who in his mind thinks just as I do,
you’d marry my child and become my son, 390
and then remain here. I’d give you a home
and wealth, as well, if you would chose to stay.
But no Phaeacian will detain you here
against your will. No. May that never be
the will of Father Zeus. I’ll set a time,
so you can know for certain when you’re leaving—
let’s say tomorrow. While you lie asleep,
they’ll carry you across the tranquil sea,
until you reach your native land and home,
or whatever place you wish, even though 400 [320]
it may take them far past Euboea.
Some of our people who saw that island
when they carried fair-haired Rhadamanthus
to visit Tityus, son of Gaea,
say it is the most remote of places.¹

¹Euboea is a large island off the coast of Attica, near Athens. The fact that the Phaeacians think of it as very remote suggests that they are located far off to the south or west, perhaps off the west coast of Greece. Rhadamanthus is a divine son of Zeus and Europa, so famous for his wise judgment that the gods made him part of an underworld trio (along with Aeacus and Minos) who judged the dead. Tityus, sometimes called a son of Zeus, is famous for his attempted rape of Leto, as a result of which he was killed by Leto’s children, Apollo and Artemis, and is eternally punished in the underworld (as we see later in the poem). Gaea (or Gaia) is the primordial deity representing Earth.

BOOK SEVEN

They went there and, without any effort,
finished the journey home in the same day.
So you, too, will discover for yourself
I have the finest ships and young men, too,
whose oar blades make the briny waters foam.”

410

Alcinous finished. Long-suffering lord Odysseus
was pleased and spoke out in prayer, saying:

“Father Zeus,
may Alcinous complete all he has said.
Then on this grain-fostering earth his fame
will never be extinguished, and I will reach
my native land once more.”

[330]

As they conversed like this,
white-armed Arete commanded her attendants
to set a bed outside, under the portico,
laying on top of it lovely purple blankets
with coverlets spread out on them, and finally,
over these, some woollen cloaks to keep him warm.
The servants left the chamber, torches in their hands.
Once they had hurried to arrange the well-made bed,
they came to call Odysseus, saying:

420

[340]

“Stranger,
come now and rest. Your bed has been prepared.”

When they said this, he welcomed thoughts of going to sleep.
So long-suffering lord Odysseus lay down there,
on the bed, beneath the echoing portico.
But Alcinous rested in an inner chamber
in the high-roofed home—his lady wife lay there, too,
stretched out beside him, sharing their marriage bed.

430

BOOK EIGHT
ODYSSEUS IS ENTERTAINED IN PHAEACIA

[Odysseus goes to the Phaeacian assembly; Alcinous outlines a proposal to assist Odysseus; men prepare a boat for Odysseus; Demodocus sings of an old quarrel between Odysseus and Achilles; Odysseus weeps at the banquet; the young men invite Odysseus to an athletic competition, but he declines; Euryalus insults Odysseus; Odysseus responds; Athena encourages him; Alcinous arranges a display of Phaeacian dancing; Demodocus sings of how Hephaestus caught Ares and Aphrodite in an affair; Alcinous proposes gifts for Odysseus; Euryalus apologizes; Arete gives Odysseus a gift; Nausicaa and Odysseus exchange farewells; Demodocus sings the story of the wooden horse at Troy; Odysseus weeps; Alcinous asks him to reveal his identity.]

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
royal and mighty Alcinous rose from his bed,
and divinely born Odysseus, sacker of cities,
got up, too. Alcinous, a powerful king, led them
to the place Phaeacians organized assemblies,
ground laid out for them beside the ships. They moved there
and then sat down on polished stones arranged in rows.
Pallas Athena moved quickly through the city,
looking like one of wise Alcinous's heralds,
planning a voyage home for brave Odysseus.
To every noble she approached she spoke these words:

10

[10]

“Come, Phaeacian counsellor and leader,
to the assembly to inform yourself
about the stranger who has just arrived
at the palace of our wise Alcinous.
He's been wandering the sea, but in form
he looks like one of the immortal gods.”

With such words she aroused the spirit in each man,
and so the seats in the assembly were soon full,
as people gathered there. Many of those present
were amazed at the sight of Laertes's son—
Athena had poured an amazing poise on him
across his shoulders and his head and made him look
taller and more powerful, so the Phaeacians
would treat him properly and he would win from them
respect and awe—and prevail in competition,
the numerous rival contests where Phaeacians
would be challenging lord Odysseus. When the men

20

[20]

BOOK EIGHT

had gathered together on their assembly grounds,
Alcinous spoke to them and said:

“Listen to me, 30
you Phaeacian counsellors and leaders.
I’ll tell you what the heart in my chest says.
This stranger here, a man I do not know,
a wanderer, has travelled to my house,
from people in the east or from the west.
He’s asking to be sent away back home [30]
and wishes us to grant him his request.
So let us act as we have done before
and assist him with his journey. No man
arriving at my palace stays there long 40
grieving because he cannot get back home.
Let’s drag a black ship down into the sea
for her first voyage. From the citizens
choose fifty-two young men who in the past
have shown they are the best. Once they’ve all lashed
the oars firmly in place, they’ll come ashore,
go to my house, and quickly have a meal.
I will provide enough for everyone.
That’s what I’m ordering for our young men. [40]
But all you other sceptre-bearing kings 50
should come to my fine home, so in those halls
we can make the stranger welcome. No man
should deny me this. And then summon there
the noble minstrel Demodocus, the man
who has received from god the gift of song
above all others. He can entertain us
with any song his heart prompts him to sing.”

Alcinous spoke and led them out. The sceptred kings
came after him. Meanwhile, a herald went to find
the godlike singer. Fifty-two hand-picked young men 60
went off, as Alcinous had ordered, to the shore
beside the restless sea. Once they reached their boat, [50]
they dragged the black ship out to deeper water,
set the mast and sails in place inside the vessel,
lashed the rowing oars onto their leather pivots,
then hoisted the white sail. That done, they moored the ship
well out to sea and then returned to the great home
of their wise king. Hallways, corridors, and courtyards
were full of people gathering—a massive crowd,

BOOK EIGHT

young and old. On their behalf Alcinous slaughtered 70
 eight white-tusked boars, two shambling oxen, and twelve sheep. [60]
 These carcasses they skinned and dressed and then prepared
 a splendid banquet. Meanwhile the herald entered
 with the loyal singer, a man loved by the Muse
 above all others—she gave him both bad and good,
 for she destroyed his eyes but then bestowed on him
 the gift of pleasing song. The herald, Pontonous,
 brought in a silver-studded chair where he could sit.
 He set it against a lofty pillar in their midst,
 hung the clear-toned lyre on a peg above his head, 80
 and then explained to him how his hands could reach it.
 The herald placed a lovely table at his side,
 with a basket of food and cup of wine to drink,
 when his spirit felt the urge. Then all those present [70]
 reached for the splendid dinner set in front of them.
 After they enjoyed their heart's fill of food and drink,
 the minstrel Demodocus, inspired by the Muse,
 sang about the glorious deeds of warriors,
 that story whose fame had climbed to spacious heaven,
 about Odysseus and Achilles, son of Peleus, 90
 when, at a lavish feast in honour of the gods,
 they fought each other in ferocious argument.¹
 Still, in his heart lord Agamemnon, king of men,
 had been glad to see the finest of Achaeans
 in that fight, for he had heard it would take place,
 when he had crossed the threshold in sacred Pytho [80]
 to consult Phoebus Apollo in his oracle
 and Apollo had answered him with this reply:
 that from this moment on, disasters would begin
 for Trojans and Danaans, as great Zeus had willed. 100
 This was the song the celebrated minstrel sang.

Odysseus's strong hands clutched his long purple cloak,
 pulled it above his head, and hid his handsome face.
 He felt ashamed to let Phaeacians look at him
 with tears streaming from his eyes. So every time
 the godlike minstrel paused in his song, Odysseus
 would wipe away the tears, take his two-handled cup,
 and pour out a libation to the gods. But then,

¹These lines refer to an argument between Odysseus and Achilles about the best tactics to use against the Trojans. That Demodocus sings about the Trojan War reinforces the traditional claim that this image of the blind minstrel is a self-portrait of Homer.

BOOK EIGHT

when Demodocus started up again, urged to sing
by Phaeacian noblemen enjoying his song,
Odysseus would cover up his head once more and groan.
He concealed the tears he shed from all those present,
except Alcinous, the only one who noticed,
since he sat beside him and heard his heavy sighs.
So Alcinous quickly spoke to the Phaeacians,
men who love the sea:

110 [90]

“Listen to me,
you counsellors and leaders of Phaeacians.
Now we have refreshed our spirit. We’ve shared
this tempting food. Music has accompanied
our splendid banquet. So now let us go
and test ourselves in various events.
Then this stranger, after he gets back home,
can inform his friends how much we surpass
all other men at wrestling and boxing,
at jumping and at running.”

120 [100]

Once he said this,
Alcinous led them out, and they all followed him.
The herald hung the clear-toned lyre up on the peg,
took Demodocus by the hand, and led him out,
taking him along the very path other men,
Phaeacia’s best, had walked along to watch the games.
So they made their way to the large assembly ground.
A huge crowd numbering thousands walked behind them.
Many excellent young men came forward to compete—
Acroneus, Ocyalus, and Elatreus,
then Nauteus, Prymneus, and Anchialus,
Eretmeus, as well, along with Ponteus,
Proreus, Thoön, and Anabesineus,
with Amphialus, a son of Polyneus,
the son of Tecton, along with Euryalus,
a match for man-destroying Ares, god of war,
a son of Naubolus. His handsome looks and shape
made him, after Laodamas, who had no equal,
the finest of Phaeacians. Three sons of Alcinous
stepped out, as well—Halius and Laodomas,
and godlike Clytoneus. In the first contest
these men competed in the foot race on a course
laid out for them with markers. They all sprinted off,
moving quickly. A cloud of dust rose from the ground.

130

[110]

140

[120]

BOOK EIGHT

Clytoneus was by far the finest runner,
so he raced on ahead and got back to the crowd, 150
leaving others runners well behind, about as far
as the length of a furrow made by a team of mules
in ploughing fallow land.¹ Then the competitors
tested their skill in the painful sport of wrestling,
and of all the noble princes Euryalus
proved himself the best, and in the leaping contest
noble Amphialus emerged victorious.
Elatreus triumphed in the discus throw,
as did Laodamas, fine son of Alcinous, [130]
in the boxing match. Once they'd enjoyed these contests, 160
Laodamas, son of Alcinous, said to them:

“Come, my friends, why don't we ask the stranger
whether there's some contest he knows about
and understands. From the way his body looks
he's no weakling—not in his thighs and calves,
his thick neck and those two strong upper arms—
lots of power there, no lack of youthful strength.
He is just worn out from constant hardship.
The sea is harsh at breaking a man down,
no matter what his strength. From what I know, 170
there's nothing worse than that.”

Then Euryalus [140]
answered him and said:

“Laodamas,
what you've just said is really sensible.
So now go on your own and challenge him.
And say it so that all of us can hear.”

When Alcinous's fine son heard these words, he moved
so he was standing in the middle of the crowd,
and spoke out to Odysseus:

“Honoured stranger,
come and test yourself in competition,
if there's some sport in which you have great skill. 180
It seems to me you know how to compete,

¹Butcher and Lang suggest that this rather odd measurement may mean the length of a furrow a pair of mules can plough before having to rest.

BOOK EIGHT

since there's no greater glory for a man
than what he wins with his own hands and feet.
So come, make the attempt. All that sorrow—
cast it from your heart. Your journey homeward
will no longer be postponed. The ship is launched, [150]
and your escort is eager to embark."

Then shrewd Odysseus answered him:

"Laodamas,
why do you provoke me with this challenge?
My heart's preoccupied with troubles now, 190
not with competition. Up to this point,
I have suffered and struggled through so much,
and now I sit with you in this assembly
yearning to get home and pleading my case
in front of all the people and your king."

Euryalus then replied by taunting Odysseus
right to his face:

"No, stranger. I don't see you
as someone with much skill in competition—
not a real man, the sort one often meets— [160]
more like a sailor trading back and forth
in a ship with many oars, a captain 200
in charge of merchant sailors, whose concern
is for his freight—he keeps a greedy eye
on cargo and his profit. You don't seem
to be an athlete."

With a scowl, Odysseus,
that resourceful man, then answered Euryalus:

"Stranger, what you've just said is not so wise,
like a man whose foolishness is blinding him.
How true it is the gods do not present
their lovely gifts to all men equally, 210
not beauty, shape, or skill in speaking out.
One man's appearance may not be attractive,
but a god will crown his words with beauty, [170]
so men rejoice to look on him—he speaks
with confidence and yet sweet modesty,
and thus excels among those in assembly,

BOOK EIGHT

and when he is outside, going through town,
they look at him as if he were a god.
And yet another man can be so beautiful,
he looks like an immortal, but his words 220
are empty of all grace. That's how you are.
Your appearance is extremely handsome—
a god could hardly make that any finer—
but your mind is empty. Your boorish speech
has stirred the spirit in my chest. For I
am not without skill in competition,
not the way you chat about. No. In fact, [180]
when I relied upon my youth and strength,
I think I ranked among the very best.
Now I'm hurt and grieving, I'm holding back, 230
because I've gone through so much misery
in dealing with men's wars and painful waves.
But still, though I have undergone so much,
I'll test myself in these contests of yours.
For what you've said is gnawing at my heart—
that insulting speech you made provokes me."

Odysseus finished and then, still wrapped in his cloak,
picked up a hefty discus, bigger than the others,
much heavier than the ones used by Phaeacians
when they competed with each other. With a whirl, 240
he sent the discus flying from his powerful hand.
The stone, as it sped in flight, made a humming sound, [190]
and the long-oared Phaeacians, men who love their ships,
ducked down, close to the ground, below its arcing path.
It sailed well beyond the marks of all contestants,
speeding easily from his hand, and Athena,
in the likeness of a man, noted where it fell.
She called out to Odysseus and said:

"Stranger,
a blind man could find your mark by groping.
It's far out in front, not with the others. 250
So at least in this throwing competition
you can be confident. No Phaeacian
will get it this far or throw it further."

Athena spoke, and resourceful lord Odysseus
was happy, glad to see someone supporting him [200]

in competition. So with a more cheerful voice
he said to the Phaeacians:

“Equal that, youngsters.
I’ll quickly send another after it,
which will go as far, I think, even further.
As for other contests, let any man 260
whose heart and spirit urge him, come up here,
and test himself. You’ve made me so worked up.
In boxing, wrestling, running—I don’t care.
Any one at all from you Phaeacians,
except Laodamas, for he’s my host.
And what man fights against another man
who shows him hospitality? Anyone [210]
who challenges the host who welcomes him
in a foreign land is a worthless fool,
for he is cancelling his own good luck. 270
But from the others I’ll not back away,
nor will I take them lightly. No. I wish
to see their skill and test them man to man.
In all the competitions men engage in,
I am no weakling. I well understand
how to use a well-polished bow with skill.
I was the first to shoot an arrow off
and, in a multitude of enemies,
to kill a man, even as companions
standing close by me were still taking aim. 280
In that Trojan land, when Achaeans shot,
the only one who beat me with the bow
was Philoctetes.¹ But of all the rest [220]
I claim I’m far the best—of mortal men,
I mean, those now on earth who feed on bread.
For I won’t seek to make myself a match
for men of earlier times—for Hercules,
or Eurytus of Oechalia, men
who competed with the gods in archery.
That’s why great Eurytus was killed so young 290
and did not reach old age in his own home.
Apollo, in his anger, slaughtered him,

¹Philoctetes was a famous Achaean warrior king, who was left for years alone on the island of Lemnos by the allied forces as they moved toward Troy, because a wound in his foot (from a snake bite) produced an insupportable smell. His bow was essential for the capture of Troy, and so Odysseus and Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles, returned to Lemnos to bring it back.

BOOK EIGHT

for Eurytus had challenged the archer god
in a contest with their bows. With my spear,
I throw further than any other man
can shoot an arrow. But in the foot race [230]
I'm afraid that one of the Phaeacians
may outrun me, for in those many waves
I was badly beaten down—on board ship
I did not have a large supply of food, 300
and so my legs are weak."

Odysseus finished.
All the people there were silent. No one spoke.
Then Alcinous responded to Odysseus, saying:

"Stranger, since you have not been ungracious
in your speech to us and wish to demonstrate
the merit you possess, in your anger
that this man came up and insulted you
in these games of ours, mocking your excellence
in a manner no one would ever do,
if in his heart he fully understood 310 [240]
how to speak correctly, come, hear me now,
so you can tell this to some other hero,
when you're back in your own home and feasting
with your wife and children there beside you,
remembering our qualities, the skills
Zeus gave us when our ancestors were here,
which still endure. We have no special gift
in boxing fights or wrestling, but we run fast.
We're the finest sailors, love feasts, the lyre,
dancing, new clothes, warm baths, and going to bed. 320
So come, all those of you among Phaeacians [250]
who dance the best, perform for us, and then
our guest, when he gets back, can tell his friends

just how much we surpass all other men
in seamanship, speed on foot, dance, and song.
Let a man go and get that sweet-toned lyre
for Demodocus—it's somewhere in the hall."

Godlike Alcinous finished. The herald got up
to fetch the hollow lyre from the royal palace.
Nine officials chosen from among the people, 330
men who organized each detail of their meetings,

BOOK EIGHT

stood up, smoothed off a dancing space, and then marked out
a fair and spacious circle. The herald came up, [260]
carrying the clear-toned lyre for Demodocus,
who then moved to the centre. Around the singer
stood boys in the first bloom of youth, skillful dancers,
whose feet then struck the consecrated dancing ground.
In his heart, Odysseus was amazed. He marvelled
how rapidly those young boys could move their dancing feet.

The minstrel struck the opening chords to his sweet song— 340
how war god Ares loved the fair-crowned Aphrodite,
how in Hephaestus's own home they first had sex
in secret, and how Ares gave her many gifts,
while he disgraced the marriage bed of lord Hephaestus.¹
But sun god Helios observed them making love [270]
and came at once to tell Hephaestus. When he heard.
the unwelcome news, the lame god went to his forge,
turning over deep in his heart a devious scheme.
He set up his enormous anvil on its block,
and forged a net no one could ever break or loosen, 350
so they would have to stay immobile where they were.
When, in his rage, he had made that snare for Ares,
he went into the room which housed his marriage bed,
anchored the metal netting around the bed posts,
and then hung loops of it from roof beams high above,
as fine as spiders' webs, impossible to see, [280]
even for a blessed god—that's how skillfully
he made that net. Once he had set the snare in place
around the bed, he announced a trip to Lemnos,
that well-built citadel, his favourite place by far 360
of all the lands on earth. Ares of the Golden Reins,
who maintained a constant lookout, saw Hephaestus,
the celebrated master artisan, leave home,
and went running over to Hephaestus's house,
eager to have sex with fair-crowned Aphrodite.
She had just left the presence of her father Zeus,
mighty son of Cronos, and was sitting down.

¹Aphrodite, the goddess of sexual love and beauty, is the wife of Hephaestus, the divine master craftsman, the crippled god of the forge (hence, he is often called the lame god). This famous story of the sexual affair between Ares, god of war, and Aphrodite has inspired some famous art works. It also provides the most famous example of "Homeric laughter," boisterously loud continuous group laughter at the plight of someone else, the reaction of the Olympian gods at the end of the song. This story has also prompted a good deal of negative criticism, even in ancient times, about the lack of morality among the Olympian deities.

BOOK EIGHT

Ares charged inside the house, grabbed her by the hand, [290]
then spoke, saying these words to her:

 "Come, my dear,
let's go to bed and make love together. 370
Hephaestus is not home. No doubt he's gone
to visit Lemnos and the Sintians,
those men who speak like such barbarians."¹

Ares spoke. To Aphrodite having sex with him
seemed quite delightful. So the two raced off to bed
and lay down together. But then the crafty net
made by Hephaestus's great skill fell down around them,
so they could not move their limbs or shift their bodies.
After a while, they realized they could not get out.
Then the famous crippled god came back to them— 380 [300]
turning round before he reached the land of Lemnos.
Helios had stayed on watch and gave him a report.
With a grieving heart, Hephaestus went into his home
and stood inside the doorway, gripped by cruel rage.
He made a dreadful cry, calling to all the gods:

 "Father Zeus and you other sacred gods
who live forever, come here, so you can see
something disgusting and ridiculous—
Aphrodite, Zeus's daughter, scorns me
and lusts after Ares, the destroyer, 390
because he's beautiful, with healthy limbs, [310]
while I was born deformed. I'm not to blame.
My parents are! I wish they'd never had me!
See how these two have gone to my own bed
and are lying there, having sex together,
while I look on in pain. But I don't think
they wish to lie like this for very long,
no matter how much they may be in love.
They'll both soon lose the urge to stay in bed.
But this binding snare will confine them here, 400
until her father gives back all those presents,

¹Sintians are a non-Greek-speaking people living on Lemnos who had helped Hephaestus when Zeus threw him out of heaven.

BOOK EIGHT

courting gifts I gave him for that shameless bitch—
a lovely daughter but a sex-crazed wife.”¹ [320]

Hephaestus finished. Gods gathered at the bronze-floored house.
Earthshaker Poseidon came, and lord Hermes, too,
the god of luck, as well as archer god Apollo.
But female goddesses were all far too ashamed
and stayed at home. So the gods, givers of good things,
stood in the doorway, looking at the artful work
of ingenious Hephaestus. They began to chortle— 410
and an irrepressible laughter then pealed out
among the blessed gods. Glancing at his neighbour,
one of them would say:

“Nasty deeds don’t pay.
The slow one overtakes the swift—just as
Hephaestus, slow as he is, has caught Ares, [330]
although of all the gods who hold Olympus
he’s the fastest one there is. Yes, he’s lame,
but he’s a crafty one. So Ares now
must pay a fine for his adultery.”

That is how the gods then talked to one another. 420
But lord Apollo, son of Zeus, questioned Hermes:

“Hermes, son of Zeus, you messenger
and giver of good things, how would you like
to lie in bed by golden Aphrodite,
even though a strong net tied you down?”

The messenger god, killer of Argus, then said
in his reply:

“Far-shooting lord Apollo,
I wish there were three times as many nets, [340]
impossible to break, and all you gods
were looking on, if I could like down there, 430
alongside golden Aphrodite.”

¹Aphrodite, Ares, and Hephaestus are all children of Zeus. Aphrodite’s mother is, in some accounts, the goddess Dione; in other accounts she emerged from the foam of the sea. The mother of Ares and Hephaestus is Hera, Zeus’s wife and sister.

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At Hermes's words,
laughter arose from the immortal deities.
But Poseidon did not laugh. He kept requesting
Hephaestus, the celebrated master artisan,
to set Ares free. When he talked to Hephaestus,
his words had wings:

“Set Ares loose.
I promise he will pay you everything,
as you are asking, all he truly owes,
in the presence of immortal gods.”

The famous lame god then replied:

“Lord Poseidon, 440
Shaker of the Earth, do not ask me this. [350]
It's a risky thing to accept a pledge
made for a nasty rogue. What if Ares
escapes his chains, avoids the debt, and leaves—
how then among all these immortal gods
do I hold you in chains?”

Earthshaker Poseidon
then answered him and said:

“Hephaestus,
if indeed Ares does not discharge his debt
and runs away, I'll pay you in person.”

Then the celebrated crippled god replied: 450

“It would be inappropriate for me
to refuse to take your word.”

After saying this,
powerful Hephaestus then untied the netting. [360]
Both gods, one they had been released from their strong chains,
jumped up immediately—Ares went off to Thrace,
and laughter-loving Aphrodite left for Paphos,
in Cyprus, for her sanctuary, her sacred altar.
Once there, the Graces bathed and then anointed her
with heavenly oil, the sort that gleams upon the gods,
who live forever. Next, they took some gorgeous clothes 460
and dressed her—the sight was marvellous to behold.

BOOK EIGHT

That was the song the celebrated minstrel sang.
As he listened, Odysseus felt joy in his heart—
long-oared Phaeacians, famous sailors, felt it, too.

Alcinous then asked Laodamas and Halius [370]
to dance alone. No man could match their dancing skill.
First, the two men picked up a lovely purple ball,
which creative Polybus had made for them.
Then, leaning back, one of the two would throw it high,
towards the shadowy clouds, and then the other one, 470
before his feet touched ground, would catch it easily.
Once they had shown their skill in tossing it straight up,
they threw it back and forth, as they kept dancing
on the life-sustaining earth, while many younger men
stood at the edge of the arena, beating time.
The percussive rhythms made a powerful sound. [380]

Then lord Odysseus spoke:

“Mighty Alcinous,
most distinguished among all men, you claimed
your dancers were the best, and now, indeed,
what you said is true. When I gaze at them, 480
I’m lost in wonder.”

At Odysseus’s words,
powerful king Alcinous felt a great delight,
and spoke at once to his Phaeacians, master sailors.

“Leaders and counsellors of the Phaeacians,
listen—this stranger seems to me a man
with an uncommon wisdom. So come now,
let’s give him gifts of friendship, as is right.
Twelve honourable kings are rulers here [390]
and govern in this land, and I myself
am the thirteenth king. Let each one of you 490
bring a fresh cloak and tunic, newly washed,
and a talent of pure gold. All of this
we should put together very quickly,
so that this stranger has his gifts in hand
and goes to dinner with a joyful heart.
Euryalus must apologize in person

BOOK EIGHT

to the stranger, verbally and with a gift,
for what he said is not acceptable.”

Alcinous spoke. All those present agreed with him
and said it should be done, and every one of them
sent an attendant out to bring the presents back. 500
Euryalus then addressed the king and said: [400]

“Lord Alcinous, most renowned among all men,
to this stranger I shall apologize,
as you instructed me. And I’ll give him
a sword completely made of hammered bronze,
with a silver hilt, and a scabbard, too,
of fresh-carved ivory which fits around it,
a gift worth a great deal, and just for him.”

With these words he set into Odysseus’s hands 510
the silver-studded sword and then addressed him—
his words had wings:

“Greetings, honoured stranger.
If any harsh word has been spoken here,
let storm winds snatch it, carry it away.
As for you, may gods grant you see your wife
and reach your native land. You’ve suffered much, [410]
for such a long time distant from your friends.”

Then Odysseus, that resourceful man, replied and said:

“And you, my friend, best wishes to you, too.
May gods give you joyful prosperity. 520
And may you never find you miss this sword
which you are giving me. These words of yours
have made amends to me.”

Odysseus spoke
and slung the silver-studded sword around his shoulders.
As the sun went down, the splendid gifts were carried in
and taken to Alcinous’ home by worthy heralds.
The sons of noble Alcinous took these lovely things [420]
and set the presents down before their honoured mother.
With powerful king Alcinous escorting them,
they came in the hall, took their seats on upraised thrones, 530
and mighty Alcinous addressed Arete, saying:

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“My lady, have a precious trunk brought here,
the best there is. You yourself should place in it
a tunic and a freshly laundered cloak.
Then heat a cauldron for him on the fire,
warm up some water, so that he can bathe,
and, after he’s seen safely stowed away
all the splendid gifts Phaeacian nobles
have brought in here, he can enjoy the feast,
while listening to the minstrel’s singing.
And I will give him this fine cup of mine—
it’s made of gold—for all his days to come
he will think of me, as he pours libations
in his halls to great Zeus and other gods.”

540

[430]

Alcinous finished. Arete told her servants
to set a cauldron full of water on the fire
as quickly as they could. They placed it on the fire,
poured water into it, and stacked wood underneath.
So hot flames soon licked the belly of the cauldron,
heating up the water. Meanwhile to please her guest,
from her inner rooms Arete had carried out
a beautiful chest, which she filled with precious gifts,
the clothing and the gold offered by Phaeacians.
She herself added a cloak and lovely tunic.
Then she addressed Odysseus—her words had wings:

550

[440]

“You must deal with the lid on this yourself,
and tie it down securely with a knot,
so that no one robs you on your journey,
perhaps when you are lost in a sweet sleep
sometime later, as your black ship sails on.”

560

Long-suffering lord Odysseus heard what she advised.
He quickly shut the lid and bound it with a knot,
a tricky one which he had learned from noble Circe.
Then the female servant invited him to step
into the bathing tub. His heart was filled with joy
to see hot water—he’d not had such welcome care
since he had left the home of fair-haired Calypso.
Till then he had always been treated like a god.
The servant women washed him, rubbed him down with oil,
and dressed him in new clothes, a fine cloak and tunic.
He left his bath and went to drink wine with the men.

[450]

570

BOOK EIGHT

Nausicaa, whose beauty was a gift from god,
standing inside the doorway of that well-built hall,
looked at Odysseus and felt a sense of wonder.
She spoke winged words to him:

[460]

“Farewell, stranger.
Once you have returned to your own country,
I hope you will remember me sometimes,
since you owe your life to me.”

Then Odysseus,
that resourceful man, replied to her and said:

“Nausicaa, daughter of great Alcinous,
may Hera’s loud-thundering husband, Zeus,
grant that I see the day of my return
when I get home. There I will pray to you
all my days, as to a god. For you, girl,
you gave me my life.”

580

Odysseus finished speaking.
Then he sat down on a chair beside king Alcinous.
They were already serving food and mixing wine.
A herald approached, leading the faithful singer,
Demodocus, whom the people held in honour,
and he sat down in the middle of the banquet,
leaning his chair against a towering pillar.
Then shrewd Odysseus, while slicing slabs of meat
from the large amount remaining, took some pieces
from the back cut of a white-tusked boar, with lots of fat
on either side, and called out to the herald:

[470]

590

“Herald, carry this portion of our food
to Demodocus, so that he can eat.
Though in grief, I’ll give him a warm welcome,
for from all people living on the earth
singers win honour and respect. The Muse
has taught them song and cherishes their tribe.”

600 [480]

Once Odysseus spoke, the herald took the serving
and handed it to distinguished Demodocus,
who accepted the food with a delighted heart.
Phaeacian hands reached out to take the tasty food

prepared and set in place in front of each of them.
When they had satisfied their hearts with food and drink,
quick-witted Odysseus called out to the singer:

“Demodocus, to you I give high praise,
more so than to all other mortal men, 610
whether it was that child of Zeus, the Muse,
who taught you, or Apollo. For you sing
so well and with such true expressiveness
about the destiny of the Achaeans,
everything they did and suffered, the work [490]
they had to do—as if you yourself were there
or heard the story from a man who was.
Come, change the subject now, and sing about
the building of that wooden horse, the one
Epeius made with guidance from Athena. 620
Lord Odysseus then, with his trickery,
had it brought to the city, filled with men,
those who ransacked Troy. If, at my request,
you will sing the details of this story,
I’ll tell all men how, of his own free will,
god gives poetic power to your song.”

Odysseus spoke. The minstrel, inspired by the god,
began to sing to them, taking up the story [500]
at the point where Argives, having burned their huts
and gone on board their well-oared ships, were sailing off, 630
while those warriors led by glorious Odysseus
were at Troy’s assembly ground, hidden in the horse.¹
Trojans had hauled the wooden horse all by themselves
inside their citadel. It stood there, while Trojans
sat and talked around it, confused what they should do.
There were three quite different options people favoured—
to split the hollow wood apart with pitiless bronze,
or drag it to the heights and throw it from the rocks,
or let it stay there as an offering to the gods,
something to assuage their anger. And that, indeed, 640 [510]
is what they finally did, for it was their fate
to be wiped out once they had within their city walls

¹This is the earliest surviving account of the famous story of the wooden horse. The deception practised on the Trojans began with the Achaean army pretending it had abandoned the war. Hence, the army burned its camp, got onboard ship, and sailed away, apparently for home, but, in reality, hiding behind a nearby island. They left the horse outside Troy.

BOOK EIGHT

a gigantic wooden horse in which lay hidden
all the finest of the Argives, bringing into Troy
death and devastation. Then Demodocus sang
how Achaea's sons left their hollow hiding place,
poured from the horse, and overpowered the city.
He sang about the various ways those warriors
laid waste that lofty town and how Odysseus,
like Ares, god of war, and noble Menelaus 650
went to the home of Deïphobus, where, he said,
Odysseus battled in the most horrendous fight,
from which he then emerged at last victorious,
thanks to assistance from Athena's mighty heart. [520]
This was the song the celebrated minstrel sang.

Odysseus was moved to weep—underneath his eyes
his face grew wet with tears. Just as a woman cries,
when she prostrates herself on her beloved husband
who has just been killed in front of his own city
and his people, trying to defend his children 660
and the citizens from the day they meet their doom—
as he lies dying, she sees him gasping his last breath,
and holds him in her arms, screaming her cries of grief,
while at her back her enemies keep beating her,
spears raining down across her spine and shoulders,
then lead her away, cheeks ravaged by her sorrow, [530]
into a life of bondage, misery, and pain—
that's how Odysseus then let tears of pity fall
down from his eyes. But he kept those tears well hidden
from the Phaeacians, except for Alcinous, who, 670
as he sat there beside him, was the only one
who noticed how he wept and heard his heavy sighs.
So he spoke out at once, addressing his Phaeacians,
lovers of the sea:

“Listen to me,
you Phaeacian counsellors and leaders.
Let Demodocus now cease from playing
his clear-toned lyre, for the song he's singing
does not please all his listeners alike.
Since our godlike minstrel was first moved to sing,
as we were dining, our guest has been in pain, 680 [540]
his mournful sighs have never stopped. His heart,
I think, must surely overflow with grief.
Let our singer end his song, so all of us,

BOOK EIGHT

both hosts and guest, can enjoy our feasting.
 Things will be much better. We've done all this—
 the farewell dinner and the friendship gifts,
 offered up with love—to honour our guest.
 In any man with some intelligence,
 a stranger coming as a suppliant
 evokes the same delight a brother does. 690
 And you, our guest-friend, should no longer hide
 behind those cunning thoughts of yours and skirt
 the things I ask. It's better to be frank.
 Tell me your name, what they call you at home— [550]
 your mother, your father, and the others,
 those in the town and in the countryside.
 There's no one in the world, mean or noble,
 who goes without a name once he's been born.
 Parents give one at birth to each of us.
 Tell me of your country and your people, 700
 your city, too, so ships can take you there,
 using what they know to chart their passage.
 Phaeacians have no pilots, no steering oar,
 like other boats, for their ships on their own
 can read men's hearts and thoughts—they understand
 all men's cities, their rich estates, as well, [560]
 and quickly skim across wide tracts of sea,
 concealed in mist and clouds, without a fear
 of shipwrecks or disaster. Still, my father,
 lord Nausithous, once told me this story— 710
 he used to say we made Poseidon angry
 because we carried everyone in safety.
 He claimed that one day, as a well-built ship
 with a Phaeacian crew was sailing back
 from such a trip, over the misty sea,
 Poseidon would destroy it and then place
 a massive ring of mountains round our city.
 That's what the old man said. It's up to god [570]
 not to do that or to make it happen,
 whatever he finds pleasing to his heart. 720
 So now come, tell me this, and speak the truth—
 Where have you travelled in your wanderings?
 What other countries have you visited?
 Tell me of people and their well-built towns,
 whether they are cruel, unjust, and wild,
 or welcome strangers and fear god in their hearts.
 Tell us why you weep, your heart full of pain,

BOOK EIGHT

to hear the fate of Argives and Danaans,
and of Troy. The gods made these things happen.
They spun out that destructive thread for men,
to weave a song for those as yet unborn.
Was someone in your family killed at Troy—
a good and loyal man, a son-in-law,
your wife's father, a man we truly love
after our flesh and blood? A companion?
A fine and worthy man dear to your heart?
For a companion who's a heart's true friend
is every bit as dear as one's own brother."

730

[580]

BOOK NINE
ISMARUS, THE LOTUS EATERS, AND THE CYCLOPS

[Odysseus identifies himself and his origins; he recounts his first adventures after leaving Troy: the attack on the Cicones, the storm sent from Zeus, the arrival in the land of the Lotus-eaters; the arrival in the land of the Cyclops; the slaughter of his men; he and his men burn out Polyphemus's eye and escape from the cave; Odysseus taunts Polyphemus; Odysseus and his men sail on.]

Resourceful Odysseus then replied to Alcinous:

“Lord Alcinous, most renowned of men,
it is indeed a truly splendid thing
to listen to a singer such as this,
whose voice is like a god's. For I say
there's nothing that provides one more delight
than when joy grips entire groups of men
who sit in proper order in a hall
feasting and attending to a singer,
with fine tables standing there beside them 10
laden with bread and meat, as the steward
draws wine out of the mixing bowl, moves round, [10]
and pours it in the cups. To me this seems
the finest thing there is. But now your heart
wants to ask about my grievous sorrows,
so I can weep and groan more than before.
What shall I tell you first? Where do I stop?
For the heavenly gods have given me
so much distress. Well, I will make a start
by telling you my name. Once you know that, 20
if I escape the painful day of death,
then later I can welcome you as guests,
though I live in a palace far away.

I am Odysseus, son of Laertes,
well known to all for my deceptive skills—
my fame stretches all the way to heaven. [20]
I live in Ithaca, a land of sunshine.
From far away one sees a mountain there,
thick with whispering trees, Mount Neriton,
and many islands lying around it
close together—Dulichium, Same, 30
forested Zacynthus. Ithaca itself,
low in the sea, furthest from the mainland,

BOOK NINE

lies to the west—while those other islands
are a separate group, closer to the Dawn
and rising Sun. It's a rugged island,
which nurtures fine young men. And in my view,
nothing one can see is ever sweeter
than a glimpse of one's own native land.

When Calypso, that lovely goddess, tried
to keep me with her in her hollow cave,
longing for me to become her husband,
or when, in the same way, the cunning witch
Aeaeon Circe held me in her home
filled with a keen desire I'd marry her,
they never won the heart here in my chest.
That's how true it is there's nothing sweeter
than a man's own country and his parents,
even if he's living in a wealthy house,
but in a foreign land, away from those
who gave him life. But come, I will describe
the miserable journey back which Zeus
arranged for me when I returned from war.

40 [30] 50

From Troy my ships were carried by the wind
to Ismarus, land of the Cicones.¹
I destroyed the city there, killed the men,
seized their wives, and captured lots of treasure,
which we divided up. I took great pains
to see that each man got an equal share.
Then I gave orders we should leave on foot—
and with all speed. But the men were foolish.
They did not listen. They drank too much wine
and on the shoreline slaughtered many sheep,
as well as shambling cows with twisted horns.
The Cicones set off and gathered up
their neighbours, tribes living further inland.
There are more of them, and they are braver men,
skilled at fighting enemies from chariots
and also, should the need arise, on foot.
They reached us in the morning, thick as leaves
or flowers growing in season. Then Zeus
brought us disaster—he made that our fate,

[40] 60 [50] 70

¹Odysseus's first adventure, at Ismarus with the Cicones, seems to have been on the mainland north of Troy.

BOOK NINE

so we would suffer many casualties.
They set their ranks and fought by our swift ships.
We threw our bronze-tipped spears at one another.
While morning lasted and that sacred day
gained strength, we held our ground and beat them back,
for all their greater numbers. But as the sun
moved to the hour when oxen are unyoked,
the Cicones broke through, overpowering 80
Achaeans. Of my well-armed companions, [60]
six from every ship were killed. The rest
made our escape, avoiding Death and Fate.

We sailed away from there, hearts full of grief
at losing loyal comrades, though happy
we had eluded death ourselves. But still,
I would not let our curved ships leave the place
until we'd made the ritual call three times
for our poor shipmates slaughtered on that plain,
killed by the Cicones. Cloud-gatherer Zeus 90
then stirred North Wind to rage against our ships—
a violent storm concealing land and sea,
as darkness swept from heaven down on us.
The ships were driven far off course, our sails [70]
were ripped to shreds by the power of that wind.
We lowered the masts into the ships' holds,
and, fearing for our lives, quickly make our way
towards the land. For two whole days and nights
we rested there, hearts consumed with sorrow
We were exhausted. But when fair-haired Dawn 100
gave birth to the third day, we raised the masts,
hoisted white sails, and took our place on board.
Wind and helmsman held us on our course,
and I'd have reached my native land unharmed,
but North Wind, sea currents, and restless waves
pushed me off course, as I was doubling back [80]
around Malea, driving me past Cythera.¹

Nine days fierce winds drove me away from there,
across the fish-filled seas, and on the tenth
we landed where the Lotus-eaters live, 110

¹Malea is a cape on the coast of the Peloponnese, one of the most southerly points in mainland Greece. Cythera is an island off the south coast of the Peloponnese.

BOOK NINE

people who feed upon its flowering fruit.¹
We went ashore and carried water back.
Then my companions quickly had a meal
by our swift ships. We had our food and drink,
and then I sent some of my comrades out
to learn about the men who ate the food
the land grew there. I chose two of my men [90]
and with them sent a third as messenger.
They left at once and met the Lotus-eaters,
who had no thought of killing my companions, 120
but gave them lotus plants to eat, whose fruit,
sweet as honey, made any man who tried it
lose his desire to ever journey home
or bring back word to us—they wished to stay,
to linger there among the Lotus-eaters,
feeding on the plant, eager to forget
about their homeward voyage. I forced them,
eyes full of tears, into our hollow ships,
dragged them underneath the rowing benches,
and tied them up. Then I issued orders 130 [100]
for my other trusty comrades to embark
and sail away with speed in our fast ships,
in case another man might eat a lotus
and lose all thoughts about his journey back.
They all raced on board, went to their places,
and, sitting in good order in their rows,
they churned the grey sea water with their oars.

We sailed away from there with heavy hearts
and reached the country of the Cyclopes,
a crude and lawless people.² They don't grow 140
any plants by hand or plough the earth,
but put their trust in the immortal gods,
and though they never sow or work the land,
still every kind of crop springs up for them—

¹The land of the Lotus Eaters is commonly placed in North Africa.

²The Cyclopes (singular cyclops) are hairy monsters, rather than people, with only one eye in the middle of their foreheads. They originated from the primal gods, Ouranos and Gaia, and had been imprisoned in Tartarus. But they helped Zeus in his fight against his father, Cronos, and Zeus freed them. Odysseus, one assumes, either doesn't know about the Cyclopes before this adventure or is not aware he is about to meet one, since he assumes he is moving into a place where the laws of hospitality may apply. We learn later that the cyclops Odysseus meets has a name (Polyphemus) and is a son of Poseidon. Most geographical interpretations place the incident with the cyclops in Sicily.

BOOK NINE

wheat and barley and rich grape-bearing vines, [110]
and Zeus provides the rain to make them grow.
They live without a council or assembly
or any rule of law, in hollow caves
among the mountain tops. Each one of them
sets down laws for his own wives and children, 150
and they shun all dealings with each other.

Now, near the country of the Cyclopes,
outside the harbour, there's a fertile island,
covered in trees, some distance from the shore,
but not too far away. Wild goats live there
in countless numbers, without the slightest need
to stay away from any human trails.
Hunters never venture there, not even those [120]
who endure great hardships in the forest,
as they make their way across the mountains. 160
That island has no flocks or ploughed-up land—
through all its days it's never once been sown
or tilled or known the work of human beings.
The only life it feeds is bleating goats.
The Cyclopes don't have boats with scarlet prows
or men with skills to build them well-decked ships,
which would enable them to carry out
all sorts of things—like travelling to towns
in other lands, the way men cross the sea
to visit one another in their ships— 170
or those who might have turned their island home
into a well-constructed settlement. [130]
The island is not poor. All things grow there
in season. It has soft, well-watered fields
by the shore of the grey sea, where grapevines
could flourish all the time, and level farmland,
where they could reap a bounteous harvest
year after year—the sub-soil is so rich.
It has a harbour with good anchorage,
no need for any mooring cable there, 180
or setting anchor stones, or using ropes
tied down at the stern. One can beach a ship
and wait until a fair wind starts to blow
and sailors' hearts tell them to go on board.
At the harbour head there is a water spring— [140]
a bright stream flows out underneath a cave.
Around it poplars grow. We sailed in there.

BOOK NINE

Some god guided us through the murky night—
we could not see a thing, and all our ships
were swallowed up in fog. Clouds hid the moon, 190
and the sky above contained no hint of light.
Our eyes could not catch any glimpse of land
or of the long waves rolling in onshore,
until our well-decked ships had reached the beach.
We dragged up our ships, took down all the sails,
then went along the shore, and fell asleep, [150]
remaining there until the light of Dawn.

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
we moved across the island quite amazed.
Some nymphs, daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus, 200
flushed out mountain goats, food for us to eat.
We quickly brought our curved bows from the ships
and our long spears, as well. Then, splitting up,
we fanned out in three different groups to hunt.
The god soon gave us our heart's fill of game.
I had twelve ships with me, and each of them
received nine goats. I was the only one [160]
to be allotted ten. So all day long
until the sunset, we sat there and ate,
feasting on that rich supply of meat, 210
with sweet wine, too—for we had not used up
the red wine in our ships and had some left.
We'd taken many jars for everyone
the day we'd seized the sacred citadel
of the Cicones. Then we looked across
towards the country of the Cyclopes,
which was not far away. We saw their smoke,
heard their voices and sounds of sheep and goats.
After the sun went down and darkness fell,
we lay down on the shore and went to sleep. 220

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared, [170]
I called a meeting of the men and spoke to them:

‘My loyal comrades, stay here where you are.
I’ll take my ship and my own company
and try to find out who those people are,
and learn if they are rough and violent,
with no sense of law, or kind to strangers,
with hearts that fear the gods.’

BOOK NINE

I said these words,
then went down to my ship and told my crew
to loose the cables lashed onto the stern 230
and climb onboard. The men embarked with speed,
and, seated on the benches in their rows,
they struck the grey sea surface with their oars. [180]
As we made the short trip round the island,
from the shoreline, right at the water's edge,
we saw a high cave, overhung with laurel.
There were many flocks, sheep as well as goats,
penned in there at night. All around the cave
there was a high front courtyard made of stones
set deep into the ground, with tall pine trees 240
and lofty oaks. At night a giant slept there,
a brute that grazed his flocks all by himself,
somewhere far off. He avoided others
and lived alone, away from all the rest,
a law unto himself, a monster, made [190]
to be a thing of wonder, not like man,
who survives by eating bread, no, more like
a soaring wooded mountain, standing there
to view in isolation from the rest.

I told the rest of my trustworthy crew 250
to stay there beside the ship and guard it,
while I selected twelve of my best men
and went off to explore. I took with me
a goatskin full of dark sweet wine. Maron,
Euanthes' son, one of Apollo's priests,
the god who kept guard over Ismarus,
gave it to me because, to show respect,
we had protected him, his wife, and child.
He lived in a grove of trees, a patch of ground [200]
sacred to Apollo. He gave me gifts— 270
seven finely crafted golden talents,
a pure silver mixing bowl, and wine as well,
a total of twelve jars poured out unmixed,
a drink fit for the gods. None of his slaves,
the men or women in his household, knew
about this wine. He was the only one,
other than his wife and one house steward.
Each time they drank that honey-sweet red wine,
he'd fill one cup with it and pour that out

BOOK NINE

in twenty cups of water, and the smell
arising from the mixing bowl was sweet,
astonishingly so—to tell the truth,
no one's heart could then refuse to drink it.
I took a goatskin filled with this fine wine,
and a pouch of food. My warrior's heart
was warning me a man might soon attack,
someone invested with enormous power,
a savage with no sense of law and justice.

280

[210]

We reached the cyclops's cave but didn't find him.
He was pasturing his rich flocks in the fields.
We went inside the cave and looked around.
It was incredible—crates full cheese,
pens crammed with livestock—lambs and kids
sorted into separate groups, with yearlings,
older lambs, newborns, each in their own pens.
The sturdy buckets, pails, and milking bowls
were awash with whey. At first, my comrades
urged me to grab some cheeses and return,
then drive the lambs and kids out of their pens
back to our swift ship and cross the water.
But I did not agree, though if I had,
things would have turned out better. I was keen
to see the man in person and find out
if he would show me hospitality.
When he did show up, as it so happened,
he proved to be no joy to my companions.

290

[220]

300

[230]

We lit a fire and offered sacrifice.
Then we helped ourselves to cheese and ate it.
staying inside the cave and waiting there,
until he led his flocks back home. He came,
with an enormous pile of dried-out wood
to prepare his dinner. He hurled his load
inside the cave with a huge crash. In our fear,
we moved to the remote end of the cave,
into the deepest corner. He then drove
his fat flock inside the spacious cavern,
just the ones he milked. Rams and billy goats
he left outside, in the open courtyard.
Then he raised up high a massive boulder
and fixed it in position as a door.
It was huge—twenty-two four-wheeled wagons,

310

[240]

320

BOOK NINE

even good ones, could not have shifted it
along the ground—that's how immense it was,
the rock he set in place to seal his cave.
He sat down with his bleating goats and ewes
and milked them all, each one in turn, setting
the young beside their mothers. He curdled
half the white milk and set aside the whey
in wicker baskets, then put the other half
in bowls for him to drink up with his meal.
When he had finished working at these tasks,
he lit a fire. Then he noticed us and said:

330

[250]

‘Strangers,
who are you men? What sea route brought you here?
Are you traders, or wandering the sea
at random, like pirates sailing anywhere,
risking their lives to injure other men.’

As he spoke, our hearts collapsed, terrified
by his deep voice and monstrous size. But still,
I answered him and said:

‘We are Achaeans
returning home from Troy and blown off course
by different winds across vast tracts of sea.
Attempting to get home, we had to take
an alternate route, chart another course,
an event, I think, which gave Zeus pleasure.
We boast that we are Agamemnon's men,
son of Atreus, now the best-known man
beneath wide heaven—the city he wiped out
was such a great one, and he killed so many.
As for us, we're visitors here and come
as suppliants to your knee, in the hope
that you will welcome us or give some gift,
the usual things one does for strangers.
And so, good sir, respect the gods. We're here
as suppliants to you, and Zeus protects
all suppliants and strangers—as god of guests,
he cares for all respected visitors.’

340

[260]

350

[270]

I finished speaking. He answered me at once—
his heart was pitiless:

BOOK NINE

‘What fools you strangers are,
or else you come from some land far away—
telling me to fear the gods, to shun their rage. 360
The Cyclopes care nothing about Zeus,
who bears the aegis, or the blessed gods.
We are much more powerful than they are.
I would not spare you or your companions
to escape the wrath of Zeus, not unless
my own heart encouraged me to do it.
But now, tell me this—when you landed here,
where did you moor your ship, a spot close by
or further off? I’d like to find that out.’ [280]

He said this to throw me off, but his deceit 370
could never fool me. I was too clever.
And so I gave him a misleading answer:

‘Earthshaker Poseidon broke my ship apart,
driving it against the border of your land,
on the rocks there. He brought us close to shore,
hard by the headland, then strong winds pushed
our ship towards the beach. But we escaped—
me and these men here. We were not destroyed.’

That’s what I told him. But his ruthless heart
gave me no reply. Instead, he jumped up, 380
seized two of my companions in his fist,
and smashed them on the ground like puppy dogs.
Their brains oozed out and soaked the ground below. [290]
He tore their limbs apart to make a meal,
and chewed them up just like a mountain lion—
innards, flesh, and marrow—leaving nothing.
We raised our hands to Zeus and cried aloud,
to witness the horrific things he did,
our hearts unable to do anything.
Once Cyclops had stuffed his massive stomach 390
with human flesh and washed it down with milk,
he lay down in the cave and stretched out there
among his flocks. In my courageous heart
I formed a plan to move up close beside him,
draw the sharp sword I carried on my thigh, [300]
and run my hand along his chest, to find
exactly where his midriff held his liver,
then stick him there. But I had second thoughts.

BOOK NINE

We, too, would have been utterly destroyed,
there in the cave—we didn't have the strength
with our own hands to roll from the high door
the massive rock he'd set there. So we groaned,
and stayed there, waiting for a bright new Dawn.

400

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
he made a fire and milked his flock, one by one,
with a new-born placed beside each mother.
When this work was over, he once again

[310]

snatched two of my men and gorged himself.
After his meal, he easily rolled back
the huge rock door, drove his rich flock outside,
and set the stone in place, as one might put
a cap back on a quiver. Then Cyclops,
whistling loudly, drove his fat flocks away
towards the mountain. He left me in the cave,
plotting a nasty scheme deep in my heart,
some way of gaining my revenge on him,
if Athena would grant that glory to me.

410

My heart came up with what appeared to me
the best thing I could do. An immense club
belonging to the cyclops was lying there
beside a stall, made of green olive wood
he'd cut to carry with him once it dried.

420 [320]

To human eyes it seemed just like the mast
on a black merchant ship with twenty oars,
a broad-beamed vessel which can move across
the mighty ocean—that's how long and wide
that huge club looked. Moving over to it,
I chopped off a piece, about six feet in length,
gave it to my companions, telling them
to smooth the wood. They straightened it, while I,
standing at one end, chipped and tapered it
to a sharp point. Then I picked up the stake
and set it in the smoldering fire to harden.

430

That done, I placed it carefully to one side,
concealing it beneath some of the dung
which lay throughout the cave in massive piles.

[330]

And then I told my comrades to draw lots
to see which men would risk their lives with me—
when sweet sleep came to settle on the cyclops,
we'd lift that stake and twist it in his eye.
The crew drew lots and picked the very men

440

BOOK NINE

I would have chosen for myself, four of them,
and I would be the fifth man in the group.

In the evening he came back, leading on
his fine-skinned animals and bringing them
inside the spacious cave, every sheep and goat
in his rich flock—not leaving even one
out in the open courtyard. Perhaps he had
a sense of something wrong, or else a god
had given him an order. He picked up
and put his huge rock door in place, then sat
to milk each ewe and bleating goat, one by one,
taking care to set beside each mother
one of her young. When this task was finished,
he quickly seized two men and wolfed them down.
I moved up and stood beside the cyclops
and offered him a bowl of ivy wood
full of my dark red wine. I said:

450 [340]

‘Cyclops,
take this wine and drink it, now you’ve had
your meal of human flesh, so you may know
the kind of wine we had on board our ship,
a gift of drink that I was bringing you,
in hope you’d pity me and send me off
on my journey home. But your savagery
is something I can’t bear. You cruel man,
how will any of the countless other men
want to visit you in future? How you act
is so against all human law.’

460

[350]

I spoke.

He grabbed the cup and gulped down the sweet wine.
Once he swallowed, he felt such great delight,
he asked me for some more, a second taste.

470

‘Be kind and give me some of that again.
And now, without delay tell me your name,
so, as my guest, I can offer you a gift,
something you’ll like. Among the Cyclopes,
grain-bearing earth grows clusters of rich grapes,
which Zeus’s rain increases, but this drink—
it’s a stream of nectar and ambrosia.’

He spoke. I handed him more fiery wine. [360]
 Three times I poured some out and gave it to him, 480
 and, like a fool, he swilled it down. So then,
 once that strong wine had addled Cyclops' wits,
 I spoke these reassuring words to him:

'Cyclops, you asked about my famous name.
 I'll tell you. Then you can offer me a gift,
 as your guest here. My name is Nobody.
 My father and mother, all my friends—
 they call me Nobody.'

That's what I said.
 His ruthless heart replied:

'Well, Nobody, 490
 I'll eat all your companions before you
 and have you at the end—my gift to you, [370]
 since you're my guest.'

After saying these words,
 he collapsed, toppling over on his back,
 lying with his neck twisted to one side.
 All-conquering Sleep overpowered him.
 In his drunken state he kept on vomiting,
 his gullet drooling wine and human flesh.
 So then I pushed the stake deep in the ashes,
 to make it hot, and spoke to all my men,
 urging them on, so no one, in his fear, 500
 would hesitate. Once that stake of olive wood,
 though green, was glowing hot, its sharp point
 ready to catch fire, I walked up to it [380]
 and with all my comrades standing round me
 removed it from the fire. And then some god
 breathed powerful courage into all of us.
 They lifted up that stake of olive wood
 and jammed its sharpened end down in his eye,
 while I, placing my weight at the upper end,
 twisted it around—just as a shipwright
 bores a timber with a drill, while those below 510
 make it rotate by pulling on a strap
 at either end, so the drill keeps moving—
 that's how we held the red-hot pointed stake
 twisting it inside the socket of his eye.

BOOK NINE

Blood poured out through the heat—around his eye,
lids and brows were singed, as his eyeball burned— [390]
roots crackling in the fire. When a blacksmith
thrusts an axe or adze in frigid water
with a loud hissing sound, to temper it 520
and make the iron strong—that's how his eye
sizzled around the stake of olive wood.
His horrific cries echoed through the rock.
We drew back, terrified. He yanked the stake
out of his eye—it was all smeared with blood—
hurled it away from him, and waved his arms.
He screamed out to the cyclopes nearby, [400]
who lived in caves up on the windy heights,
his neighbours. When they heard him shouting out,
they came crowding round from all directions. 530
Standing at the cave mouth, they questioned him,
asking what was wrong:

‘Polyphemus,
what's so bad with you that you keep howling
through the immortal night and wake us up?
Is some mortal human stealing your flocks
or killing you by treachery or force?’

From the cave mighty Polyphemus roared:

‘Nobody is killing me, my friends,
by treachery, not using any force.’

They answered him—their words had wings:

‘Well, then, 540
if nobody is hurting you and you're alone, [410]
it must be sickness given by great Zeus,
one you can't escape. So say your prayers
to our father, lord Poseidon.’

With these words,
they went away, and my heart was laughing—
my cunning name had pulled off such a trick.
But Cyclops groaned, writhing in agony.
Groping with his hands he picked up the stone,
removed it from the door, and sat down there,
in the opening. He stretched out his arms, 550

attempting to catch anyone who tried
 to escape there with the sheep. In his heart,
 he took me for a fool. But I was thinking
 the best thing I could do would be to find
 if somehow my companions and myself [420]
 could avoid being killed. I wove many schemes,
 all sorts of tricks, the way a man will do
 when his own life's at stake—and we were faced
 with a murderous peril right beside us.
 To my heart the best plan was as follows. 560
 In Cyclops' flocks the rams were really fat—
 fine, large animals, with thick fleecy coats
 of deep black wool. I picked three at a time
 and, keeping quiet, tied them together
 with twisted willow shoots, part of the mat
 on which the monster Polyphemus slept.
 The middle ram carried a single man.
 The two on either side were for protection. [430]
 So for each one of us there were three sheep.
 I, too, had my own ram, the finest one 570
 in the whole flock by far. I grabbed its back
 then swung myself below its fleecy gut,
 and lay there, face upwards, with my fingers
 clutching its amazing fleece. My heart was firm.
 We waited there like that until bright Dawn.

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
 males in the flock trotted off to pasture,
 while the females, who had not yet been milked
 and thus whose udders were about to burst,
 bleated in their pens. Their master, in great pain, 580 [440]
 ran his hands across the backs of all his sheep
 as they moved past him, but was such a fool,
 he failed to notice how my men were tied
 below their fleecy bellies. Of that flock,
 my ram was the last to move out through the door,
 weighed down by its thick wool and my sly thoughts.
 Huge Polyphemus, as he stroked its back,
 spoke to the animal:

'My lovely ram,
 how come you are the last one in the flock
 to move out of the cave? Not once before 590
 have you ever lagged behind the others.

BOOK NINE

No. You have always been well out in front,
striding off to graze on fresh shoots of grass
and be the first to reach the river's stream. [450]
And you're the one who longs to get back home,
once evening comes, before the others do.
But now you're last of all. You must be sad,
grieving for your master's eye, now blinded,
thanks to that evil fellow and his crew.
That Nobody destroyed my wits with wine. 600
But, I tell you, I can still destroy him.
If only you could feel and speak like me—
you'd tell me where he's hiding from my rage.
I'd smash his brains out on the ground in here,
sprinkle them in each corner of this cave,
and then my heart would ease the agonies
this worthless Nobody has brought on me.' [460]

Saying these words, he pushed the ram aside,
out through the door. After the ram had moved
a short distance from the cave and courtyard, 610
first I got out from underneath its gut
and then untied my men. We rushed away,
driving off those rich, fat, long-legged sheep,
often turning round to look behind us,
until we reached our ship—a welcome sight
to fellow shipmates—we'd escaped being killed,
although they groaned and wept for those who'd died.
But I would not allow them to lament—
with a scowl I ordered everyone to stop
and told them they should quickly lead on board 620
the many fine-fleeced sheep and then set sail [470]
across the salty sea. They climbed aboard
each man taking his place beside an oar,
and, sitting in good order in the boat,
they struck the grey sea surface with their blades.
When we had rowed as far as man's voice
can carry when he yells, I shouted out
and mocked the mighty cyclops:

 'Cyclops,
it seems he was no weakling, after all,
the man whose comrades you so wished to eat, 630
using brute force in that hollow cave of yours.
Your evil acts were bound to catch you out,

BOOK NINE

you wretch—you didn't even hesitate
to gorge yourself on guests in your own home.
Now Zeus and other gods have paid you back.'

That's what I said. My words increased his rage. [480]
He snapped off a huge chunk of mountain rock
and hurled it. The stone landed up ahead,
by our ship's dark prow. As the boulder sank,
the sea surged under it, waves pushed us back 640
towards the land, and, like a tidal flood,
drove us on shore.¹ I grabbed a long boat hook
and pushed us off, encouraging the crew,
and, with a nod of my head, ordered them
to ply their oars and save us from disaster.
They put their backs into it then and rowed. [490]
But when we'd got some distance out to sea,
about twice as far, I started shouting,
taunting the cyclops, although around me
my comrades cautioned me from every side, 650
trying to calm me down:

'That's too reckless.
Why attempt to irritate that savage?
Just now he threw a huge rock in the sea
and pushed us back on shore. We really thought
he'd killed us there. If he had heard us speak
or uttering a sound, he'd have hurled down
another jagged stone and crushed our skulls
and the timbers on this ship. His huge arms
are strong enough to throw this far.'

That's what they said. [500]
But my warrior spirit did not listen. 660
So, anger in my heart, I yelled again:

'Cyclops, if any mortal human being
asks about the injury that blinded you,
say your eye was burned out by Odysseus,

¹As in many other translations, line 483 in the Greek (which mentions how the rock just missed the steering oar) has been omitted, on the ground that if the projectile falls in front of the ship, it is nowhere close to the steering oar in the stern. The omitted line occurs a few lines later with the description of the second rock thrown.

BOOK NINE

sacker of cities, son of Laertes,
a man from Ithaca.'

After I'd said this,
he groaned and spoke out in reply:

'Alas!

Now an ancient prophecy about me
has truly been fulfilled! For Telemus,
fine, tall son of Eurymus, a seer 670
who surpassed all other men in prophecy,
reached old age among the Cyclopes [510]
as a soothsayer. He said all these things
would come to pass someday—I'd lose my sight
at the hand of someone called Odysseus.
But I always expected he'd be large,
a noble man, with enormous power.
But now a puny, good-for-nothing weakling,
after overpowering me with wine,
has destroyed my eye. Come here, Odysseus, 680
so I can give you your gift as my guest,
and urge the famous Shaker of the Earth
to escort you homeward—I am his son,
and he boasts he's my father. If he wishes, [520]
he will cure me. No other blessed god,
can do that, nor can any mortal man.'

He finished speaking. I answered him and said:

'I wish I were as sure that I could kill you,
rob you of your living spirit, and send you
down to Hades, as I am confident 690
not even the great Shaker of the Earth
will fix your eye.'

After I'd said this,
he stretched out his hands to starry heaven
and offered up this prayer to lord Poseidon:

'Hear me, Poseidon, Enfolder of the Earth,
dark-haired god, if I truly am your son
and if you are my father, as you claim,
grant that Odysseus, sacker of cities, [530]
a man from Ithaca, Laertes' son,

BOOK NINE

never gets back home. If it's his destiny
to see his friends and reach his native land
and well-built house, may he arrive there late
and in distress, after all his comrades
have been killed, and in someone else's ship,
and may he find misfortune in his home.'

700

That's what he prayed. The dark-haired god heard him.
Then Cyclops once again picked up a rock,
a much larger stone, swung it round, and threw,
using all his unimaginable force.
It landed right behind the dark-prowed ship
and almost hit the steering oar. Its impact
convulsed the sea, and waves then pushed us on,
carrying our ship up to the further shore.

710

[540]

We reached the island where our well-decked ships
were gathered. Our comrades sat beside them,
in great sorrow, always watching for us.
We rowed in, drove our ship up on the sand,
then climbed out through the surf. From the ship's hold
we unloaded Cyclops' flock and shared it.
I took great care to see that all men there
received an equal part. But when the flock
was given out, my well-armed companions
awarded me the ram, my special gift,
one just for me. I sacrificed that ram,
there on the shore, to Zeus, son of Cronos,
lord of the dark cloud, ruler of all,
offering him burnt pieces of the thigh.
But he cared nothing for my sacrifice.
Instead he started planning to destroy
all my well-decked ships and loyal comrades.

720

[550]

730

So then, all day long until the sunset,
we sat feasting on huge supplies of meat
and sweet red wine. After the sun had set
and darkness came, we lay down to rest
and slept there on the shore beside the sea.

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
I roused my crew and ordered them aboard,
to untie cables fastened to the sterns.
They got in at once, each man in his place,

[560]

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and sitting in good order in their rows,
they churned the grey sea surface with their oars.
So we moved away from there, sad at heart,
happy to have avoided a dark fate,
although some dear companions had been killed.”

740

BOOK TEN
AEOLUS, THE LAESTRYGONIANS, AND CIRCE

[Odysseus continues his narrative: he and his ships reach Aeolia, home of Aeolus, god of the winds; Aeolus welcomes them and gives Odysseus a bag with all the winds tied up inside it; Odysseus sails from Aeolia, but his men open the bag, bringing on a storm which drives them back to Aeolia; Aeolus refuses Odysseus's request for further help and orders him off the island; Odysseus and his men reach the land of the Laestrygonians, who attack them and destroy all the ships except Odysseus's vessel; that one ship sails to the island of Aea, land of Circe; Odysseus kills a stag for a meal; half the men go to Circe's house and are changed into pigs; Eurylochus brings the news to Odysseus; Odysseus meets Hermes, who gives him an antidote to Circe's spells; Circe tries to bewitch Odysseus and fails; they go to bed together; Circe changes the men back to human beings; they stay there one year, and then sail on, heading for Hades's home.]

“We reached Aeolia, a floating island,
where Aeolus lived, son of Hippotas,
whom immortal gods hold dear.¹ Around it,
runs an impenetrable wall of bronze,
and cliffs rise up in a sheer face of rock.
His twelve children live there in the palace,
six daughters as well as six full-grown sons.
He gave the daughters to the sons in marriage,
and they are always at a banquet feasting,
beside their dear father and good mother, 10
with an infinite store of fine things to eat
set out before them. The smells of cooking [10]
fill the house all day. The courtyard echoes
to the sounds of celebration. At night,
they go to sleep beside their faithful wives,
on coverlets and beds well strung with cord.²

We reached the splendid palace in the city,
and for one whole month he entertained me,
always asking questions about everything—
Troy, Argive ships, and the return back home. 20
I described it all from start to finish.
When, for my part, I asked to take my leave
and told him he should send me on my way,

¹This next stop on Odysseus's journey is a small island to the north of Sicily.

²The Greek says “pierced (or perforated) beds.” The best beds had bedsteads which had been bored with holes so that cords could be strung through to provide more flexible support for the sleeper.

he denied me nothing and helped me go.
 He gave me a bag made out of ox-hide,
 skin flayed from an animal nine years old,
 and tied up in it all the winds that blow [20]
 from every side, for the son of Cronos
 has made Aeolus keeper of the winds,
 and he could calm or rouse them, as he wished. 30
 With a bright silver cord he lashed that bag
 inside my hollow ship, so as to stop
 even the smallest breath from getting out.
 He also got a West Wind breeze to blow
 to carry ships and men on their way home.
 But that's not how things happened to turn out—
 we ruined everything with our own folly.

For nine whole days and nights we held our course,
 and on the tenth we glimpsed our native land.
 We came in so close we could see the men 40 [30]
 who tend the beacon fires.¹ But then sweet Sleep
 overcame me—I was so exhausted.
 All that time my hands had gripped the sail rope—
 I'd not let go of it or passed it on
 to any shipmate, so that we'd get home
 more quickly. But as I slept, my comrades
 started talking to each other, claiming
 I was taking gold and silver with me,
 gifts of Aeolus, brave son of Hippotas.
 Glancing at the man who sat beside him, 50
 one of the crew would mutter words like these:

'It's not fair. Everyone adores this man
 and honours him, no matter where he goes,
 to any city, any land. From Troy
 he's taking a huge stash of splendid loot— [40]
 but those of us who've been on the same trip
 are coming home with empty hands. And now,
 Aeolus, because he's a friend of his,
 has willingly presented him these gifts.
 Come on, let's see how much gold and silver 60
 he has in this bag.'

¹These fires would serve to guide the ship toward land.

BOOK TEN

As they talked like this,
my companions' envious thoughts prevailed.
They untied the bag. All the winds rushed out.
Then storms winds seized them, swept them out to sea,
in tears, away from their own native land.
At that point I woke up. Deep in my heart [50]
I was of two minds—I could jump overboard
and drown or just keep going in silence,
remain among the living. I stayed there
and suffered on. Covering up my head, 70
I just lay there on the deck, while our ships,
loaded with my whimpering companions,
were driven by those wicked blasts of wind
all the way back to Aeolus's island.

We went ashore there and brought back water.
My crew had a quick meal beside the ships.
After we'd had something to eat and drink,
I set off for Aeolus's splendid home,
taking with me one comrade and a herald.
I found him feasting with his wife and children. 80 [60]
So we went in the house and sat down there
on the threshold, right beside the doorposts.
In their hearts they were amazed. They asked me

'Odysseus, why have you returned to us?
What cruel god has been attacking you?
We took great care to send you on your way
so you'd get home, back to your native land
or any other place, just as you wished.'

That's what they asked. With a heavy heart,
I answered them:

'My foolish comrades, 90
aided by malicious Sleep, have harmed me.
But, my friends, you can repair the damage—
that's within your power.'

I said these words [70]
to reassure them. But they stayed silent.
And then their father gave me this reply:

‘Of all living mortals, you are the worst—
 so you must leave this island with all speed.
 It would violate all sense of what is right
 if I helped out or guided on his way
 a man the blessed gods must hate. So leave. 100
 You’re here because the deathless gods despise you.’

Once he’d said this, he sent me from his house,
 for all my heavy groans. Then, sick at heart,
 we sailed on further, my crewmen’s spirits
 worn down by the weary work of rowing.
 Because we’d been such fools, there was no breeze
 to help us on our way. We kept going [80]
 for six whole days and nights. On the seventh
 we came to Telepylus, great citadel
 of Lamus, king of Laestrygonians, 110
 where the herdsman bringing his flock back home
 salutes the herdsman moving his beasts out.
 There any man who had no need of sleep
 could earn two wages—for tending cattle
 and for grazing sheep. Day and night-time trails
 lie close together.¹ We approached and rowed
 into a lovely harbour, with sheer cliffs
 around it on both sides. Jutting headlands
 facing one another extended out
 past the harbour. The entrance was quite small. 120 [90]
 All my companions brought their curved ships up
 and moored them inside the hollow harbour
 in a tightly clustered group—in that spot
 there were never any waves, large or small.
 Everything was calm and bright around them.
 But I moored my black ship all by itself
 outside the harbour, right against the land,
 tying it to the rock. I climbed the cliff
 and just stood there, on a rugged outcrop,
 looking round. I could see no evidence 130
 of human work or ploughing, only smoke
 rising from the land. I sent some comrades [100]
 to learn what the inhabitants were like,

¹The land of the Laestrygonians seems to be north of Sicily, possibly Corsica. This rather odd passage has attracted some commentary. It’s not clear why the sheep have to come in at night, just as the cattle are going out to graze. The detail about the trails seems to suggest that one man could get the double wage because the roads he would have to use are conveniently near each other. The precise meaning, however, is disputed.

the men who ate the food this land produced.
 I chose two men, with a third as herald.
 They left the ships and came to a smooth road,
 which wagons used to haul wood to the town
 from high mountain slopes. Outside the city
 they met a young girl collecting water,
 a noble daughter of Antiphates, 140
 a Laestrygonian. She'd come down there
 to the fine flowing spring Artacia,
 where the townsfolk went to draw their water.
 The men walked up and spoke to her. They asked
 who ruled the people there and who they were. [110]
 She quickly pointed out her father's lofty home.
 They reached the splendid house and found his wife,
 an immense woman, like a mountain peak.
 They were horrified. She called her husband,
 strong Antiphates, from an assembly, 150
 and he arranged a dreadful death for them—
 he seized one of my shipmates and prepared
 to make a meal of him. The other two
 jumped up, ran off, and came back to the ships.
 Antiphates then raised a hue and cry
 throughout the city. Once they heard his call,
 the mighty Laestrygonians poured out,
 thronging in countless numbers from all sides—
 not like men at all, but Giants. From cliffs [120]
 they hurled rocks down on us, the largest stones 160
 a man can lift. The clamour from the ships
 was dreadful—my men were being destroyed,
 ships were smashing into one another,
 with those huge monsters spearing men like fish,
 and taking them to eat a gruesome meal.
 While they were slaughtering the sailors there,
 trapped in the deep harbour, I grabbed my sword,
 pulled it from my thigh, and cut the cables
 on my dark-prowed ship, yelling to my crew,
 ordering them to put their oars to work, 170
 so we could get away from this disaster.
 They all churned the water with their oar-blades, [130]
 afraid of being killed. We were relieved,
 as my ship left the beetling cliffs behind,
 moving out to sea. But the other ships,
 those in the harbour, were totally destroyed.

BOOK TEN

We sailed away from there with heavy hearts,
 grieving for dear companions we had lost,
 though glad we had avoided death ourselves,
 until we reached the island of Aeaea, 180
 home of that dread goddess, fair-haired Circe,
 who possessed a human voice—blood sister
 to murderous Aeetes, both children
 of sun god Helios, who gives men light.¹
 Perse, child of Ocean, was their mother.
 Here, in silence, we brought our ship to land, [140]
 inside a harbour with fine anchorage.
 Some god was guiding us. We disembarked
 and laid up in that spot two days and nights,
 our hearts consumed with weariness and pain. 190
 When fair-haired Dawn gave birth to the third day,
 with my sharp sword and spear I quickly climbed
 above the ships up to a vantage point,
 to see if I could notice signs of men
 or hear voices. From the rocky lookout
 where I was standing, I saw smoke rising
 above the spacious grounds of Circe's home
 through dense brush and trees. Seeing the smoke, [150]
 my mind and heart considered going down
 to look around. But as I thought about it, 200
 the best initial action seemed to be
 to get back to our ship along the shore,
 let my companions eat, then send them out
 to reconnoiter. On my way back there,
 in a lonely place close to our curved ship,
 some god pitied me and sent across my path
 a huge stag with massive antlers, on its way
 from pastures in the woods towards the stream
 to slake its thirst—the sun's heat forced it down. [160]
 As it came out, I struck it in the spine, 210
 the middle of its back. My bronze-tipped spear
 sliced right through—with a groan the stag collapsed,
 down in the dust its spirit left the beast.
 I planted my feet and pulled my bronze spear
 out of the wound and left it lying there,

¹The precise location of this island is a matter of scholarly argument. In this passage, it would seem to lie close to the land of the Laestrygonians, probably somewhere to the west of Corsica. Later in the *Odyssey* references to the island seem to place it in a more easterly location. Aeetes was king of Colchis, father of Medea.

on the ground. I picked up some willow shoots
 and wove a rope about six feet in length,
 by plaiting them together back and forth,
 until they were well twisted. After that,
 I tied the huge creature's feet together, 220
 and, carrying it across my back, returned
 to my black ship. I had to support myself
 by leaning on my spear—there was no way
 I could just sling a beast as large as that [170]
 and hold it on my shoulder with one hand.¹
 I tossed the stag down right before our ship,
 encouraging the crew with words of comfort.
 I stood by each of them in turn:

‘My friends,
 we’re not going down to Hades—not just yet,
 although we’re grieving, not until the day 230
 we must confront our fate. So come on now,
 while there’s still food and drink in our swift ship,
 let’s think of eating, so we don’t waste away
 and die of hunger.’

That’s what I said. My words
 soon won them over. Uncovering their heads,
 they saw the stag there and were astonished
 at such a huge beast lying by the sea. [180]
 Once they’d had their fill of looking at it,
 they washed their hands and made a splendid meal.
 So all day long until the sun went down 240
 we sat feasting on that large supply of meat
 and on sweet wine. After the sun had set
 and darkness came, we lay down on the shore.

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
 I called a meeting and addressed them all:

‘Shipmates, though you’re all feeling our distress,
 listen now to what I have to tell you.
 My friends, how far we are to east or west [190]

¹The image here suggests (according to Merry, Riddell, and Monro) that Odysseus stuck his head between the bound legs and body of the deer and carried it like a packsack, with both his hands on the spear, because the beast was too heavy to carry in the usual way, slung over the shoulder and held in place with one hand.

BOOK TEN

we just don't know, or how far we've travelled
 from where lord Helios, who brings men light, 250
 goes down beneath the earth or rises up.¹
 But let's quickly put our heads together
 to see if there's some scheme we can devise.
 I'm not sure there is. I climbed a rocky crag,
 and from that vantage point spied out the land.
 It's an island with deep water round it,
 low-lying and flat. I did see some smoke
 rising in the middle of the island,
 through dense brush and trees.'

That's what I said.

But their spirits fell, as they remembered 260
 what the Laestrygonian king had done
 and the brute force of mighty Polyphemus, [200]
 that man-eating cyclops. They wept aloud,
 shedding frequent tears. But those cries of theirs
 were not much help to us. So I split up
 my well-armed comrades in two separate groups,
 each with its own leader. I commanded one,
 and godlike Eurylochus the other.
 We shook tokens in a helmet made of bronze.
 When brave Eurylochus's lot fell out, 270
 he set off with twenty-two companions,
 all in tears, leaving us behind to grieve.
 In a forest clearing they found Circe's house [210]
 of polished stone, with views in all directions.
 There were mountain wolves and lions round it,
 all bewitched by Circe's wicked potions.
 But they made no attack against my men.
 No. They stood up on their hind legs and fawned,
 wagging their long tails. Just as dogs will beg
 around their master coming from a feast, 280
 for he keeps bringing scraps to please their hearts—
 that's how the wolves and sharp-clawed lions there
 kept fawning round those men, who were afraid
 just looking at those terrifying beasts.
 My comrades stood by fair-haired Circe's gate [220]

¹Odysseus literally says "we don't know where the darkness is or the dawn or where the sun sets or rises," a claim that seems to mean he's so lost he doesn't know East from West anymore. That seems extremely unlikely, especially since the sun has apparently been shining earlier in the story. The general sense is clear enough—they're not sure where they are.

and heard her sweet voice singing in the house,
 as she went back and forth before her loom,
 weaving a huge, immortal tapestry,
 the sort of work that goddesses create,
 finely woven, luminous, and beautiful. 290
 Then Polites, one of the men's leaders,
 the shipmate I trusted most and cherished
 more than any of my comrades, spoke up:

'Friends, someone's in there moving to and fro,
 before a giant tapestry, and singing
 so sweetly the floor echoes to her song—
 perhaps a goddess, maybe a woman—
 come now, let's all give her a shout.'

He spoke,
 and they all started yelling, calling her.
 She came out at once, opened the bright doors, 300
 and asked them to come in. In their folly,
 they all went in the house. Eurylochus [230]
 was the only one of them to stay outside—
 he thought that Circe might be tricking them.
 She led the others in and sat them down
 on stools and chairs, then made them all a drink
 of cheese and barley meal and yellow honey
 stirred into Pramnian wine. But with the food
 she mixed a vicious drug, so they would lose
 all memories of home. When they'd drunk down 310
 the drink she'd given them, she took her wand,
 struck each of them, then stuck them in her pens.
 They had bristles, heads, and voices just like pigs—
 their bodies resembled swine—but their minds [240]
 were as before. Inside their pens they wept.
 Circe threw down some feed in front of them—
 acorns, beech nuts, cornel fruit—the stuff
 pigs eat when they are wallowing in mud.

Eurylochus came back immediately
 to our swift black ship, bringing a report 320
 of his comrades' fate. But though he tried,
 he could not say a single word—his heart
 felt too much pain. His eyes were full of tears,
 his mind transfixed with sorrow. When all of us,

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astonished, questioned him, he spoke out,
describing to us his companions' fate: [250]

‘Lord Odysseus, we went through the forest,
as you had ordered and, in a clearing,
found a splendid house built of polished stone,
with a view in all directions. Inside, 330
someone was singing in a loud clear voice,
in front of an enormous piece of weaving,
moving back and forth—some god or woman.
They all shouted, calling her. She came out,
opened her shining doors without delay,
and asked them to come in. In their foolishness,
they accompanied her inside. But I,
thinking it might be a trick, remained behind.
Then the whole bunch disappeared, all of them.
No one came out again. And I sat there 340
a long time, watching for them.’ [260]

He spoke.
I slung my large bronze silver-studded sword
across my shoulder, grabbed my bow, and told him
to take me back there on the selfsame trail.
He gripped me with both his hands, clasped my knees,
moaned, and spoke to me—his words had wings:

‘Child raised by Zeus, do not take me there
against my will. Let me stay here. I know
you won’t be coming back again yourself
or bringing back the rest of your companions. 350
No. Let’s get out of here and quickly, too,
with these comrades here. We may still escape
this day’s disasters.’

That’s what he said.
But I gave him this answer: [270]

‘Eurylochus,
you can stay right here, in this very spot,
eating and drinking by our hollow ship.
But I will go. I don’t have any choice.’

This said, I walked away from ship and shore.
As I was moving through the sacred groves

on my way to Circe's home, a goddess
 skilled in many magic potions, I met
 Hermes of the Golden Wand. I was going
 towards the house. He looked like a young man
 when the first growth of hair is on his lip,
 the age when youthful charm is at its height.
 He gripped my hand, spoke to me, and said: [280]

'Where are you off to now, you wretched man,
 wandering through these hills all by yourself
 and knowing nothing of the country here?
 Your shipmates, over there in Circe's house, 370
 have been penned up like swine in narrow stalls.
 Are you intending now to set them free?
 I do not think you'll make it back yourself—
 you'll remain there with the others. But come,
 I will keep you free from harm and save you.
 Take a remedial medicine with you,
 and go to Circe's house. It will protect you
 and keep your head safe from any danger
 this day may bring. Now I'll describe for you
 each and every one of Circe's fatal ploys. 380
 She'll mix a drink for you and with that drink [290]
 include a drug. But she won't have power
 to cast a spell on you. The potent herb
 that I'll provide you will not allow it.
 I'll tell you now in detail. When Circe
 touches you with her elongated wand,
 then draw that sharp sword on your thigh and charge,
 as if you were intent on killing her.
 She'll be afraid. And then she'll order you
 to sleep with her. At that point don't refuse
 to share the goddess's bed, if you wish 390
 to free your crew and entertain yourself.
 But tell her she must swear a solemn oath,
 on all the blessed gods, not to make plans
 to harm you with some other injury, [300]
 so when you are in bed completely naked,
 she won't change you to an unmanned weakling.'

After these words, the Killer of Argus
 pulled a plant out of the ground, offered it,
 and explained its features. Its roots were black, 400

the flower milk-white. Gods call it Moly.¹
 It's difficult for mortals to pull out,
 but gods have power to do anything.
 Then Hermes left, through the wooded island,
 bound for high Olympus. I continued on
 to Circe's home. As I moved on, my heart
 was turning over many gloomy thoughts.
 After I had walked up to the gateway [310]
 of fair-haired Circe's house, I just stood there
 and gave a shout. The goddess heard my voice. 410
 She came out at once, opened her bright doors,
 and invited me inside. I entered,
 heart full of misgivings. She led me in
 and sat me on a silver-studded chair,
 a lovely object, beautifully made,
 with a stool underneath to rest my feet.
 She mixed her potion in a golden cup
 for me to drink. In it she placed the drug,
 heart still bent on mischief, gave it to me,
 and, when I drank, without being bewitched, 420
 she struck me with her wand and said these words:

'Off now to your sty, and lie down in there [320]
 alongside all the rest of your companions.'

She spoke. I drew the sharp sword on my thigh
 and charged at her, as if intent on murder.
 She gave a piercing scream, ducked, then ran up,
 reaching for my knees. Through her tears she spoke—
 her words had wings:

'What sort of man are you?
 Where are you from? Where is your native town?
 Your parents? I'm amazed you drank this drug 430
 and then were not bewitched. No other man
 who's tried it has been able to resist,
 once it's passed the barrier of his teeth.
 Inside that chest of yours your mind holds out
 against my spell. You must be Odysseus, [330]
 that resourceful man. The Killer of Argus,

¹The moly plant is probably a poetic fiction. Merry, Riddell, and Monro suggest it might be hellebore, which fits the description of the roots and flower and which was believed to be a protection against madness.

Hermes of the Golden Wand, always said
 Odysseus in his swift black ship would come
 on his way back from Troy. So put that sword
 back in its sheath, and let the two of us
 go up into my bed. When we've made love,
 then we can trust each other.'

440

Once she said this,
 I answered her and said:

'O Circe,
 how can you ask me to be kind to you?
 In your own home you've changed my crew to pigs
 and keep me here. You're plotting mischief now,
 inviting me to go up to your room,
 into your bed, so when I have no clothes,
 you can do me harm, destroy my manhood.
 But I will not agree to go to bed,
 unless, goddess, you will agree to swear
 a solemn oath that you'll make no more plans
 to injure me with some new devious trick.'

[340]

450

When I'd said this, she made the oath at once,
 as I had asked, that she'd not injure me.
 Once she had sworn and finished with the oath,
 I went with Circe to her splendid bed.

Meanwhile four women serving in her home
 were busy in the hall, children of springs,
 groves, and sacred rivers flowing out to sea.
 One of them threw lovely purple coverlets
 across the chairs and spread linen underneath.
 And one pulled silver tables to each chair
 and on them placed baskets made of silver.
 The third one mixed deliciously sweet wine
 inside a silver bowl, then served it out
 in cups of gold. The fourth brought water in,
 lit a large fire under a huge cauldron,
 and warmed the water up until it boiled
 inside the bronze. She sat me in a tub,
 and, diluting water from that cauldron
 so it was right for me, gave me a bath,
 pouring water on my head and shoulders,
 until the weariness that sapped my heart

[350]

460

470 [360]

had left my limbs. After giving me a bath,
 she rubbed me with rich oil, then fitted me
 in a fine cloak and tunic and led me
 to a handsome chair embossed with silver,
 finely worked, with a footstool underneath.
 A maid brought in a lovely golden jug, 480
 poured water out into a silver basin,
 so I could wash, and set a polished table [370]
 at my side. Then the distinguished steward
 brought in bread and set it there before me,
 placing with it large quantities of food,
 given freely from her stores. She bade me eat.
 But in my heart I had no appetite.
 So I sat there, thinking of other things,
 my spirit sensing something ominous.
 When Circe noticed me just sitting there, 490
 not reaching for the food, weighed down with grief,
 she came up close and spoke winged words to me:

‘Odysseus, why are you just sitting here,
 like a man who’s mute, wearing out your heart,
 never touching food or drink? Do you think
 this is another trick? Don’t be afraid— [380]
 I’ve already made a solemn promise
 I won’t injure you.’

When she said this,
 I answered her and said:

‘O Circe,
 what man with any self-respect would start 500
 to eat and drink before he had released
 his shipmates and could see them face to face?
 If you are being sincere in asking me
 to eat and drink, then set my comrades free,
 so my own eyes can see my trusty crew.’

When I said this, Circe went through the hall,
 her wand clutched in her hand, and opened up
 the pig-sty doors. She drove the whole herd out.
 They looked like full-grown pigs at nine years old, [390]
 standing there before her. She went through them, 510
 smearing on them all a different potion.
 Those bristles brought on by that toxic drug

which they'd received from Circe earlier
 fell from their limbs, and they were men again,
 more youthful and much taller than before,
 more handsome to the eye. Now they knew me.
 Each shipmate grabbed my hand, and all of them
 were overcome with passionate weeping,
 so the house around them echoed strangely.
 Circe herself was moved to pity then—
 standing near me, the lovely goddess said:

520

[400]

'Resourceful Odysseus, son of Laertes,
 and child of Zeus, go now to the sea shore,
 back to your swift ship, drag it up on land,
 and stash your goods and all the things you need
 inside the caves. Then come back here again,
 and bring your loyal companions with you.'

Her words persuaded my proud heart. I left,
 going back to our swift ship beside the sea.
 I found my trusty comrades at the ship
 lamenting sadly, shedding many tears.
 Just as on a farm calves frisk around the herd
 when cows, having had their fill of grazing,
 return back to the yard—they skip ahead,
 and pens no longer hold them, as they run,
 mooing in a crowd around their mothers,
 that's how my companions, once they saw me,
 thronged around, in tears—in their hearts it felt
 as if they they'd just sailed back to their own land,
 the rugged town of Ithaca itself,
 where they were born and bred. In their distress
 they spoke winged words to me:

530

[410]

540

'You're back,
 you favourite of Zeus. We're glad of that,
 as if we had returned to Ithaca,
 our native land. But come, describe for us
 how our other comrades came to grief.'

[420]

They spoke. I replied and reassured them:

'First, let's drag our ship up onto the shore,
 stow all our goods and tackle in the caves.
 Then you can rouse yourselves and come with me,

550

BOOK TEN

see your comrades in Circe's sacred home,
enjoying food and wine. There's lots of both.'

What I said to them quickly brought them round.
Of all my shipmates there, Eurylochus
was the only one to hesitate. He spoke— [430]
his words had wings:

'You wretched creatures,
where are you going? Are you so in love
with these disasters you're going back there,
to Circe's house, where she'll transform you all
to pigs or wolves or lions, so we'll be forced 560
to protect her great house for her? It's like
what the cyclops did, when our companions
went inside his cave with this reckless man,
Odysseus—thanks to his foolhardiness
those men were killed.'

Eurylochus finished.
Then my heart considered drawing the sword
hanging on my sturdy thigh and striking him,
slicing off his head, knocking it to earth, [440]
although he was a relative of mine,
closely linked by marriage.¹ But my crewmen, 570
one by one, calmed me with their soothing words:

'You child of Zeus, if you give the order,
we'll leave him behind. He can remain here,
beside the ship, and stand guard over it,
while you lead us to Circe's sacred home.'

This said, they moved up from the ships and shore.
And Eurylochus was not left behind
at our hollow ship. He came with the group,
afraid I might be harsh and punish him.

Meanwhile, Circe had been acting kindly 580
to the rest of my companions in her home.
She'd given them baths, rubbed them with rich oil, [450]
and dressed them in warm cloaks and tunics.
We found them all, in fine spirits, eating

¹According to some stories, Eurylochus was married to Odysseus's sister.

in the hall. When my men saw each other
and recognized their shipmates face to face,
their cries and weeping echoed through the house.

The lovely goddess came to me and said:

‘Resourceful Odysseus, son of Laertes
and Zeus’s child, you should no longer rouse 590
an outburst of such grief. I know myself
every pain you’ve suffered on the fish-filled seas,
every wrong that hostile men have done on land.
Come now, enjoy my food, and drink my wine— [460]
revive once more the spirit in your chest
you had when you first left your native land
of rugged Ithaca. You’re weary now—
you have no spirit—you’re always brooding
on your painful wanderings. There’s no joy
inside your hearts—you have endured so much.’ 600

Our proud hearts were persuaded by her words.
We stayed there, day by day, for one whole year,
feasting on sweet wine and huge stores of meat.
But as the months and seasons came and went,
the long spring days returned. A year had passed. [470]
My trusty comrades summoned me and said:

‘You god-driven man, now the time has come
to think again about your native land,
if you’re someone who’s destined to be saved
and reach your lofty home and soil once more.’ 610

My proud heart was persuaded by their words.
So all day long until the sun went down,
we sat there, feasting on huge plates of meat
and on sweet wine. After the sun had set
and darkness came, they all lay down to sleep
in the shadowy hall. I went to Circe, [480]
in her impressive bed, and clasped her knees.
The goddess listened to me as I spoke,
pleaded with her—my words had wings:

‘Circe,
fulfill the promises you made to me 620
to send me home. My spirit’s keen to leave,

as are the hearts in my companions, too,
who, as they grieve around me, drain my heart,
whenever you are not here among us.'

I spoke. The goddess answered me at once.

'Resourceful Odysseus, son of Laertes
and Zeus's child, if it's against your will,
you should not now remain here in my house.
But first you must complete another trip—
to the home of Hades and Persephone,
to consult the shade of blind Teiresias,
the Theban prophet.¹ His mind is unimpaired.
Even though he's dead, dread Persephone
has granted him the power to understand—
the others flit about, mere shadows.'

[490]
630

As Circe finished, my spirit was breaking.
I sat weeping on her bed, for my heart
no longer wished to live or glimpse the light.
But when I'd had enough of shedding tears
and rolling in distress, I answered her:

640 [500]

'Circe, who'll be the guide on such a trip?
No black ship has ever sailed to Hades.'

The lovely goddess gave me a quick answer:

'Resourceful Odysseus, son of Laertes
and Zeus's child, do not concern yourself
with a pilot for your ship. Raise the mast,
spread out your white sail, and just take your seat.
And then the breath of North Wind Boreas
will take you on your way. But once your ship
has crossed flowing Ocean, drag it ashore
at Persephone's groves, on the level beach
where tall poplars grow, willows shed their fruit,
right beside deep swirling Oceanus.²

650

[510]

¹Persephone, a divine daughter of Zeus and Demeter, is the wife of Hades, god of the underworld and the dead.

²Oceanus or Ocean is a river which in Homeric geography surrounds the lands and the sea—it is, as it were, the outer rim of the world (which is flat). It is not the same as the sea, although one can reach it by sailing across the sea.

Then you must go to Hades' murky home,
 where Periphlegethon and Cocytus,
 a stream which branches off the river Styx,
 flow into Acheron. There's a boulder
 where these two foaming rivers meet. Go there,
 heroic man, and do just what I say—
 move close and dig a hole there two feet square.¹ 660
 Pour libations to the dead around it,
 the first with milk and honey, next sweet wine,
 and then a third with water. And shake out [520]
 white barley meal. Then pray there in earnest
 to all the hapless heads of those who've died,
 with a vow that, when you reach Ithaca,
 at home you'll sacrifice a barren heifer,
 the best you have, and will cram the altar
 with lovely gift and make an offering
 to Teiresias, a black ram just for him, 670
 the finest creature in your flocks. And then,
 when you've offered prayers of supplication
 to celebrated nations of the dead,
 you'll sacrifice a ram and a black ewe,
 twisting their heads down towards Erebus,
 while you turn to face the flowing rivers,
 looking back.² At that point many spirits
 will emerge—they'll be the shadows of the dead. [530]
 Then call your crew. Tell them to flay and burn
 the sheep lying there, killed by ruthless bronze. 680
 Pray to the gods, to powerful Hades
 and dread Persephone. Then from your thigh,
 you must yourself draw out that sharpened sword,
 and, sitting there, prevent the powerless heads
 of those who've died from coming near the blood,
 until you've listened to Teiresias.
 That prophet, the leader of his people,
 will soon come to you. He'll tell you your course,
 the distance you must go on your return,
 and how to sail across the fish-filled seas.' 690 [540]

¹The Greek reads "as great as the length of a *pugon* (the distance from the elbow to the first finger joints) here and there." This is the length of a cubit, about two feet.

²Erebus is the deepest pit of Hades. Odysseus is, one assumes, not to watch while the gods of the underworld sample the blood of the sacrificial animals in the pit.

She spoke. Once Dawn appeared on her golden throne,
 Circe dressed me in a cloak and tunic
 and clothed her body in a long white robe,
 a lovely, finely woven garment, and tied
 a splendid golden belt around her waist.
 On her head she placed a veil. Then I went
 through her whole house, rousing my companions,
 with words of reassurance to them all:

‘No more sleeping now, no sweet slumbering.
 Let’s go. Queen Circe’s told me what to do.’

700

That what I said. And their proud hearts agreed.
 But I could not lead my men off safely,
 not even from that place. Of all of them
 the youngest was Elpenor, in battle
 not all that brave or clever. He’d lain down
 in Circe’s sacred home some distance off,
 away from his companions. Heavy with wine,
 he’d climbed onto the roof, seeking cooler air.
 When he heard the noise and the commotion
 made by his shipmates as they moved around,
 he jumped up on the spot, but then forgot
 to use the long ladder to come down again.
 He fell from the roof headfirst, snapped his neck,
 and broke his spine. His spirit went to Hades.
 As my men came out, I spoke to them and said:

[550]

710

[560]

‘No doubt you now believe you’re going home,
 back to your dear native land. But Circe
 has stated we must take a different route,
 to Hades’ home and dread Persephone,
 to meet the shade of Teiresias from Thebes.’

720

That’s what I said, and it broke their spirit.
 Sitting down right where they were, they shed tears
 and tore their hair. But their cries were useless.
 We moved down to our swift ship by the shore,
 shedding many tears of grief, while Circe
 went out and tied a ram and a black ewe
 by our black ship. She’d slipped past us with ease,
 for who can see a god move back and forth,
 if she has no desire to be observed?”

[570]

BOOK TEN

ODYSSEUS MEETS THE SHADES OF THE DEAD

[Odysseus continues his narrative: Odysseus and his men sail to Oceanus, land there, and make a sacrifice; the shades of the dead come up out of the hole; Elpenor's shade appears first and asks for burial; then Odysseus's mother appears; Odysseus has a conversation with Teiresias, who prophesies his future and his death; Odysseus talks with his mother, who gives him news of his family; a series of female shades appears: Tyro, Antiope, Alcmene, Megara, Jocasta, Chloris, Leda, Iphimedeia, Phaedra, Procris, Ariadne, Maera, Clymene, and Eriphyle; Odysseus interrupts his narrative to discuss his leaving Phaeacia with Alcinoos; Odysseus resumes his story and tells of his encounters with Agamemnon, Achilles, and Ajax; Odysseus describes Minos and Orion and the punishments of Tityus, Tantalus, and Sisyphus; the final shade to appear and speak to Odysseus is the image of Hercules; Odysseus and his men return to the ship and sail away from Oceanus.]

“Once we had reached our boat down on the beach,
we dragged it out into the gleaming sea,
set up the mast and sail in our black ship,
led on the sheep, and then embarked ourselves,
still full of sorrow, shedding many tears.
But that fearful goddess with a human voice,
fair-haired Circe, sent us a welcome breeze,
blowing from behind our dark-prowed ship—
it filled the sail, an excellent companion.
When we had checked the gear all through the ship,
we just sat—wind and helmsman held the course.
All day long, the sail stayed full. We sped on
across the sea, until the sun went down
and all sea routes grew dark. Our ship then reached
the banks of the deep stream Oceanus,
where Cimmerians have their lands and city,
a region always wrapped in mist and cloud.
Bright Helios never gazes down on them,
not when he rises into starry heaven,
or when he turns again from heaven to earth.
Fearful Night envelops wretched mortals.
We sailed in there, then dragged our ship on shore,
and walked along the stream of Oceanus,
until we reached the place Circe described.¹

¹No location on Odysseus's voyage has been more discussed and disputed the place where he meets the spirits of the dead. Suggestions range from Averneus (in Italy) to Gibraltar to mainland Spain and elsewhere.

Perimedes and Eurylochos held the sheep,
 our sacrificial victims, while I unsheathed
 the sharp sword on my thigh and dug a hole,
 two feet each way. I poured out libations
 to all the dead—first with milk and honey,
 second with wine, and a third with water. 30
 Around the pit I sprinkled barley meal.
 Then to the helpless heads of the departed
 I offered many prayers, with promises
 I'd sacrifice, once I returned to Ithaca,
 the finest barren heifer in my home, [30]
 and load the altar with fine gifts, as well.
 To Teiresias in a different sacrifice
 I'd offer up a ram, for him alone,
 the finest in my flocks. With prayers and vows
 I called upon the families of the dead. 40
 Next, I held out the sheep above the hole,
 slit their throats, and let the dark blood flow.

Then out of Erebus came swarming up
 shades of the dead—brides, young unmarried men,
 old ones worn out with toil, young tender girls,
 with hearts still new to grief, and many men
 wounded by bronze spears, who'd died in battle, [40]
 still in their blood-stained armour. Crowds of them
 came thronging in from all sides of the pit,
 with amazing cries. Pale fear seized my heart. 50
 Then I called my comrades, ordering them
 to flay and burn the sheep still lying there,
 slain by cruel bronze, and pray to the gods,
 to mighty Hades and Persephone.
 And then I drew the sharp sword on my thigh
 and sat there, stopping the powerless heads
 of all the dead from getting near the blood,
 until I'd asked Teiresias my questions.

The first shade to appear out of the pit
 was my companion Elpenor, whose corpse 60
 had not been buried in the broad-tracked earth.
 We'd left his body back in Circe's house,
 without lament or burial—at the time
 another need was driving us away.

When I saw him, I wept. My heart felt pity.
So I called out to him—my words had wings:

‘Elpenor, how did you come to this place,
this gloomy darkness? You got here on foot
faster than I did, sailing my black ship.’

I spoke. He groaned and gave me his reply:

70

‘Resourceful Odysseus, Laertes’ son,
and child of Zeus, some fatal deity
has brought me down—that and too much wine.
In Circe’s house, after I’d been sleeping,
I didn’t think of using the long ladder
to get back again. So I fell headfirst,
down off the roof. The impact broke my neck,
shattering the spine. My shade departed,
and went down to Hades. I beg you now,
in the name of shipmates we’ve left behind,
the ones who are not with us, of your wife,
and your father, who reared you as a child,
and Telemachus, whom you left at home,
your only son. I know that your fine ship
will sail away from this home of Hades
and once more reach the island of Aeaea,
where, my lord, I ask you to remember me.
When you go from there, don’t abandon me,
unburied, unlamented. Don’t turn away,
or I may bring gods’ anger down on you.
Burn me with all the armour I possess.
Raise a mound for me by the gray sea shore,
in memory of an unlucky man,
for those in times to come. Do this for me.
And on the tomb there fix the oar I used
while I lived and rowed with my companions.’

[60]

80

[70]

90

He finished. I answered him and promised:

‘You poor man, I’ll do this, complete it all.’

[80]

So we two sat in gloomy conversation,
I, on one side, with my sharp sword held high,
above the blood, and, on the other side,
the shade of my companion speaking out.

100

Then appeared the ghost of my dead mother,
 Anticleia, Autolycus's child.
 I'd left her still alive when I set off
 for sacred Troy. Once I caught sight of her,
 I wept, and I felt pity in my heart.
 Nonetheless, in spite of my great sorrow,
 I could not let her get too near the blood,
 until I'd questioned blind Teiresias.

The shade of Teiresias from Thebes appeared,
 holding a gold staff. He knew who I was
 and started speaking:

110

[90]

'Venturous Odysseus,
 Laertes' son and Zeus's child, what now,
 you unlucky man? Why leave the sunlight,
 come to this joyless place, and see the dead?
 Move from the pit and pull away your sword,
 so I may drink the blood and speak the truth.'

When Teiresias said this, I drew back
 and thrust my studded sword inside its sheath.
 Once the blameless prophet had drunk dark blood,
 he said these words:

120

'Glorious Odysseus,
 you ask about your honey-sweet return.
 But a god will make your journey bitter.
 I don't think you can evade Poseidon,
 whose heart is angry at you, full of rage
 because you blinded his dear son.¹ But still,
 though you will suffer, you may still get home,
 if you will curb your comrades and your heart.
 As soon as you've escaped the dark blue sea
 and reached the island of Thrinacia
 in your sturdy ship, you'll find grazing there
 the cattle and rich flocks of Helios,
 who hears and watches over everything.
 If you leave them unharmed and keep your mind
 on your return, you may reach Ithaca,
 though you'll have trouble. But if you touch them,

[100]

130

[110]

¹This, of course, is a reference to Polyphemus, the Cyclops, whose story is told in Book 9.

then I foresee destruction for your crew,
 for you, and for your ship. And even if
 you yourself escape, you'll get home again
 late and grieving, in someone else's ship,
 after losing all of your companions.
 There'll be trouble at home—insolent men
 eating up your livelihood and wooing
 your godlike wife by giving courtship gifts.
 But when you come, you'll surely take revenge
 for all their violence. Once you have killed
 the suitors in your house with your sharp sword,
 by cunning or in public, then take up
 a well-made oar and go, until you reach
 a people who know nothing of the sea,
 who don't put salt on any food they eat,
 and have no knowledge of ships painted red
 or well-made oars that serve those ships as wings.
 I'll tell you a sure sign you won't forget—
 when someone else runs into you and says
 you've got a shovel used for winnowing
 on your broad shoulders, then fix that fine oar
 in the ground, and offer rich sacrifice
 to lord Poseidon with a ram, a bull,
 and a boar that breeds with sows. And then leave.¹
 Go home, and there make sacred offerings
 to immortal gods, who hold wide heaven,
 all of them in order. Your death will come
 out of the sea, such a gentle passing,
 when you are bowed down with a ripe old age,
 and your people prospering around you.²
 In all these things I'm telling you the truth.'

He finished speaking. Then I replied and said:

¹This curious journey seems to suggest that Odysseus must finally propitiate Poseidon by going somewhere far inland, where people have never heard of that god and, in effect, make him known with the oar planted in the ground and a sacrifice. The winnowing shovel is a device for separating grain from chaff. The fact that the person confuses an oar with such a device is an indication of just how ignorant he is about the sea.

²This prophecy of the death of Odysseus has prompted much comment, especially the phrase "out of the sea," which some interpreters wish to emend to "from the sea" (i.e., someone will arrive by boat and bring about Odysseus's death—but that detail seems to counter the sense here that he will die calmly from old age) or "far from the sea." It's difficult to reconcile the idea of Odysseus being far from the sea with the mention of his people (i.e., those in Ithaca) living well all around him, unless, as some legends have it, he leaves Ithaca and becomes a ruler somewhere else.

'Teiresias, no doubt the gods themselves
 have spun the threads of this. But come, tell me—
 and speak the truth—I can see there the shade
 of my dead mother, sitting near the blood,
 saying nothing. She does not dare confront
 the face of her own son or speak to him.
 Tell me, my lord, how she may understand
 just who I am.'

170 [140]

When I'd finished speaking,
 Teiresias quickly gave me his reply:

'I'll tell you so your mind will comprehend.
 It's easy. Whichever shadow of the dead
 you let approach the blood will speak to you
 and tell the truth, but those you keep away
 will once again withdraw.'

180

After these words,
 the shade of lord Teiresias returned
 to Hades, having made his prophecy.
 But I stayed there undaunted, till my mother
 came up and drank dark blood. Then she knew me.
 Full of sorrow, she spoke—her words had wings:

[150]

'My son, how have you come while still alive
 down to this sad darkness? For living men
 it's difficult to come and see these things—
 huge rivers, fearful streams, stand between us,
 first and foremost, Oceanus, which no man
 can cross on foot. He needs a sturdy ship.
 Have you only now journeyed here from Troy,
 after a long time wandering with your ship
 and your companions? Have you still not reached
 Ithaca or seen your wife in your own house?'

190 [160]

Once she'd finished, I answered her:

'Mother,
 I had to come down here to Hades' house,
 meet the shade of Teiresias of Thebes,
 and hear his prophecy. I have not yet
 come near Achaea's shores or disembarked

200

in our own land. I've been wandering round
 in constant misery, ever since I left
 with noble Agamemnon, bound for Troy,
 that city celebrated for its horses,
 to fight against the Trojans. But come now,
 tell me this—and make sure you speak the truth— [170]
 what grievous form of death took you away? 210
 A lengthy illness? Did archer Artemis
 attack and kill you with her gentle arrows?¹
 And tell me of my father and my son,
 whom I left behind. Do they still possess
 my kingship, or has another man already
 taken it, because they now are saying
 I won't be coming back? Tell me of the wife
 I married. What are her thoughts and plans?
 Is she still there with our son, keeping watch
 on everything? Or has she been married 220
 to the finest of Achaeans?'

When I said this, [180]
 my honoured mother answered me at once:

'You can be sure she's waiting in your home,
 her heart still faithful. But her nights and days
 all end in sorrow, with her shedding tears.
 As for your noble kingship rights, no one
 has taken them as yet. Telemachus
 controls the land unchallenged and can feast
 in banquets with his equals, or at least
 those which any man who renders judgment 230
 should by rights attend. They all invite him.²
 As for your father, he stays on his farm
 and never travels down into the town.
 He has no bed or bedding—and lacks cloaks
 or shining coverlets. In wintertime,
 he sleeps inside the house beside his slaves, [190]
 in the dirt close to the fire, and he wears

¹The choice here seems to be between a long, painful ordeal and a more peaceful final fever. Artemis and her brother Apollo, both archers, are associated with death by fever.

²The point here is that Telemachus, although young, is still being accorded royal honours in the social life of the palace, as if he is representing the king. Anticleia is not necessarily stating he's actually performing the work of a king. Telemachus's exact age is not known, but he must be in his mid to late teens, since he was a young child when Odysseus left for Troy about thirteen years earlier than this meeting of Odysseus and Anticleia.

disgraceful clothes. During the summer months
 and in fruitful autumn, he makes his bed
 from fallen leaves scattered across the ground, 240
 here and there, all through his sloping vineyard.
 He lives in sorrow, nursing in his heart
 enormous grief, longing for your return.
 A harsh old age has overtaken him.
 That's how I met my fate and died, as well.
 I was not struck and killed inside my home
 by gentle arrows of the keen-eyed archer,
 nor did I die of some disease which steals [200]
 spirit from our limbs, as we waste away
 in pain. No. It was my longing for you, 250
 glorious Odysseus, for your loving care,
 that robbed me of my life, so honey sweet.'

She finished. In my heart I thought about
 how much I yearned to hold my mother's shade.
 My spirit urged me to clasp her in my arms.
 Three times I moved towards her, but each time
 she slipped away, like a shadow or a dream.
 The pain inside my heart grew even sharper.
 Then I called out to her—my words had wings:

'Mother, why do you not linger with me? 260 [210]
 I'd like to hold you, so that even here
 in Hades, we might throw our loving arms
 around each other and then have our fill
 of icy lamentation. Or are you
 a phantom royal Persephone has sent
 to make me groan and grieve still more?'

I spoke.
 My honoured mother quickly answered me:

'My child, of all men most unfortunate,
 no, dread Persephone, daughter of Zeus,
 is not deceiving you. Once mortals die, 270
 this is what's ordained for them. Their sinews
 no longer hold the flesh and bone together.
 The mighty power of a blazing fire [220]
 destroys them, once our spirit flies from us,
 from our white bones. And then it slips away,
 and, like a dream, it flutters to and fro.

But hurry to the light. Do it quickly.
Remember all these things, so later on
you can describe the details to your wife.'

As we talked together, some women came, 280
all wives and daughters of the noblest men,
sent out by queen Persephone. They flocked
in a throng by the black blood. I wondered
how I could get to question each of them.
To my heart the best idea seemed to be [230]
to draw the sharp sword by my sturdy thigh
and stop them drinking dark blood all at once.
So they came forward one by one in turn,
and each of them described her lineage,
and I could question every one of them. 290
There I saw high-born Tyro first of all,
daughter, she said, of noble Samoneus,
and wife of Cretheus, son of Aeolus.
She'd loved the river god Enipeus,
most beautiful by far of all the streams
that flow on earth. She used to stroll along [240]
beside the lovely waters of Enipeus.
But the Encircler and Shaker of the Earth,
taking on the form of Enipeus,
lay with her in the foaming river mouth. 300
A high dark wave rose arching over them,
like a mountain, keeping them well hidden,
the mortal woman and the god. Poseidon
removed the virgin's belt and made her sleep.
After he'd finished having sex with her,
the god then held her by the hand and said:

'Woman, be happy about making love.
Before the year goes by, you will give birth
to splendid children, for a god's embrace
does not lack power. Take good care of them, 310 [250]
and raise them well. But now you must go home.
No word of this—do not tell anyone.
Know that I am Earthshaker Poseidon.'

That said, he plunged into the surging sea.
Tyro conceived and then gave birth to sons,
Pelias and Neleus, and they became
two stalwart followers of mighty Zeus.

Pelias lived in spacious Iolcus,
 where he owned many flocks, and Neleus
 made his home in sandy Pylos. Tyro, 320
 delivered other sons to Cretheus—
 Aeson and Pheres and Amythaon—
 who loved to ride a chariot to war.

I saw Antiope, child of Asopus. [260]
 She boasted she'd made love with Zeus himself,
 and borne two sons, Zethus and Amphion,
 who first established seven-gated Thebes,
 encircling it with walls—for all their strength,
 they lacked power to live in spacious Thebes,
 unless the place was fortified. After her, 330
 I saw Alcmene, Amphytrion's wife,
 who had sex with powerful Zeus and bore
 that great fighter, lion-hearted Hercules.
 And I saw Megara, proud Creon's child,
 who married that son of Amphytrion,
 a man whose fighting spirit never flagged. [270]
 The next I saw was Oedipus's mother,
 fair Jocasta, who, against her knowledge,
 undertook a monstrous act—she married
 her own son.¹ After he killed his father, 340
 he made his mother his wife. Then the gods
 showed everyone the truth. But Oedipus,
 thanks to the fatal counsels of the gods,
 for all his painful suffering, remained king
 in lovely Thebes, ruling the Cadmeans.
 But she descended down to Hades' home,
 the mighty gaoler. She'd tied a fatal noose
 to a roof-beam high above her head and died,
 overwhelmed with grief. But she left behind
 enormous agonies for Oedipus, 350
 all that a mother's Furies can inflict. [280]
 Next I saw lovely Chloris, whom Neleus
 married because she was so beautiful,
 after he'd given countless courtship gifts.
 She was the youngest child of Amphion,
 son of Iasus, once the mighty king

¹The Greek text calls her Epicaste, which seems to be an alternative name for Jocasta, rather than a different person from another legend. The name Jocasta has been used here, since that name is better known from Sophocles's *Oedipus the King*.

of Minyan Orchomenus. In Pylos,
 as queen, she bore Neleus splendid children—
 Nestor, Chromius, Periclymenus,
 and lovely Pero, a mortal wonder, 360
 so much so that all the neighbouring men
 sought her hand in marriage. But Neleus
 would not give her up, except to someone
 who drove great Iphicles's cattle herd [290]
 from Phylace—broad-faced beasts with spiral horns,
 and hard to manage. A trusty prophet
 was the only one who promised he would try,
 but a sad fate determined by the gods
 ensnared him—those savage cattle herders
 threw him in prison, a cruel bondage. 370
 But as the days and months went by, bringing
 a change in seasons, the new year rolled in,
 and mighty Iphicles had him released—
 after he'd told them all his prophecies,
 and Zeus's will then came to be fulfilled.¹
 I saw Leda, wife of Tyndareus.
 She bore Tyndareus two noble sons,
 horse-taming Castor and Polydeuces, [300]
 the illustrious boxer. Life-giving earth 380
 has buried them, although they live on still.
 Even in the world below Zeus honours them.
 On every other day they are alive
 and then, on alternating days, are dead.²
 And they have won respect reserved for gods.

After Leda, I saw Iphimedeia,
 wife of Aloeus. Poseidon, she said,
 had made love to her, and she'd had two sons,
 godlike Otus and famous Ephialtes.

¹Commentators have suggested that this "trusty prophet" may have been Melampus. One of the stories of Melampus has him captured for stealing cattle and spending a year in prison. But he had the ability to communicate with animals and heard the worms in the roof beams of his prison talking about how the timbers were about to collapse. Melampus passed this information onto his captor (in this story Iphicles), who was so impressed he released him.

²Leda is the mother of Helen of Troy and of Clytaemnestra, two twin sisters, but with different fathers. Helen is a daughter of Zeus, Clytaemnestra the daughter of the mortal Tyndareus. Castor was, like Clytaemnestra, a child of the mortal Tyndareus, king of Sparta, and Polydeuces (or Pollux), like Helen, a child of Zeus. When Castor, who was mortal, was killed, Polydeuces asked Zeus if he could share his immortality with Castor. Zeus then allowed them to live alternating days on Mount Olympus and Hades. The twins were also immortalized as the constellation Gemini.

Though neither one of them lived very long, 390
 grain-giving Earth had raised them up to be
 the tallest and handsomest men by far, [310]
 after glorious Orion. They stood,
 at nine years of age, twenty-two feet wide
 and fifty-four feet high.¹ But they threatened
 to bring the battle din of furious war
 against the immortals on Olympus.
 They wished to pile Mount Ossa on Olympus,
 and stack Pelion with its trembling woods
 on top of Ossa.² Then they could storm heaven. 400
 And if they'd reached their full-grown height as men,
 they could well have done it. But Zeus's son,
 the one whom Leto bore, killed both of them,
 before the hair below their temples grew
 and hid their chins beneath a full-fledged beard.³ [320]
 I saw Phaedra, Procris, and Ariadne,
 daughter of Minos, whose mind loved slaughter.
 Theseus brought her once away from Crete
 to the hill in sacred Athens. But he got
 no joy of her. Before he did, Artemis 410
 on sea-girt Dia murdered Ariadne,
 because of something Dionysus said.⁴

And then I saw Maera and Clymene,
 and despicable Eriphyle, who sold
 her dear husband's life for a gift of gold.
 I cannot mention all the woman I saw,
 every wife and daughter of those heroes—
 immortal night would end before I finished. [330]
 It's time to sleep, in my swift ship or here.
 How I am escorted from this palace 420
 is now up to you and the immortals."

¹The Greek says nine cubits wide and nine fathoms tall. A cubit was the length of a man's arm from the elbow to the tip of his middle finger (the exact length varies somewhat), and a fathom was the length of a man's outstretched arms (about six feet, but the exact length varies).

²Ossa and Pelion are mountains in Thessaly. This attempt to scale the heights of heaven is part of the famous stories of the war between the Giants and the Olympian deities.

³The son referred to is Apollo, child of Zeus and Leto.

⁴In the best-known version of this famous story, Theseus sails off from Crete with Ariadne, who has helped him escape from her father's labyrinth, but then deserts her on an island (Dia or Naxos). She later marries Dionysus. It is not clear here just what Dionysus may have told Artemis to make her want to kill Ariadne.

Odysseus paused. All Phaeacians sat in silence,
saying not a word, spellbound in the shadowy hall.
The first to speak was white-armed Arete, who said:

“Phaeacians, how does this man seem to you
for beauty, stature, and within himself,
a fair, well-balanced mind? He is my guest,
though each of you shares in this honour, too.
So don’t be quick to send him on his way,
and don’t hold back your gifts to one in need.
Thanks to the good will of the gods, you have
many fine possessions stored in your homes.”

430 [340]

Then old warrior Echeneus addressed them all—
one of the Phaeacian elders there among them:

“Friends, what our wise queen has just said to us,
as we’d expect, is not wide of the mark.
You must attend to her. But the last word
and the decision rest with Alcinous.”

Once Echeneus finished, Alcinous spoke out:

“The queen indeed will have the final word,
as surely as I live and am the king
of the Phaeacians, men who love the oar.
But though our guest is longing to return,
let him agree to stay until tomorrow.
By then I’ll have collected all our gifts.
His leaving here is everyone’s concern,
especially mine, since I control this land.”

440

[350]

Resourceful Odysseus then answered him and said:

“Lord Alcinous, of all men most renowned,
if you asked me to stay for one whole year,
to arrange my escort and give splendid gifts,
then I would still agree. It’s far better
to get back to one’s own dear native place
with more wealth in hand. I’ll win more respect,
more love from anyone who looks at me,
whenever I return to Ithaca.”

450

[360]

Alcinous then replied to him and said:

“Odysseus,
 when we look at you, we do not perceive
 that you’re in any way a lying fraud,
 like many men the black earth nourishes 460
 and scatters everywhere, who make up lies
 from things no man has seen. You speak so well,
 and you have such a noble heart inside.
 You’ve told your story with a minstrel’s skill, [370]
 the painful agonies of the Argives
 and your own, as well. Come then, tell me this—
 and speak the truth—did you see your comrades,
 those godlike men who went with you to Troy
 and met their fate there? This night before us
 will be lengthy, astonishingly so. 470
 It’s not yet time to sleep here in the halls,
 so tell me of these marvellous events.
 I could stay here until bright Dawn arrives,
 if you’d agree to tell me in this room
 the tale of your misfortunes.”

Adventurous Odysseus
 then answered him and said:

“Lord Alcinous,
 most renowned among all men, there’s a time
 for many stories and a time for sleep.
 If you are eager to hear even more, [380]
 I will not hesitate to speak to you 480
 of other things more pitiful than these.
 I mean the troubles of those friends of mine
 who perished later—they managed to escape
 the Trojans’ fearsome battle cries, but died
 when they returned, thanks to the deviousness
 of a malicious woman.

Once Persephone
 dispersed those female shadows here and there,
 then the grieving shade of Agamemnon,
 son of Atreus, appeared. Around him
 other shades had gathered, all those who died 490
 and met their fate alongside Agamemnon
 in Aegisthus’ house. He knew me at once, [390]
 and after drinking blood, he wept aloud,

BOOK ELEVEN

shedding many tears, and stretched out his hands,
keen to reach me. But he no longer had
any inner power or strength, not like
the force his supple limbs possessed before.
I watched him and wept. Pity filled my heart.
Then I called out to him—my words had wings:

‘Lord Agamemnon, son of Atreus, 500
king of men, what fatal net of grievous death
destroyed you? Did Poseidon stir the winds [400]
into a furious storm and strike your ships?
Or were you killed by enemies on land,
while you were cutting out their cattle herd
or rich flocks of sheep? Or were you fighting
to seize their town and carry off their wives?’

I paused, and he at once gave me his answer:

‘Resourceful Odysseus, Laertes’ son,
and Zeus’s child, Poseidon did not kill me 510
in my ships by rousing turbulent winds
into a vicious storm. Nor was I slain
by enemies on land. No. Aegisthus
brought on my fatal end. He murdered me,
and he was helped by my accursed wife, [410]
after he’d welcomed me into his home
and prepared a feast for me, like an ox
one butchers at the trough. And so I died
the most pitiful of deaths. Around me
they kept killing all of my companions, 520
like white-tusked pigs at some nuptial banquet,
communal feast, or fine drinking party
in a powerful and rich man’s palace.
You have encountered dying men before,
many of them, slain in single combat
or the thick of war. But if you’d seen that,
your heart would feel great pity. There we were,
lying in the hall with the mixing bowls
and tables crammed full of food, the whole floor [420]
awash with blood. The saddest thing I heard 530
was Cassandra, Priam’s daughter, screaming.
That traitor Clytaemnestra slaughtered her
right there beside me. Though I was dying,
I raised my arms to strike her with my sword,

but that dog-faced bitch turned her back on me.
 Even though I was on my way to Hades,
 she made no attempt to use her fingers
 to close my eyelids or to shut my mouth.¹
 The truth is, there's nothing more disgusting,
 more disgraceful, than a woman whose heart
 is set on deeds like this—the way she planned
 the shameless act, to arrange the murder
 of the man she married. I truly thought
 I'd be warmly welcomed when I reached home
 by my children and my slaves. That woman,
 more than anyone, has covered herself
 and women born in years to come with shame,
 even the ones whose deeds are virtuous.'

540

[430]

Agamemnon finished. I answered him at once:

'That's appalling! Surely wide-thundering Zeus
 for many years has shown a lethal hate
 towards the family of Atreus,
 thanks to the conniving of some woman.
 Many died because of Helen, and then
 Clytaemnestra prepared a trap for you,
 while you were fighting far away.'

550

I spoke,
 and he immediately replied, saying:

[440]

'That's why you should never treat them kindly,
 not even your own wife. Never tell her
 the things you have determined in your mind.
 Tell her some, but keep the rest well hidden.
 But in your case, Odysseus, death won't come
 at your wife's hand, for wise Penelope,
 Icarius' child, is a noble wife,
 with an understanding heart. When we left
 to go to war, she'd not been married long.
 She had a young lad at her breast, a child,
 who now, I think, sits down among the men,
 happy his dear father will notice him
 when he returns back home. He'll welcome him

560

[450]

570

¹These actions were made out of respect for the dead on their way to the underworld. The refusal to carry them out shows the greatest disrespect for the dead.

in an appropriate way. But my wife
 did not let my eyes feast on my own son.
 Before I could do that, she slaughtered me,
 her husband. But I'll tell you something else—
 keep this firmly in your mind. Bring your ship
 back to your dear native land in secret,
 without public display. For there's no trust
 in women anymore. But come, tell me—
 and speak the truth—whether you chanced to hear
 where my son's living now. He may well be
 in Orchomenus or sandy Pylos,
 or perhaps in Sparta with Menelaus.
 For brave Orestes has not yet perished
 up there on the earth.'

580

[460]

Once Agamemnon paused,
 I answered him immediately and said:

'Son of Atreus, why ask me that question?
 I don't know whether he's alive or dead.
 And there's no point in prattling like the wind.'

As we two stood there in sad conversation,
 full of sorrow and shedding many tears.
 Achilles' shade came up, son of Peleus,
 with those of glorious Antilochus
 and Patroclus, too, as well as Ajax,
 who in his looks and body was the best
 of all Danaans, after Achilles,
 whom no one else could match. Then the shadow
 of the swift-footed son of Aeacus
 knew who I was, and with a cry of grief,
 Achilles spoke to me—his words had wings:

590

[470]

'Adventurous Odysseus, Laertes' son
 and Zeus's child, what a bold man you are!
 What exploit will your heart ever dream up
 to top this one? How can you dare to come
 down here into Hades, the dwelling place
 for the mindless dead, shades of worn-out men?'

600

Achilles spoke. I answered him at once:

'Achilles, son of Peleus, mightiest
 by far of the Achaeans, I came here
 because I had to see Teiresias
 and hear his prophecy of my return
 to rugged Ithaca. I've not yet reached
 Achaean land. I've still not disembarked
 on my own soil. I'm in constant trouble.
 But as for you, Achilles, there's no man
 in former days who was more blest than you,
 and none will come in future. Before now,
 while you were still alive, we Achaeans
 honoured you as we did the gods. And now,
 since you've come down here, you rule with power
 among those who have died. So Achilles,
 you have no cause to grieve because you're dead.'

610 [480]

620

I paused, and he immediately replied:

'Don't try to comfort me about my death,
 glorious Odysseus. I'd rather live
 working as a wage-labourer for hire
 by some other man, one who had no land
 and not much in the way of livelihood,
 than lord it over all the wasted dead.
 But come, talk to me of my noble son—
 whether he went off to war or not.
 Did he become a leader? Talk to me
 about great Peleus, if there's something
 you have heard. Is he still held in honour
 among the many Myrmidons? Do men
 disparage him in Hellas and in Phthia
 because old age now grips his hands and feet?
 I am not there, living in the sunlight,
 to help him with the power I once had
 in spacious Troy, when I fought their best men
 and kept the Argives safe. But if I came
 back to my father's house with strength like that,
 though only for the briefest length of time,
 those who act with disrespect against him,
 denying him honour, would soon come to fear
 my force, these all-conquering hands of mine.'

[490]

630

[500]

640

Achilles spoke. I answered him at once:

'To tell the truth, I've heard nothing at all
 of worthy Peleus. As for your son,
 dear Neoptolemus, I can tell you
 the entire truth, just as you requested. 650
 I myself escorted him in my fine ship
 from Scyros, to join well-armed Achaeans.
 And whenever we discussed our strategies [510]
 around the Trojans' city, I tell you,
 he was always first to state his own ideas,
 and when he talked, he never missed the mark.
 The only ones superior to him
 were godlike Nestor and myself. And then,
 on the Trojan plain, when we Argives fought,
 he never stayed back in the crowds of men 660
 with ranks of soldiers. No. He ran ahead,
 far out in front. No soldier's strength matched his.
 In fearful battles he killed many men.
 I can't give you the names of all of them,
 those he slew while fighting for the Argives.
 But his sword cut down the son of Telephus,
 brave Eurypylus. What a man he was!
 Many of his comrades, the Ceteians, [520]
 also met their deaths in war around him,
 because a certain woman wanted gifts.¹ 670
 He was the finest looking man I saw
 after noble Memnon. And then, when we,
 the noblest of the Argives, were sitting
 in the wooden horse made by Epeius,
 with me in full command, ordering men
 to open up or close our well-built trap,
 many other Danaan counsellors
 and leaders, too, were brushing tears aside,
 and each man's legs were trembling—even then
 my eyes never saw his fair skin grow pale 680
 or watched him wipe his cheeks to clear off tears. [530]
 He begged me many times to let him loose,
 to leave the horse, and he kept reaching for
 his sword hilt and his spear of heavy bronze.
 That's how keen he was to kill the Trojans.
 Once we'd ravaged Priam's lofty city,
 he took his share of loot and a fine prize,

¹Eurypylus was sent to fight for the Trojans by his mother Astyoche, who did so because her brother Priam promised to give her a golden vine.

when he went to his ship. He was unhurt—
 no blows from sharp bronze spears or other wounds
 from fighting hand-to-hand, the sort one gets 690
 so frequently in battle. For Ares,
 when he's angry, does not discriminate.'

I spoke. Then the shade of swift Achilles
 walked away with massive strides through meadows
 filled with asphodel, happy that I'd said
 his son was such a celebrated man. [540]

The other shadows of the dead and gone
 stood there in sorrow, all asking questions
 about the ones they loved. The only one
 who stood apart was the shade of Ajax, 700
 son of Telamon, still full of anger
 for my victory, when I'd bested him
 beside our ships, in that competition
 for Achilles' arms. His honoured mother
 had offered them as prizes. The judges
 were Athena and captive sons of Troy.¹
 How I wish I'd never won that contest!
 Those weapons were the cause earth swallowed up
 the life of Ajax, such a splendid man,
 who, in his looks and actions, was the best 710 [550]
 of all Danaans after the noble son
 of Peleus. I called to him and spoke
 to offer him some reassurance:

'Ajax,
 worthy son of Telamon, can't you forget,
 even when you're dead, your anger at me
 over those destructive weapons? The gods
 turned them to a curse against the Argives,
 when they lost you, such a tower of strength.
 Now you've been killed, Achaeans mourn your death
 unceasingly, just as they do Achilles, 720
 son of Peleus. No one is to blame
 but Zeus, who in his terrifying rage [560]

¹When Achilles died there was a contest for his famous weapons. The two main claimants were Odysseus and Ajax. When Odysseus was awarded the weapons by the judges, Ajax went berserk and later killed himself. Different versions of the story provide different accounts of how the decision was made. In one such story, the judges asked some Trojan prisoners which of the two Achaean warrior leaders they feared more.

against the army of Danaan spearmen
brought on your death. Come over here, my lord,
so you can hear me as I talk to you.
Let your proud heart and anger now relent.'

I finished. He did not reply, but left,
moving off towards Erebus, to join
the other shadows of the dead and gone.
For all his rage, he would have talked to me, 730
or I to him, but in my chest and heart
I wished to see more shades of those who'd died.

Next I saw Minos, glorious son of Zeus,
sitting there, holding a golden sceptre
and passing judgments on the dead, who stood
and sat around the king, seeking justice, [570]
throughout the spacious gates of Hades' home.¹
After him I noticed huge Orion
driving on through a field of asphodel
wild creatures he himself had hunted down 740
in isolated mountains. In his hand,
he clutched his still unbreakable bronze club.²

And I saw Tityus, son of glorious Earth,
lying on the ground. His body covered
nine acres and more. Two vultures sat there,
one on either side, ripping his liver,
their beaks jabbing deep inside his guts,
for his hands could not protect his body.
He'd attacked Leto, Zeus's lovely wife, [580]
as she was passing through Panopeus, 750
with its fine dancing grounds, towards Pytho.³

Then I saw Tantalus in agony,
standing in a pool of water so deep

¹This scene and the following details are a remarkable view of the underworld as a place of judgment, with eternal punishment inflicted on particularly grievous wrongdoers, a view of a moralized afterlife unknown anywhere else in Homer. Not surprisingly, this sudden description of such a different sense of Hades has given rise to charges that it is a later interpolation.

²Orion was a legendary hunter, in some accounts a son of Zeus, who, after Orion's death, turned him into the constellation of the same name.

³Tityus was a giant son of Zeus (or of Uranus). Hera persuaded Tityus to attack Leto, whose children, Apollo and Artemis, came to her help and killed him. The measurement describing his size on the ground is unclear.

it almost reached his chin. He looked as if
 he had a thirst but could not take a drink.
 Whenever that old man bent down, desperate
 to drink, the water there was swallowed up
 and vanished. You could see black earth appear
 around his feet. A god dried up the place.
 Some high and leafy trees above his head 760
 were in full bloom—pears and pomegranates,
 apple trees—all with gleaming fruit—sweet figs [590]
 and luscious olives. Each time the old man
 stretched out his arms and tried to reach for them,
 a wind would raise them to the shadowy clouds.¹

And then, in his painful torment, I saw
 Sisyphus striving with both hands to raise
 a massive rock. He'd brace his arms and feet,
 then strain to push it up a nearby hill.
 But as he was about to get that stone 770
 across the crest, its overpowering weight
 would make it change its course. The cruel rock
 would roll back down again along the plain.
 Then he'd strain once more to get it up the slope.
 His limbs dripped sweat, and dust rose from his head.² [600]

And then I noticed mighty Hercules,
 or at least his image, for he himself
 was with immortal gods, enjoying their feasts.
 Hebe with the lovely ankles is his wife,
 daughter of great Zeus and Hera, goddess 780
 of the golden sandals.³ Around him there
 shades of the dead were making noises, like birds
 fluttering here and there, quite terrified.

¹Tantalus was a son of Zeus and a distant ancestor of Agamemnon and Menelaus. His punishment comes from some action he committed against the gods (stealing the gods' food or murdering his son Pelops and serving him to the gods for dinner).

²Sisyphus was the son of Aeolus and founder of Corinth, famous for his trickery. He gave away the secrets of the gods and once tricked the god of death, so that the dead could not reach the underworld.

³Hercules had the rare distinction of being admitted to heaven, even though he was a mortal son of Zeus. Hence, Odysseus meets an "image" of Hercules. His later mention of serving an inferior man is a reference to the Labours of Hercules, work he had to carry out for king Eurystheus over a twelve-year period as punishment for having murdered his own wife and children in a fit of temporary insanity brought on by Zeus's wife, Hera. One of those labours involved bringing back Cerberus, a dog belonging to Hades.

And like dark night, he was glaring round him,
 his unsheathed bow in hand, with an arrow
 against the string, as if prepared to shoot.
 The strap across his chest was frightening,
 a golden belt inlaid with images— [610]
 amazing things—bears, wild boars, and lions
 with glittering eyes, battles, fights, murders, 790
 and men being killed. I hope the craftsman
 whose skill conceived the pictures on that belt
 never made or ever makes another.
 His eyes saw me and knew just who I was.
 With a mournful tone he called out to me—
 his words had wings:

‘Odysseus, you resourceful man,
 son of Laertes and a child of Zeus,
 are you now bearing an unhappy fate
 below the sunlight, as I, too, did once?
 I was a son of Zeus, child of Cronos, 800
 and yet I had to bear so many troubles, [620]
 forced to perform those labours for a man
 vastly inferior to me, someone
 who kept assigning me the harshest tasks.
 One time he sent me here to bring away
 Hades’ hound. There was no other challenge
 he could dream up more difficult for me
 than that one. But I carried the dog off
 and brought him back from Hades with my guides,
 Hermes and glittering-eyed Athena.’ 810

With these words he returned to Hades’ home.
 But I stayed at that place a while, in case
 one of those heroic men who perished
 in days gone by might come. I might have seen
 still more men from earlier times, the ones [630]
 I wished to see—Theseus and Perithous,
 great children of the gods. Before I could,
 a thousand tribes of those who’d died appeared,
 with an astounding noise. Pale fear gripped me—

holy Persephone might send at me
a horrific monster, the Gorgon's head.¹ 820

I quickly made my way back to the ship,
and told my crew to get themselves on board
and loosen off the cables at the stern.
They went aboard at once and took their seats
along each rowing bench. A rising swell
carried our ship away down Ocean's stream.
We rowed at first, but then a fair wind blew. [640]

¹The Gorgons were three sisters (the most famous being Medusa, the only mortal of the three). Perseus killed Medusa, but her head retained its power to turn people and even some immortals to stone.

BOOK TWELVE
THE SIRENS, SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS, THE CATTLE OF THE SUN

[Odysseus continues his story in Phaeacia: the ship sails from Oceanus back to Circe's island where they bury Elpenor; Circe advises Odysseus about future adventures; Odysseus and his crew leave Circe and sail past the Sirens; then they encounter Scylla and Charybdis and lose six men; the ship then sails on to Thrinacia, where the herds and flocks of Helios graze; Odysseus's men swear not to touch the animals; winds keep them on the island; desperate with hunger the crewmen round up some of the animals and kill them; they leave the island, and Zeus sends on a storm as punishment; the boat is destroyed and all of Odysseus's shipmates drown; Odysseus drifts back on a temporary raft to Charybdis, but manages to escape; he reaches Calypso's island; the tale of his past adventures concludes.]

“Our ship sailed on, away from Ocean’s stream,
across the great wide sea, and reached Aeaea,
the island home and dancing grounds of Dawn.¹
We sailed in, hauled our ship up on the beach,
then walked along the shore beside the sea.
There, waiting for bright Dawn, we fell asleep.

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
I sent my comrades off to Circe’s house
to fetch the body of the dead Elpenor.
Then, after quickly cutting down brushwood,
we buried him where the land extended
furthest out to sea. Overcome with grief,
we shed many tears. After we had burned
the dead man’s corpse and armour, we piled up
a mound, raised a pillar, then planted there,
above the mound, his finely fashioned oar.

[10]

10

While we were occupied with all these tasks,
Circe was well aware of our return
from Hades’ home. Dressed in her finery,
she quickly came to us. With her she brought
servants carrying bread, plenty of meat,
and bright red wine. Then the lovely goddess
stood in our midst and spoke:

20

[20]

¹This return to Aeaea, Circe’s island, has puzzled commentators, because the description of it here seems to place in a very different location from the earlier one (in the east rather than in the north west).

BOOK TWELVE

‘You reckless men,
you’ve been down to Hades while still alive,
to meet death twice, when other men die once.
But come, enjoy this food and drink this wine.
Take all day. Then, as soon as Dawn arrives,
you’ll sail. I’ll show you your course and tell you
each sign to look for, so you’ll not suffer,
or, thanks to ill-thought acts on sea and land,
endure great pain.’ 30

Circe finished speaking.
And our proud hearts agreed with what she’d said.
So all that day until the sun went down
we sat there eating rich supplies of meat [30]
and drinking down sweet wine. The sun then set,
and darkness came. So we lay down and slept
beside our ship’s stern cables. But Circe
took me by the hand and led me away,
some distance from the crew. She made me sit,
while she stretched out beside me on the ground. 40
I told her every detail of our trip,
describing all of it from start to finish.
Then lovely Circe spoke to me and said:

‘All these things have thus come to an end.
But you must listen now to what I say—
a god himself will be reminding you.
First of all, you’ll run into the Sirens.
They seduce all men who come across them. [40]
And no man who unwittingly sails past
and hears the Sirens’ call ever returns. 50
His wife and infant children in his home
will never stand beside him full of joy.
No. Instead, the Sirens’ clear-toned singing
will captivate his heart. They’ll be sitting
in a meadow, surrounded by a pile,
a massive heap, of rotting human bones
encased in shrivelled skin. Row on past them.
Roll some sweet wax in your hand and stuff it
in your companions’ ears, so none of them
can listen. But if you’re keen to hear them, 60
make your crew tie you down in your swift ship. [50]
Stand there with hands and feet lashed to the mast.
They must attach the rope ends there as well.

BOOK TWELVE

Then you can hear both Sirens as they sing.
 You'll enjoy their song. If you start to beg
 your men, or order them, to let you go,
 make sure they lash you there with still more rope.
 When your men have rowed on past the Sirens,
 I cannot tell you which alternative
 to follow on your route—for you yourself 70
 will have to trust your heart. But I'll explain
 the options. One has overhanging rocks,
 on which dark-eyed Amphitrite's great waves [60]
 smash with a roar. These cliffs the sacred gods
 have called the Planctae. No birds pass through there,
 not even timid doves who bring ambrosia
 to father Zeus. The sheer rock precipice
 snatches even these away. And then Zeus
 sends out another to maintain their count.
 No human ship has ever reached this place 80
 and made it past. Instead, waves from the sea
 and deadly blasts of fire carry away
 a whirling mass of timbers from the boat
 and human corpses. Only one ocean ship,
 most famous of them all, has made it through,
 the Argo, on her way home from Aeetes, [70]
 and waves would soon have smashed that vessel, too,
 against the massive rocks, had Hera not
 propelled her through. For Jason was her friend.¹
 On the other route there are two rock cliffs. 90
 One has a sharp peak jutting all the way
 up to wide heaven. Around that mountain
 a dark cloud sits, which never melts away.
 No blue sky ever shows around the peak,
 not even in summer or at harvest time.
 No human being could climb up that rock
 and stand on top, not even if he had
 twenty hands and feet. The cliff's too smooth,
 like polished stone. Half way up the cliff face [80]
 there's a shadowy cave. It faces west, 100
 to Erebus. You'll steer your ship at it,
 illustrious Odysseus. There's no man
 powerful enough to shoot an arrow

¹The Argo, a ship named after its builder Argus, carried Jason and his companions (the Argonauts) to Colchis on their trip to capture the Golden Fleece and back again. Aeetes was king of Colchis, father of Medea.

from a hollow ship and reach that cavern.
 In there lives Scylla. She has a dreadful yelp.
 It's true her voice sounds like a new-born pup,
 but she's a vicious beast. No mortal man
 would feel good seeing her, nor would a god
 who crossed her path. She has a dozen feet,
 all deformed, six enormously long necks, 110 [90]
 with a horrific head on each of them,
 and three rows of teeth packed close together,
 full of murky death. Her lower body
 she keeps in her hollow cave, out of sight,
 but sticks her heads outside the fearful hole,
 and fishes there, scouring around the rock
 for dolphins, swordfish, or some bigger prey,
 whatever she can seize of all those beasts
 moaning Amphitrite keeps nourishing
 in numbers past all counting. No sailors 120
 yet can boast they and their ship sailed past her
 without disaster. Each of Scylla's heads
 carries off a man, snatching him away [100]
 right off the dark-prowed ship. Then, Odysseus,
 you'll see the other cliff. It's not so high.
 The two are close together. You could shoot
 an arrow from one cliff and hit the other.
 There's a huge fig tree there with leaves in bloom.
 Just below that tree divine Charybdis
 sucks black seawater down. She spews it out 130
 three times a day, and then three times a day
 she gulps it down—a terrifying sight.
 May you never meet her when she swallows!
 Nothing can save you from destruction then,
 not even Poseidon, Shaker of the Earth.
 Make sure your ship stays close to Scylla's rock.
 Row past there with all speed. It's much better
 to mourn for six companions in your ship [110]
 than to have them all wiped out together.'

Circe paused. I answered her directly: 140

'Goddess, please tell me this, and speak the truth—
 is there some way I can get safely through,
 past murderous Charybdis, and protect
 me and my crew when Scylla moves to strike.'

I spoke. The lovely goddess then replied:

'You reckless man, you think you're dealing here
with acts of war or work? Why won't you yield
to the immortal gods? She's not human,
but a destroyer who will never die—
fearful, difficult, and fierce—not someone 150
you can fight. There's no defence against her.
The bravest thing to do is run away. [120]
If you linger by the cliff to arm yourself,
I fear she'll jump out once more, attack you
with all her heads and snatch away six men,
just as before. Row on quickly past her,
as hard as you can go. Send out a call
to Crataeis, her mother, who bore her
to menace human beings. She'll restrain her—
Scylla's heads won't lash out at you again.

160
Next you'll reach the island of Thrinacia,
where Helios's many cattle graze,
his rich flocks, too—seven herds of cattle
and just as many lovely flocks of sheep,
with fifty in each group. They bear no young [130]
and never die. Their herders are divine,
fair-haired Lampetie and Phaethusa.
Beautiful Neaera gave birth to them
from sun god Helios Hyperion.
Once she had raised them, their royal mother 170
sent them off to live on Thrinacia,
an island far away, where they could tend
their father's sheep and bent-horned cattle herds.
Now, if you leave these animals unharmed
and focus on your journey home, I think
you may get back to Ithaca, although
you'll meet misfortune. But if you harm them,
then I foresee destruction for your ship
and crew. Even if you yourself escape, [140]
you'll get back home in great distress and late, 180
after all your shipmates have been killed.'

Circe finished speaking. When Dawn came up
on her golden throne, the lovely goddess
left to go up island. So I returned
back to the ship, where I urged my comrades

to get on board and loosen off the ropes.
 They quickly climbed into the ship, sat down
 in proper order at each rowing bench,
 and struck the gray sea surface with their oars,
 as fair winds blew behind our dark-prowed ship, 190
 filling the sail, excellent companions
 sent by fair-haired Circe, fearful goddess [150]
 who possessed the power of song. We checked
 the rigging on our ship and then sat down.
 The wind and helmsman kept us on our course.
 Then, with an aching heart, I addressed my crew:

‘Friends, it’s not right that only one or two
 should know the prophecies revealed to me
 by the lovely goddess Circe. And so,
 I’ll tell you all—once we understand them, 200
 we’ll either die or ward off Death and Fate
 and then escape. She told me first of all
 we should guard against the wondrous voices
 of the Sirens in their flowery meadow.
 She said I alone should listen to them. [160]
 But you must tie me down with cruel bonds,
 so I stay where I am and cannot move,
 standing upright at the mast. You must fix
 the rope at both its ends onto the mast.
 If I start telling you to set me free, 210
 you have to tie me down with still more rope.’

I reviewed these things in every detail,
 informing my companions. Our strong ship,
 with a fair wind still driving us ahead,
 came quickly to the island of the Sirens.¹
 Then the wind died down. Everything was calm,
 without a breeze. Some god had stilled the waves.
 My comrades stood up, furled the sail, stowed it [170]
 in the hollow ship, then sat at their oars,
 churning the water white with polished blades 220
 carved out of pine. With my sharp sword I cut
 a large round chunk of wax into small bits,
 then kneaded them with my strong fingertips.
 This pressure and the rays of Helios,

¹Odysseus’s encounter with the Sirens seems to take place on an island between the west coast of Italy and Sicily.

lord Hyperion, made the wax grow warm.
 Once I had plugged my comrades' ears with wax,
 they tied me hand and foot onto the ship,
 so I stood upright hard against the mast.
 They lashed the rope ends to the mast as well,
 then sat and struck the gray sea with their oars.
 But when we were about as far away
 as a man shouts, moving forward quickly,
 our swift ship did not slip past the Sirens,
 once it came in close, without being seen.
 So they began their clear-toned cry:

230 [180]

'Odysseus,
 you famous man, great glory of Achaeans,
 come over here. Let your ship pause awhile,
 so you can hear the songs we two will sing.
 No man has ever rowed in his black ship
 past here without attending to our songs,
 sweet-voiced melodies sung from our own lips.
 That brings him joy, and he departs from here
 a wiser man, for we two understand
 all the misfortunes men endured at Troy,
 hardships faced by Trojans and Achaeans,
 thanks to what the gods then willed, for we know
 everything that happens on this fertile earth.'

240

[190]

They paused. The voice that reached me was so fine
 my heart longed to listen. I told my crew
 to set me free, sent them clear signals
 with my eyebrows. But they fell to the oars
 and rowed ahead. Then two of them got up,
 Perimedes and Eurylochus, bound me
 with more rope and lashed me even tighter.
 When they'd rowed on well beyond the Sirens,
 my loyal crew quickly removed the wax
 I'd stuffed in each man's ears and loosed my ropes.

250

[200]

But once we'd left the island far behind,
 I saw giant waves and smoke. Then I heard
 a crashing roar. The crew was terrified.
 The oars were snatched away, out of their hands,
 and banged each other in the swirling sea.
 Once the men were no longer pulling hard
 on their tapered oars, the boat stopped moving.

260

I went through the ship, cheering up the crew,
standing beside each one and speaking words
of reassurance:

‘Friends, up to this point,
we have not been strangers to misfortune.
Surely the bad things now are nothing worse
than when the cyclops with his savage force
kept us prisoners in his hollow cave. 270 [210]
But even there, thanks to my excellence,
intelligence, and planning, we escaped.
I think someday we’ll be remembering
these dangers, too. But come now, all of us
should follow what I say. Stay by your oars,
keep striking them against the surging sea.
Great Zeus may somehow let us all move past
and thus avoid destruction. You, helmsman,
I’m talking, above all, to you, so hold 280
this in your heart—you control the steering
on this hollow ship. Keep us on a course
some distance from the smoke and breaking waves.
Hug the cliff, in case, before you know it, [220]
our ship veers over to the other side,
and you throw us all into disaster.’

I spoke. They quickly followed what I’d said.
I did not mention Scylla—for she was
a threat for which there was no remedy—
in case my comrades, overcome with fear, 290
stopped rowing and huddled up together
inside the boat. At that point I forgot
Circe’s hard command, when she’d ordered me
not to arm myself. After I’d put on
my splendid armour, I took two long spears
and moved up to the foredeck of the ship,
where, it seemed to me, I could see Scylla [230]
as soon as she appeared up on the rock
and brought disaster down on my ship’s crew.
I could not catch a glimpse of her at all. 300
My eyes grew weary as I searched for her
all around that misty rock. We sailed on,
up the narrow strait, groaning as we went.
On one side lay Scylla; on the other
divine Charybdis terrified us all,

BOOK TWELVE

by swallowing salt water from the sea.¹
 When she spewed it out, she seethed and bubbled
 uncontrollably, just like a cauldron
 on a huge fire, while high above our heads
 the spray rained down on top of both the cliffs. 310
 And when she sucked the salt sea water down, [240]
 everything there looked totally confused,
 a dreadful roar arose around the rocks,
 and in the depths the dark and sandy ground
 was plain to see. Pale fear gripped my comrades.
 When we saw Charybdis, we were afraid
 we'd be destroyed. Then Scylla snatched away
 six of my companions, right from the deck,
 the strongest and the bravest men I had.
 I turned to watch the crew and the swift ship— 320
 already I could see their hands and feet,
 as Scylla carried them high overhead.
 They cried out and screamed, calling me by name
 one final time, their hearts in agony. [250]
 Just as an angler on a jutting rock
 casts out some bait with his long pole to snare
 small fish and lets the horn from some field ox
 sink down in the sea, then, when he snags one,
 throws it quivering on shore, that's how those men
 wriggled as they were raised towards the rocks.² 330
 Then, in the entrance to her cave, Scylla
 devoured the men—they still on kept screaming,
 stretching out their arms in my direction,
 as they met their painful deaths. Of all things
 my eyes have witnessed in my journeying
 on pathways of the sea, the sight of them
 was the most piteous I've ever seen.

 Once we had made it past those rocks and fled, [260]
 escaping Scylla and dread Charybdis,
 we reached the lovely island of the god, 340
 home to those fine herds of broad-faced cattle
 and numerous rich flocks belonging to

¹Scylla and Charybdis are commonly located on either side of the narrow Strait of Messina, between Italy and Sicily.

²The horn of the field ox mentioned here is, one assumes, designed to act as a lead sinker and carry the hook down into deeper water.

Helios Hyperion, god of the sun.¹

While I was still at sea in my black ship
and heard the lowing cattle being penned
and bleating sheep, there fell into my heart
the speeches of Teiresias of Thebes,
the sightless prophet—Circe's words, as well,
on Aeaëa. They both had strictly charged
that I should at all costs miss this island, 350
the property of Helios, who brings
such joy to men. So with heavy heart, [270]
I spoke to my companions:

‘Shipmates,
though you have endured a lot of trouble,
hear what I have to say, so I can speak
about the prophecies Teiresias made
and Circe, too, on Aeaëa. They both
strictly charged me to avoid this island,
which Helios owns, who gives men such joy.
Here, she said, we face our gravest danger. 360
So let's row our black ship past this island.’

I paused. The spirit in my crew was shattered.
Then Eurylochus answered me. His words
were full of spite:

‘You're a difficult man,
Odysseus, with more strength than other men.
Your limbs are never weary. One would think [280]
you were composed entirely of iron,
if you refuse to let your shipmates land,
when they're worn out with work and lack of sleep.
Here on this sea-girt island, we could make 370
a tasty dinner. You tell us instead
to wander on like this through the swift night.
But harsh winds which destroy men's ships arise
out of the night. And how could we avoid
total disaster, if we chance to meet
unexpected blasts from stormy South Wind
or from blustering West Wind, gusty storms
most likely to completely wreck our ship,

¹The location of Thrinacia, the island where Helios's cattle live, is uncertain. It may be in Sicily or perhaps Malta.

no matter what the ruling gods may wish? [290]
 Surely we should let black night persuade us, 380
 and now prepare a meal, while we stay put
 alongside our swift ship. When morning comes,
 we'll go on board, set off on the wide sea.'

Eurylochus spoke. My other comrades
 all agreed. So then I understood too well
 some god was planning trouble. I replied—
 my words had wings:

'It seems, Eurylochus,
 you're forcing me to stand alone. But come,
 let all of you now swear this solemn oath—
 if by chance we find a herd of cattle 390
 or a large flock of sheep, not one of you [300]
 will be so overcome with foolishness
 that you will kill a cow or sheep. Instead,
 you'll be content to eat the food supplies
 which goddess Circe gave.'

Once I'd said this,
 they swore, as I had asked, they'd never kill
 those animals. When they had made the oath
 and finished promising, we moved our ship
 inside a hollow harbour, by a spring
 whose water tasted sweet. Then my crewmen 400
 disembarked and made a welcome dinner.
 When everyone had eaten food and drunk
 to ease his heart, they wept as they recalled
 those dear companions Scylla snatched away
 out of the hollow ship and then devoured. [310]
 As they cried there, sweet sleep came over them.

But when three-quarters of the night had passed
 and the stars had shifted their positions,
 cloud-gatherer Zeus stirred up a hostile wind
 and an amazing storm, which hid in clouds 410
 both land and sea alike. And then dark night
 descended. Once rose-fingered Dawn arrived,
 we dragged up our ship and then secured it
 inside a hollow cave, a place nymphs used
 as a fine dancing and assembly ground.
 Then I called a meeting of the men and said:

'My friends, in our ship we have meat and drink, [320]
 so let's not touch those cattle, just in case
 that causes trouble for us. For these cows
 and lovely sheep belong to Helios, 420
 a fearful god, who spies out all there is
 and listens in on everything we say.'

These words of mine won over their proud hearts.
 But then South Wind kept blowing one whole month.
 It never stopped. No other wind sprang up,
 except those times when East and South Wind blew.
 Now, while the men still had red wine and bread,
 they did not touch the cattle. They were keen
 to stay alive. But once what we had stored
 inside our ship was gone, they had to roam, 430
 scouring around for game and fish and birds, [330]
 whatever came to hand. They made bent hooks
 to fish, as starvation gnawed their stomachs.
 At that point I went inland, up island,
 to pray to the gods, hoping one of them
 would show me a way home. Once I had moved
 across the island, far from my companions,
 I washed my hands in a protected spot,
 a shelter from the wind, and said my prayers
 to all the gods who live on Mount Olympus. 440
 Then they poured sweet sleep across my eyelids.

Meanwhile Eurylochus began to give
 truly bad advice to my companions:

'Shipmates, although you're suffering distress, [340]
 hear me out. For wretched human beings
 all forms of death are hateful. But to die
 from lack of food, to meet one's fate like that,
 is worst of all. So come, let's drive away
 the best of Helios' cattle, and then
 we'll sacrifice to the immortal gods 450
 who hold wide heaven. And if we get home,
 make it to Ithaca, our native land,
 for Helios Hyperion we'll build
 a splendid temple, and inside we'll put
 many expensive gifts. If he's enraged
 about his straight-horned cattle and desires

to wreck our ship and other gods agree,
I'd rather lose my life once and for all [350]
by choking on a wave than starve to death
on an abandoned island.'

Eurylochus spoke. 460

My other comrades agreed with what he'd said.
They quickly rounded up the finest beasts
from Helios's herd, which was close by,
sleek, broad-faced animals with curving horns,
grazing near the dark-prowed ship. My comrades
stood around them, all praying to the gods.
They broke off tender leaves from a high oak,
for there was no white barley on the ship.¹
Once they had prayed, they cut the creatures' throats,
flayed them, and cut out portions of the thighs. 470 [360]
These they hid in double layers of fat
and laid raw meat on top. They had no wine
to pour down on the flaming sacrifice,
so they used some water for libations
and roasted all the entrails in the fire.
Once the thigh parts were completely roasted
and they'd had a taste of inner organs,
they sliced the rest and skewered it on spits.
That was the moment sweet sleep left my eyes.
I went down by the shore to our swift ship. 480
As I drew closer to our curving ship,
the sweet smell of hot fat floated round me.
I groaned and cried out to the immortals: [370]

'Father Zeus and you other sacred gods,
who live forever, you forced it on me,
that cruel sleep, to bring about my doom.
For my companions who remained behind
have planned something disastrous.'

A messenger

quickly came to Helios Hyperion,
long-robed Lampetie, bringing the news— 490

¹The traditional sacrifice requires white barley. But since the sailors are out of food, they have to substitute the leaves for the barley.

we had killed his cattle.¹ Without delay,
he spoke to the immortals, full of rage:

‘Father Zeus and you other blessed gods,
who live forever, take your vengeance now
on those men, companions of Odysseus,
Laertes’ son, who, in their arrogance,
have killed my animals, the very ones
I always look upon with such delight [380]
whenever I move up to starry heaven
and then turn back from there towards the earth. 500
If they don’t pay me proper restitution
for those beasts, then I’ll go down to Hades
and shine among the dead.’

Cloud-gatherer Zeus
answered him and said:

‘Helios, I think
you should keep on shining for immortals
and for human beings on fertile earth.
With a dazzling thunderbolt I myself
will quickly strike at that swift ship of theirs
and, in the middle of the wine-dark sea,
smash it to tiny pieces.’

I learned of this 510
from fair Calypso, who said she herself [390]
had heard it from Hermes the Messenger.

I came down to the sea and reached the ship.
There I bitterly attacked my crewmen,
each of them in turn, standing by the boat.
But we could not find a single remedy—
the cattle were already dead. The gods
immediately sent my men bad omens—
hides crept along the ground, while on the spits
the meat began to bellow, and a sound 520
like cattle lowing filled the air.

For six days,
those comrades I had trusted feasted there,

¹Lampetie is a divine daughter of Helios and one of the guardians of his cattle herds.

eating the cattle they had rounded up,
 the finest beasts in Helios's herd.
 But when Zeus, son of Cronos, brought to us
 the seventh day, the stormy winds died down. [400]
 We went aboard at once, put up the mast,
 hoisted the white sail, and left the island,
 out on the wide sea

Once we'd sailed away,
 no other land appeared, just sky and sea. 530
 The son of Cronos sent us a black cloud,
 above our hollow ship, while underneath
 the sea grew dark. Our boat sailed on its course,
 but not for long. All at once, West Wind whipped up
 a frantic storm—the blasts of wind snapped off
 both forestays on the mast, which then fell back, [410]
 and all our rigging crashed down in the hold.
 In the stern part of the ship, the falling mast
 struck the helmsman on his head, caving in
 his skull, every bone at once. Then he fell, 540
 like a diver, off the boat. His proud spirit
 left his bones. Then Zeus roared out his thunder
 and with a bolt of lightning struck our ship.
 The blow from Zeus's lightning made our craft
 shiver from stem to stern and filled it up
 with sulphur smoke. My men fell overboard
 and rode atop the waves, like cormorants,
 around our blackened ship, because the god
 had robbed them of their chance to get back home.

But I kept moving up and down the ship, 550 [420]
 until the breaking seas had loosened off
 both sides of the keel. Waves were holding up
 the shattered ship but then snapped off the mast
 right at the keel. But the ox-hide backstay
 had fallen over it, and so with that
 I lashed them both together, mast and keel.
 I sat on these and then was carried off
 by those destructive winds. But when the storms
 from West Wind ceased, South Wind began to blow,
 and that distressed my spirit—I worried 560
 about floating back to grim Charybdis.
 All night I drifted. When the sun came up,
 I reached Scylla's cliff and dread Charybdis [430]

still sucking down salt water from the sea.
 I jumped up into the lofty fig tree
 and held on there, as if I were a bat.
 But there was nowhere I could plant my feet,
 nor could I climb the tree—its roots were spread
 far down below me, and its branches stretched
 above me, out of reach, immense and long, 570
 shadowing Charybdis. So I hung there,
 staunch in my hope that when she spewed again,
 she'd throw up keel and mast. And to my joy
 at last they surfaced—at the very hour
 a man gets up for dinner from assembly,
 one who adjudicates the bitter quarrels [440]
 young men have, who then request his judgment,
 that's when those timbers first came into view
 out from Charybdis.¹ My hands and feet let go
 and from up high I fell into the sea 580
 beside those lengthy spars. I sat on them
 and used my hands to paddle my way through.
 As for Scylla, the father of gods and men
 would not let her catch sight of me again,
 or else I'd not have managed to escape
 being utterly destroyed.

From that place
 I drifted for nine days. On the tenth night,
 I was guided to Ogygia by the gods,
 the island where fair-haired Calypso lives,
 fearful goddess with the power of song. 590
 She welcomed and treated me with care. [450]
 But why should I tell you that story now?
 It was only yesterday, in your home,
 I told it to you and your noble wife.
 And it's an irritating thing, I think,
 to re-tell a story once it's clearly told."

¹These details suggest that Odysseus was stuck in the tree virtually all day.

ODYSSEUS LEAVES PHAEACIA AND REACHES ITHACA

[Odysseus ends his story; the Phaeacians collect gifts and store them on a ship; Odysseus takes his leave and goes on board, where he sleeps during the voyage to Ithaca; the Phaeacians land in Ithaca, unload the goods, place Odysseus sleeping on the shore, and leave; Poseidon complains to Zeus about the Phaeacians' transporting Odysseus safely home; Poseidon decides to turn the Phaeacian ship to stone and put up a mountain range around their city; the Phaeacians are amazed at the transformation of their ship; Alcinous recalls his father's prophecies; the Phaeacians sacrifice to Poseidon; Odysseus wakes up on Ithaca but does not recognize the place; Athena visits him in the form of a young man; she tells him he is in Ithaca; Odysseus fabricates a story about his identity; Athena transforms herself into a woman, reveals her identity, and points out the features of the island; the two of them plan how Odysseus will take his revenge on the suitors; Athena transforms his appearance so that he looks like an impoverished old beggar; she tells him to seek out the man who tends his swine; Athena leaves for Sparta to fetch Telemachus.]

Odysseus paused. All Phaeacians sat in silence, motionless and spellbound in the shadowy hall. Then Alcinous again spoke up and said to him:

“Odysseus, since you’re visiting my home,
with its brass floors and high-pitched roof, I think
you won’t leave here and go back disappointed,
although you’ve truly suffered much bad luck.
And now I’ll speak to all men present here,
those who in this hall are always drinking
the council’s gleaming wine and enjoying
the songs the minstrel sings. I tell you this.
Clothing for our guest is packed already,
stored in a polished chest inlaid with gold,
as well as all the other gifts brought here
by Phaeacia’s counsellors. But come now,
let’s give him a large tripod and cauldron,
each one of us. We can repay ourselves—
we’ll get the people to provide the cost.
It’s too expensive for one man to give
without receiving any money back.”

Alcinous spoke. And they agreed with what he said.
Then they all left to go back home and get some rest.

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But as soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
they hurried to the ship and loaded on the bronze,
which strengthens men. Strong and mighty Alcinous [20]
went in person through the ship and had the gifts
stowed beneath the benches, where they would not hinder
any of the crew, as the rowers plied their oars.
Then they went back to Alcinous's home to feast.

On their behalf, forceful and mighty Alcinous 30
sacrificed a bull to Zeus, god of the dark cloud
and son of Cronos, who rules over everything.
Once they had burned pieces of the thigh, they enjoyed
a splendid banquet. Among them Demodocus,
the godlike minstrel revered by all Phaeacians,
sang a song of celebration. But Odysseus
kept on turning round toward the blazing sunlight,
eager to see it set—he so wanted to return. [30]
Just as a man longs for supper, when all day long
a pair of wine-dark oxen pull a well-made plough 40
through fallow land for him, and as the sun goes down,
the sight delights him—now he can prepare a meal,
for both his knees are weary when he moves—that's how
Odysseus rejoiced to see the sunlight disappear.
He spoke up at once, addressing the Phaeacians,
men who love the oar, especially Alcinous,
saying these words:

“Lord Alcinous, of all men
most renowned, pour out your libations now,
and send me safely off. Farewell to you!
Now everything my dear heart once desired 50 [40]
has come about—an escort and these gifts,
marks of friendship. May the heavenly gods
make me content with them. When I get back,
may I find my excellent wife at home,
with all my family safe. As for you,
may you stay here and make a happy life
for the wives you married and your children.
May gods grant you success of every kind,
and may no evil things afflict your people.”

Odysseus spoke. They all approved of what he said, 60
and ordered that their guest should be escorted off,

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because he spoke so well. Mighty Alcinous
addressed the herald, saying:

“Pontonous, [50]
stir the mixing bowl, and serve out the wine
to all those in the hall, so once we’ve prayed
to Father Zeus, we may send off our guest,
back to his native land.”

Alcinous finished speaking.
Pontonous mixed wine sweet as honey, then served it
to all of them, moving to everyone in turn,
and, from where they sat, they each poured out libations 70
to all the immortal gods who hold wide heaven.
Lord Odysseus stood up, placed a two-handled cup
in Arete’s hands, and spoke winged words to her:

“Fare well, queen Arete, through all your years,
until old age and death arrive, the fate [60]
of every mortal being. I’m leaving now.
But in this house may you have much delight
from your own children and your people,
and from Alcinous, the king.”

Lord Odysseus spoke,
then moved across the threshold. Mighty Alcinous 80
dispatched a herald to conduct him to the sea
and his fast ship. Arete sent slave girls with him.
One carried a freshly laundered cloak and tunic.
She told a second one to follow on behind
escorting the large trunk. Another female slave
brought red wine and bread. Once the group had reached the ship [70]
beside the sea, the noble youths escorting him
immediately took all the food and drink on board
and stowed them in the hollow ship. They spread a rug
and a linen sheet on the deck inside the ship, 90
at the stern, so Odysseus could have a peaceful sleep.
He went aboard, as well, and lay down in silence.
Each man sat in proper order at his oarlock.
They loosed the cable from the perforated stone.
Once they leaned back and stirred the water with their oars,
a calming sleep fell on his eyelids, undisturbed
and very soothing, a sensation much like death. [80]
Just as four stallions yoked together charge ahead

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across the plain, all running underneath the lash,
 and jump high as they gallop quickly on their way, 100
 that's how the stern part of that ship leapt up on high,
 while in her wake the dark waves of the roaring sea
 were churned to a great foam, as she sped on her path,
 safe and secure. Not even wheeling hawks in flight,
 the swiftest of all flying things, could match her speed,
 as she raced ahead, slicing through the ocean waves,
 bearing on board a man whose mind was like a god's.
 His heart in earlier days had undergone much pain, [90]
 as he moved through men's wars and suffered on the waves.
 Now he slept in peace, forgetting all his troubles. 110

When the most splendid of the morning stars appeared,
 which always comes to herald light from early Dawn,
 the fast sea-faring ship was nearing Ithaca.
 Now, in that land, Phorcys, the Old Man of the Sea,
 has his harbour.¹ Two jutting headlands at its mouth
 drop off on the seaward side, but on the other,
 slope down to the cove and keep the place protected
 from massive waves whipped up by stormy winds at sea.
 In there well-timbered ships, once they reach the inlet,
 can ride without an anchor. At the harbour head,
 there is an olive tree with lengthy pointed leaves, 110 [100]
 and close beside it is a pleasant shady cave,
 sacred to the nymphs whom people call the Naiads.²
 Mixing bowls and jars of stone are stored inside,
 and bees make honey there. The cave has long stone looms
 where those nymphs weave cloth with a deep sea-purple dye,
 an amazing thing to see. In there, too, are springs
 which never cease to flow. It has two entrances—
 one, which faces North Wind, is the one people use [110]
 to go inside; the other, which faces South Wind, 130
 is sacred—human beings may not go in there,
 for the pathway is confined to the immortals.

¹Phorcys was an ancient god of the sea who produced large number of monster children. The title "Old Man of the Sea," the name given to Proteus in Menelaus's account of his adventures in Egypt (in Book 4), is applied here to Phorcys as well and elsewhere (in Book 24) to the sea god Nereus, father of the fifty Nereids, one of whom was Thetis, mother of Achilles.

²The Naiads are the nymph goddesses of fresh water, one of three classes of water nymphs (the others being the Nereids, nymphs of the sea, and the Oceanids, nymphs of the Ocean).

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They rowed in here, a place they knew about before.
Those rowers' arms had so much strength that half the boat,
which was moving quickly, was driven up on shore.
Once the crew had clambered from that well-built ship
onto dry land, first they carried off Odysseus,
lifting him out of the hollow ship still wrapped up
in the linen sheet and splendid blanket, placed him,
down on the sand, fast asleep, then brought ashore 140
the gifts Phaeacia's noblemen had given him, [120]
thanks to the goodwill of powerful Athena,
when he was setting out for home. They put these gifts
against the trunk of the olive tree, in a pile,
some distance from the path, in case someone came by,
before Odysseus could wake up, stumbled on them,
and robbed him. Then the Phaeacians set off for home.

But the Shaker of the Earth had not forgotten
those threats he once made against godlike Odysseus.
So he asked Zeus what plan he had in mind:

“Father Zeus, 150
the immortal gods will honour me no more,
for these men pay me no respect at all,
these Phaeacians, who, as you well know, [130]
are my descendants.¹ For I clearly said
Odysseus should suffer much misfortune
before he made it home. I'd not rob him
of his return completely, once you'd made
that promise and confirmed it with a nod.
But these men carried him, while still asleep,
over the sea in their swift ship, set him 160
in Ithaca, and gave him countless gifts—
bronze and gold and piles of woven clothing,
more than Odysseus ever would have got
at Troy, if he'd come safely back, bringing
his fair share of battle trophies with him.”

Cloud-gatherer Zeus then gave Poseidon this reply:

“Mighty Earthshaker, what strange things you say! 140
The gods aren't treating you with disrespect.

¹The Phaeacians, according to legend, stem from Pheax, a son of Poseidon, or from Nausithous, father of Alcinous, also a son of Poseidon.

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To dishonour the oldest and the best
would be hard to bear. But if any man,
seduced by his importance and his power,
fails to honour you somehow, it's up to you
to take vengeance later. Do what you want,
what gives your heart delight." 170

Earthshaker Poseidon
then answered Zeus:

"Lord of the Dark Cloud,
I would have quickly done as you've just said,
but I was afraid you might be angry,
and that I wanted to avoid. But now,
I wish to strike a blow at those Phaeacians,
at their splendid ship, as it sails back home,
after its trip across the misty seas, 180 [150]
so they will stop and never more provide
an escort carrying mortal beings.
Then all around their city I'll throw up
a massive mountain range."

Cloud-gatherer Zeus
then answered him and said:

"Brother, listen
to what my heart thinks best—when all of them
are in the city gazing at that boat
speeding on its way, turn it into stone
close to the shore, a rock that looks just like 190
a racing ship—all men will be amazed.
Then raise a ring of mountains round their town."

When Earthshaker Poseidon heard these words, he left
and went to Scheria, home of the Phaeacians. [160]
There he waited. As their sea-faring ship approached,
moving quickly on her course, Earthshaker came up
and turned it into stone. With the palm of his hand
he hit it once and from below froze it in place.
Then Poseidon went away. Long-oared Phaeacians,
men famous for their ships, spoke to one another— 200
their words had wings. Looking at the man beside him,
one of them would say:

“Who has transformed our ship
out at sea as she was racing homeward,
and in plain sight of all?”

That’s what they said. [170]
But they did not understand why this had happened.
Then Alcinous addressed them all and said:

“Alas!
The prophecies my father used to make
so long ago have come to pass. He said
we were going to rouse Poseidon’s rage,
because we escort all men in safety. 210
He claimed that one day, as a splendid ship
of the Phaeacians was returning home,
after a convoy on the misty seas,
Poseidon would strike her and then throw up
a huge mountain range around our city.
That’s what the old man said. And now all this
is taking place. But come, let all of you
attend to what I say. You must now stop [180]
escorting strangers when a mortal man
comes to our city. And let’s sacrifice 220
twelve choice bulls as offerings to Poseidon,
so he’ll take pity and not ring our city
with a lofty mountain range.”

Alcinous spoke.
They were all afraid, so they prepared the bulls,
and the counsellors and leaders of Phaeacians,
standing by the altar, prayed to lord Poseidon.

Meanwhile, brave Odysseus, asleep in his own land,
woke up. He did not recognize just where he was.
He had been away so long, and Pallas Athena, [190]
Zeus’s daughter, had cast a mist around him, 230
to make him hard for people to identify,
so she could tell him every detail, while his wife,
his townsfolk, and his friends would not know who he was,
until the suitors’ crimes had all been paid in full.
And so all things seemed unfamiliar to their king,
the long straight paths, the harbour with safe anchorage,
the sheer-faced stony cliffs, the trees in rich full bloom.
So he jumped up and looked out at his native land.

He groaned aloud and struck his thighs with both his palms,
and then cried out in sorrow:

“Where am I now? 240 [200]

Whose strange country have I come to this time?
Are they violent, unjust, and cruel,
or do they welcome strangers? Do their minds
respect the gods? And all this treasure here,
where do I take that? Where do I go next?
I wish I’d stayed with the Phaeacians there.
I could have visited another king
who would have welcomed me, then sent me off
on my way home. I’ve no idea now
where to put this wealth. I won’t leave it here, 250
in case somebody robs me and removes it
as his spoils. Alas! All those Phaeacians,
those counsellors and leaders, weren’t so wise [210]
or just—they led me to a foreign land.
They said they’d bring me to bright Ithaca,
but that’s not what they’ve done. I pray that Zeus,
god of suppliants, who watches everyone
and punishes the man who goes astray,
will pay them back. But come, I’ll count these gifts
and check them over, just in case these men 260
in their hollow ship have carried away
some property of mine.”

After saying this,

Odysseus examined his gifts—lovely tripods,
cauldrons, gold, and splendid clothing. It was all there.
Then, overwhelmed with longing for his native land,
he wandered on the shore beside the crashing sea, [220]
with many cries of grief. But then Athena came,
moving close to him in the form of a young man,
someone who herded sheep, but with a refined air
that marks the sons of kings. She wore a well-made cloak, 270
a double fold across her shoulders, and sandals
on her shining feet. In her hand she gripped a spear.
Odysseus, happy to catch sight of her, came up
and spoke to her—his words had wings:

“My friend,

since you’re the first one I’ve encountered here,
my greetings to you, and may you meet me

with no evil in your mind. Save these goods, [230]
 and rescue me. For I'm entreating you,
 the way I would a god, and I've come here
 begging you, like a dear friend at your knee. 280
 Tell me the truth, so I can understand—
 What country is this? Who are these people?
 Is it some sunny island or a cape
 jutting from the mainland out to sea?"

Athena, goddess with the gleaming eyes, replied:

"Stranger, you must be a fool, or else come
 from somewhere far away, if you must ask
 about this land. Its name is not unknown—
 not at all—many men have heard of it,
 all those who live in regions of the dawn 290 [240]
 and rising sun, as well as all who dwell
 towards the gloomy darkness in the west—
 a rugged place, not fit for herding horses,
 yet not too poor, although not very wide.
 There are countless crops and wine-bearing grapes.
 There is no lack of rain or heavy dew,
 a fine land for raising goats and cattle.
 There are all sorts of trees and water springs
 that last throughout the year. And so, stranger,
 Ithaca is well known, even in Troy, 300
 a long way from Achaean land, they say."

Athena spoke, and much-enduring lord Odysseus [250]
 felt great joy, happy to learn of his ancestral lands
 from what Pallas Athena said, daughter of Zeus,
 who bears the aegis. So he spoke winged words to her.
 He did not tell the truth, but left some things unsaid,
 always thinking devious thoughts inside his chest:

"I've heard of Ithaca, even in Crete,
 far across the sea. Now I have come here
 with these goods of mine. When I ran away, 310
 I left even more there with my children.
 I killed a dear son of Idomeneus,
 the swift Orsilochus—in spacious Crete [260]
 he was the fastest runner of all those

who have to work to earn the bread they eat.¹
 He wished to steal the spoils I'd won at Troy,
 for which my heart had gone through so much pain,
 facing men's wars and perils on the sea,
 because I would not gratify his father
 and serve as his attendant there in Troy, 320
 but led another group of my own men.
 As he was coming home, back from the fields,
 I lay in wait for him with my companions,
 close to the road. There with my bronze-tipped spear
 I struck him. Black night concealed the heavens,
 and no one noticed us or was aware [270]
 I took his life. Once my sharp bronze killed him,
 I ran off to a ship without delay,
 offered prizes to some fine Phoenicians,
 as much as they could wish, entreating them, 330
 pleading to be taken off to Pylos
 and left there, or else to lovely Elis,
 where Epeians rule. Much against their will,
 the power of the winds drove them off course.
 They did not wish to cheat me, but were blown
 away from there and sailed in here at night.
 We quickly rowed into this anchorage.
 Although we needed food, we never thought [280]
 of dinner—we just stretched out where we were.
 I was so tired, sweet sleep fell over me. 340
 They took my goods out of the hollow ship
 and piled them right beside me on the shore.
 Then they went back on board and sailed away
 for bustling Sidon, leaving me behind
 with all these troubles in my heart."

Odysseus finished.

Bright-eyed Athena smiled and stroked him with her hand.
 Then she changed herself into a lovely woman,
 tall and very skilled in creating splendid things.
 She spoke to him—her words had wings: [290]

"Any man,
 or even a god who ran into you, 350
 would have to be a cunning charlatan

¹In the *Iliad* Idomeneus, leader of the forces from Crete, is a major ally and a senior leader among the Achaean troops fighting against the Trojans.

to surpass your different kinds of trickery.
 You are bold and make complicated plans.
 You love deceit. Now, back in your own land,
 it does not seem that you intend to stop
 your lies or making up those artful tales,
 which you love from the bottom of your heart.
 But come, let's no longer talk about this,
 for we both understand what shrewdness means.
 Of all men you're the best in making plans 360
 and giving speeches, and among all gods
 I'm well known for subtlety and wisdom.
 Still, you failed to recognize Athena, [300]
 daughter of Zeus, who's always at your side,
 looking out for you in every crisis.
 Yes, I made all those Phaeacians love you.
 Now I have come to weave a scheme with you
 and hide these goods Phaeacian noblemen
 offered as you were setting out for home,
 thanks to my plans and what I had in mind. 370
 I'll tell you what Fate has in store for you.
 You'll find harsh troubles in your well-built home.
 Be patient, for you must endure them all.
 Don't tell anyone, no man or woman,
 you have returned from wandering around.
 Instead, keep silent. Bear the many pains.
 When men act like savages, do nothing." [310]

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

"Goddess, it's difficult for any man
 to recognize you when you come to him, 380
 even if he's truly wise, for you appear
 in any shape you wish. But I know well
 that in years past you have been kind to me,
 when we sons of Achaea fought in Troy.
 But when we'd ransacked Priam's lofty town
 and sailed off in our ships and then some god
 scattered the Achaeans, I never saw you,
 daughter of Zeus. I did not notice you
 coming aboard our ship to keep me safe
 from danger. So I kept on wandering, 390 [320]
 my heart always divided in my chest,
 until the gods delivered me from harm.
 Then, in the rich land of the Phaeacians,

your words encouraged me, and you yourself
 led me to their city. Now I beg you,
 in your father's name, for I don't believe
 I've come back to sunny Ithaca. No.
 I'm at a loose end in some other land,
 and you're attempting to confuse my mind.
 So tell me truly if I have arrived
 on my dear native soil."

400

Then Athena,
 the bright-eyed goddess, answered him:

"That heart in your chest
 always thinks this way. And that's the reason
 I can't abandon you. You're so polite,
 astute, and cautious. Any other man
 who'd just come back from wandering around
 would have been eager to run home to see
 his wife and children. But you're in no rush
 to learn about or hear of anything,
 before you can observe your wife yourself.
 She's still living in her home, as before—
 her nights and days always end in sorrow,
 and she weeps. As for me, I had no doubts,
 for my heart always knew you'd get back home,
 although your comrades would all be destroyed.
 But you should know I had no wish to fight
 against Poseidon, my father's brother,
 who bears anger in his heart against you,
 enraged that you destroyed his dear son's eye.
 But come, I'll demonstrate to you this land
 is Ithaca, so you'll be reassured.
 This anchorage here belongs to Phorcys,
 the Old Man of the Sea. At the harbour
 stands the long-leaved olive tree. Beside it
 is the pleasant, shadowy cave, sacred
 to those nymphs the people call the Naiads.
 This, you must know, is the arching cavern
 where you made many sacrificial gifts
 to those same nymphs to grant you what you asked.
 And there is forested Mount Neriton."

[330]

410

[340]

420

[350]

430

As the goddess said these words, she dispersed the mist.
 Once the land was visible to him, Odysseus,

who had endured so much, overjoyed to see it,
kissed the fertile ground. Then, stretching out his arms
towards the nymphs, he prayed:

“You Naiad nymphs,
Zeus’s daughters, I thought I’d never catch
a glimpse of you again. Now I greet you
with loving prayers. I’ll give gifts, as well,
as I have done for you in former days,
if Zeus’s daughter who awards the spoils
will in her goodness let me stay alive
and help my dear son grow into a man.”

440
[360]

Athena, the bright-eyed goddess, then said to him:

“Be brave, and don’t weigh down your heart with this.
Now, let’s not wait, but put away these goods
in some dark recess of this sacred cave,
where they’ll stay safely stored inside for you.
And then let’s think about how all these things
may turn out for the best.”

After saying this,
goddess Athena went in the shadowy cave
and looked around for hiding places. Odysseus
brought in all the treasures—enduring bronze and gold
and finely woven clothes, gifts from the Phaeacians.
He stored these carefully, and Pallas Athena,
child of aegis-bearing Zeus, set a rock in place
to block the entranceway.

450
[370]

Then the two of them
sat down by the trunk of the sacred olive tree
to think of ways to kill those insolent suitors.
Athena, bright-eyed goddess, was the first to speak:

“Resourceful Odysseus, son of Laertes,
and child of Zeus, think how your hands may catch
these shameless suitors, who for three years now
have been lording it inside your palace,
wooing your godlike wife and offering her
their marriage gifts. She longs for your return.
Although her heart is sad, she feeds their hopes,

460
[380]

by giving each man hints he may prevail.
But her mind is filled with other matters.”

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

“Goddess, if you had not told me all this, 470
I would have shared the fate of Agamemnon,
son of Atreus, death in my own home.
Come, weave a plan so I can pay them back.
Stand in person by my side, and fill me
with indomitable courage, as you did
when we loosed the bright diadem of Troy.
I pray, goddess with the glittering eyes,
that you are with me now as eagerly [390]
as you were then. If so, then I would fight 480
three hundred men, if you, mighty goddess,
in your heart are willing to assist me.”

Gleaming-eyed goddess Athena then answered him:

“You can be certain I will stand by you.
I won’t forget you when the trouble starts.
I think the brains and blood of many suitors
who consume your livelihood will spatter
this wide earth. But come, I will transform you,
so that no one here will recognize you.
I’ll wrinkle the fine skin on your supple limbs,
change the dark colour on that head of hair, 490
and dress you in rags that would make you cringe [400]
to see on anyone. As for your eyes,
so striking up to now, I’ll make them dim.
To all those suitors you’ll appear disgusting,
and to the wife and son you left at home.
Then you must go first to see the swineherd,
who tends your pigs. He’s well disposed to you
and loves your son and wise Penelope.
You’ll find him keeping his swine company
where they feed by Corax Rock, near the spring 500
of Arethusa, drinking its dark stream
and eating lots of acorns, which make pigs [410]
grow rich in fat. Stay there and sit with him.
If you have questions, just ask the swineherd.
I’ll go to Sparta, land of lovely women,
and there, Odysseus, I will summon back

your dear son, Telemachus, who has gone
to spacious Lacedaemon, to the home
of Menelaus, to hear news of you,
to learn if you are still alive somewhere.”¹

510

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

“Why did you not tell him, since in your mind
you know all things? What was your intention—
that he’d run into hardships on his trip
across the restless seas, while other men
were eating up his livelihood?”

Athena,
goddess with the glittering eyes, then said to him:

[420]

“Don’t worry in your heart about your son.
I sent him off myself, so he might earn
a well-known reputation going there.
He’s not in trouble, but sits there in peace,
in the home of the son of Atreus,
with countless splendid things surrounding him.
It’s true some young men out in a black ship
are lying in ambush, keen to kill him
before he gets back to his native land,
but I don’t think that’s what will come about.
Before that happens, earth will cover up
the many suitors who consume your goods.”

520

As she said this, Athena touched him with her staff.
She wrinkled the fine smooth skin on his supple limbs
and took the dark hair from his head. His arms and legs
she covered with an old man’s ancient flesh and dimmed
his eyes, which earlier had been so beautiful.
She dressed him in different clothes—a ragged cloak,
a dirty tunic, tattered, dishevelled, and stained
with stinking smoke. Then around his shoulders she threw
a large hairless hide from a swift deer and gave him
a long staff and shabby leather pouch, full of holes,
with a twisted strap.

530

[430]

¹Lacedaemon is another name for Sparta.

BOOK THIRTEEN

When the two of them
had made their plans, they parted, and Athena went
to Lacedaemon to bring back Odysseus' son.

540

[440]

BOOK FOURTEEN
ODYSSEUS MEETS EUMAEUS

[Odysseus leaves the harbour and moves inland to the farm of Eumaeus, the swineherd; Eumaeus welcomes Odysseus and prepares a meal for him; Eumaeus talks about his absent master; Odysseus assures Eumaeus that his master will return, but Eumaeus does not believe him; Odysseus tells Eumaeus a long made-up story about his identity and his adventures in Egypt and elsewhere, telling him he heard news of Odysseus's return; Eumaeus still does not believe him; the other swineherds arrive; Eumaeus prepares a sacrifice and another meal; Odysseus tells another story about an incident in the Trojan War; Eumaeus prepares a bed for Odysseus, then goes outside to guard the boars.]

Odysseus left the harbour, taking the rough path
into the woods and across the hills, to the place
where Athena told him he would meet the swineherd,
who was, of all the servants lord Odysseus had,
the one who took greatest care of his possessions.
He found him sitting in the front part of his home,
a built-up courtyard with a wide extensive view,
a large, handsome place, with cleared land all around it.
The swineherd built it by himself to house the pigs,
property belonging to his absent master.

10

He had not told his mistress or old Laertes.

He made it from huge stones, with a thorn hedge on top
and surrounded on the outside with close-set stakes
facing both directions, made by splitting oaks trees
to leave the dark heart of the wood. Inside the yard,
to hold in the pigs, he packed twelve sties together.
In each of these fifty wallowing swine were penned,
sows for breeding. The boars, in a much smaller group,
stayed outside. The feasting of the noble suitors
kept their numbers low, for the swineherd always sent
the finest of all fattened hogs for them to eat.

[10]

20

There were three hundred and sixty boars there—four dogs,
fierce as wild animals, always crouched beside them.

[20]

These the swineherd, a splendid man, had raised himself.
He was trimming off a piece of coloured ox-hide,
shaping sandals for his feet. Three of his fellows
had gone off, herding pigs in different places.
He had had to send a fourth man to the city,
taking a boar to be butchered for the suitors,
so they could feast on meat, as much as they desired.

30

BOOK FOURTEEN

All of a sudden, the dogs observed Odysseus.
They howled and ran at him, barking furiously. [30]
Odysseus was alert enough to drop his staff
and sit. Still, he could have been severely injured
in his own farmyard, but the swineherd ran up fast
right behind them, dropping the leather in his hands.
Hurrying through the gate and shouting at his dogs,
he scattered them in a hail of stones here and there.
Then he spoke out to his master, saying:

“Old man,
those dogs would’ve ripped at you in no time, 40
and then you would’ve heaped the blame on me.
Well, I’ve got other troubles from the gods,
things to grieve about. For as I stay here,
raising fat pigs for other men to eat,
I’m full of sorrow for my noble master, [40]
who’s probably going hungry someplace else,
as he wanders through the lands and cities
where men speak a foreign tongue, if, in fact,
he’s still alive, looking at the sunlight.
But follow me, old man. Come in the hut. 50
When you have had enough to eat and drink
and your heart’s satisfied, you can tell me
where you come from, what hardships you’ve endured.”

With these words, the loyal swineherd entered the hut,
brought Odysseus in, and invited him to sit,
after piling some leafy twigs and, over them,
spreading out the rough shaggy skin of a wild goat, [50]
the large and hairy hide which covered his own bed.
Odysseus was glad to get this hospitality,
so he addressed the swineherd, saying:

“Stranger, 60
may Zeus and other gods who live forever
give what you truly want—you’ve welcomed me
with such an open heart.”

Then, swineherd Eumaeus,
you answered him and said:¹

“It would be wrong,
stranger, for me to disrespect a guest,
even if one worse off than you arrived,
for every guest and beggar comes from Zeus,
and any gift from people like ourselves,
though small, is welcome. It’s the fate of slaves
to always fear young masters who control them. 70 [60]
The gods are holding up the journey home
of the man who would have loved me kindly
and given me possessions of my own,
a home, a plot of land, a wedded wife
worthy of being wooed by many suitors,
the sorts of things a generous master gives
a servant who has toiled so hard for him,
whose work the gods have helped to thrive and grow,
the way the tasks I put my mind to here
have prospered. If my master was at home 80
and growing old, he would have given me
so many presents. But he has perished.
How I wish all of Helen’s relatives
had been knocked to their knees and lost their lives—
for she brought death to many fighting men.
He went to Troy, famous for its horses, [70]
to carry out revenge for Agamemnon
by fighting Trojans.”

After saying this,
Eumaeus quickly cinched the belt around his tunic,
left the hut for the pens where the young pigs were held, 90
selected two from there, brought them in, and killed them.
He singed and cut them up, then skewered them on spits.
When they were completely roasted, he picked them up
and, without taking out the spits, brought them, still hot,
over to Odysseus. On top of them he spread
white barley meal. Then in a bowl of ivy wood
he mixed wine sweet as honey. That done, he sat down
opposite Odysseus, inviting him to dine:

¹Here the narrator makes an unexpected shift and addresses one of the characters in person (“you”), suggesting a certain closeness between the narrator and the character. While this is not common in Homer, it does occur several times (e.g., with Menelaus in the *Iliad*).

“Eat now, stranger, what a servant offers, [80]
 meat from a young pig, for the suitors take 100
 the fatted hogs. Their hearts have no compassion,
 and they never think about gods’ anger.
 The truth is this—the blessed gods don’t love
 men’s reckless acts. No. They honour justice
 and men’s righteousness. Even enemies
 with cruel intentions can invade the lands
 of someone else, and Zeus awards them spoils.
 They fill their ships and then sail off for home.
 And even in the hearts of men like these
 falls a great fear of vengeance from the gods. 110
 But these suitors here, I think, know something—
 they have heard a voice from one of the gods
 about my master’s painful death. That’s why [90]
 they do not wish to have a proper courtship
 or to go back to their homes. Instead,
 without a care they waste our property
 in all their insolence, sparing nothing.
 For every day and night Zeus sends, they kill
 our animals, and not just one or two,
 and, with their arrogance, they draw our wine, 120
 taking what they want—sometimes even more.
 My master used to be a man of substance,
 beyond all measure. No warrior hero
 in Ithaca itself or on the mainland
 possessed what he did. Twenty men combined
 did not have so much wealth. I’ll tell you this—
 on the mainland he’s got twelve cattle herds, [100]
 as many flocks of sheep and droves of pigs
 and wide-ranging herds of goats, all of these
 tended by foreign herdsmen or his own. 130
 And here, on the edges of this island,
 graze roaming herds of goats, eleven in all,
 with loyal servants guarding every one.
 To supply the suitors, all these herdsmen
 keep bringing in more creatures from their flocks,
 the fattest ones which seem to them the best.
 That always happens, each and every day.
 As for me, I protect and raise these pigs.
 I choose with care and then deliver them
 the finest of the boars.”

BOOK FOURTEEN

Eumaeus finished. 140
Meanwhile Odysseus eagerly devoured the meat
and drank the wine in silence. He was ravenous. [110]
He was also sowing troubles for the suitors.
Once he had eaten his heart's fill and had enough,
Eumaeus filled the bowl from which he drank himself
and gave it to him full of wine. Odysseus took it,
rejoicing in his heart, and spoke winged words to him:

“My friend, who was the man who used his wealth
to purchase you? Was he rich and powerful,
as you've just said? You claim he was destroyed 150
helping Agamemnon get his revenge.
Tell me. I may know him, a man like that.
Zeus and the rest of the immortal gods
know if I've seen him or heard any news.
For I've been travelling a lot.” [120]

Then Eumaeus,
a worthy man, answered him and said:

“Old man,
no wanderer who came with news of him
could convince his wife or his dear son.
Men who roam about, when they need a meal,
have no desire to speak the truth—they lie. 160
Whoever moves around and reaches here,
this land of Ithaca, goes to my mistress
with some made-up tale. She receives him well,
with hospitality, and questions him
about each detail. Then she starts to grieve,
and tears fall from her eyes, as is fitting
when a woman's husband dies far away. [130]
You too, old man, would make up a story
quickly enough, if someone offered you
a cloak and tunic—you need clothes to wear. 170
But by this time swift birds and dogs have ripped
the flesh from off his bones, and his spirit
has slipped away. Or else fish in the sea
have eaten him, and now his bones remain
somewhere on the shore, buried in deep sand.
Anyway, he died out there. From now on,
it is the fate of all his friends to grieve,
especially me—however far I go,

BOOK FOURTEEN

I'll never come across another man
who could match him as a gentle master, 180
not even if I went back home again
to where my mother and my father live, [140]
where I was born, where they reared me themselves.
I don't mourn for them so much, though I yearn
for these eyes of mine once more to see them
and be in my own native land again.
What grips me is a longing for Odysseus,
who is gone. Even though he is not here,
stranger, I speak his name with full respect.
His love for me was great, and in his heart 190
he cared. So although he may be absent,
I call him my dear master."

Odysseus,
that resourceful man, answered him and said:

"My friend,
since you are so firm in your denials,
when you declare he'll not come home again,
and your heart always clings to this belief, [150]
I won't tell you Odysseus will return—
no, I'll take an oath on it. When he comes,
when he gets back home, give me my reward
for my good news—let me have fine clothing, 200
a cloak and tunic. Until that moment,
there's nothing I'll accept, despite my need.
For just as I despise the gates of Hades,
I hate the man who, in his poverty,
tells stories which are lies. So now let Zeus,
the first of gods, this welcoming table,
and the hearth of excellent Odysseus,
which I have reached, let them all bear witness—
everything will happen the way I say— [160]
Odysseus will return within a month, 210
between the waning and the rising moons.
He'll get back home and take out his revenge
on anyone here who has not honoured
his wife and noble son."

Then, swineherd Eumaeus,
you gave him your reply and said:

“Old man,
 I won’t be rewarding you for that good news.
 Odysseus won’t be coming back. Drink up—
 and relax. Now, let’s talk of something else.
 I don’t want to remember all those things.
 The heart here in my chest fills up with grief, 220
 whenever someone mentions my good master. [170]
 So let’s forget about your oath. I wish
 Odysseus would come home—that’s what I want.
 So does Penelope, Laertes, too,
 the old man, and noble Telemachus.
 Right now I’m always grieving for the boy,
 the child Odysseus had, Telemachus.
 Immortal gods reared him like a sapling,
 and, as a man, I thought he’d be a match
 for his dear father, with a splendid shape 230
 and handsome. But one of the immortals
 warped his better judgment—perhaps it was
 some mortal being. He’s gone on a trip
 to sacred Pylos to learn any news
 about his father. Now noble suitors [180]
 lie in wait for him on his voyage home.
 And so the race of brave Arceisius
 will die without a name in Ithaca.¹
 But let’s just let him be—they may get him,
 or they may fail, if the son of Cronos 240
 holds out his hand to guard him. But come now,
 old man, describe for me what you’ve been through.
 Give me the truth, so I clearly understand—
 Who are you among men? Where are you from?
 Where is your city? Who are your parents?
 On what kind of ship did you travel here?
 How did sailors bring you to Ithaca?
 Who did they claim they were? For I don’t think [190]
 you reached this place on foot.”

Resourceful Odysseus
 then answered Eumaeus and said:

“All right, 250
 I’ll tell you the truth of what you’ve asked me.
 I wish we two had food and honey wine

¹Arceisius is the name of the father of Laertes and thus of Odysseus’s paternal grandfather.

to last a while, so we could feast in peace
 inside your hut, while others did the work.
 I could easily go on for one whole year
 and never finish talking of those things
 my heart has suffered, all the miseries
 I've endured, thanks to what the gods have willed.
 I claim my people come from spacious Crete.
 I am a rich man's child, and in his house 260
 several other sons were born and raised, [200]
 his legal children from his lawful wife.
 My mother was a purchased concubine.
 But still, Castor, son of Hylax, the man
 I claim as my own father, honoured me,
 just as he did his true-born sons. Back then,
 since he had wealth and land and worthy sons,
 the Cretans in the country looked on him
 as if he were a god. But lethal Fates
 sent him down to Hades, and his proud sons 270
 divided up his goods by drawing lots.
 They gave me a really tiny portion [210]
 and assigned a house. But I won a wife
 from people who had many rich estates,
 thanks to my courage—for I was no fool,
 nor was I a coward. Now all that strength
 has gone. A host of troubles wears me down.
 But by examining the husk, I think,
 you can assess the plant. Back then, Ares
 and Athena gave me strength and courage, 280
 the power to break ranks of men apart.
 Whenever I would choose the bravest men
 to set an ambush and put my enemies
 in peril, my proud spirit never sensed
 that I might die. I always jumped out first, [220]
 and my spear killed whatever enemy
 ran past me. That's the kind of man I was
 when it came to war. But I got no joy
 from working on the land or household chores,
 like raising lovely children. No. Instead, 290
 I always took pleasure in ships with oars
 and weapons—well polished shields and arrows—
 deadly things, so horrible to others.
 I think I loved those things because a god
 somehow set them in my heart. Different men
 find their delight in different kinds of work.

Before Achaea's sons set foot in Troy,
 I'd led fast ships and warriors nine times, [230]
 attacking troops from foreign lands, and won
 enormous quantities of loot. I'd take 300
 what I desired and later pile up more,
 when we drew lots. So my house soon grew rich,
 and Cretans honoured and respected me.
 When far-seeing Zeus planned that fatal trip
 which loosed the knees of many warriors,
 they asked me and famed Idomeneus
 to lead their ships to Troy. There was no way
 one could refuse—the people's voice insisted.
 So we Achaean sons fought there nine years, [240]
 and ransacked Priam's city in the tenth. 310
 We set out, sailing for home, but some god
 scattered the Achaeans. Counsellor Zeus
 devised some difficulties just for me,
 to make me miserable. I stayed at home,
 enjoying my children, the wife I'd married,
 and what I owned, for just a single month.
 Then my heart urged me to outfit some ships
 and sail to Egypt with my noble comrades.
 I manned nine ships. The fleet was soon prepared.
 My loyal shipmates feasted for six days— 320
 I gave them many beasts to sacrifice, [250]
 as offerings to the gods and to prepare
 a banquet for them. On the seventh day,
 we left wide Crete. North Wind provided us
 a stiff and welcome breeze, so we sailed on
 quite easily, like drifting down a stream.
 None of my ships was damaged, no one got sick
 or suffered harm, and we stayed in our seats,
 while wind and helmsman held us on our course.
 The fifth day we reached Egypt's mighty river, 330
 where I moored my curving ships. Then I told
 my loyal crew to stay there with the ships, [260]
 keeping watch on them, while I sent out scouts
 to find some places we could use as lookouts.
 But my men, overcome with arrogance,
 and trusting their own might, at once began
 to plunder the Egyptians' finest fields.
 They took their women and small children, too,
 and killed the men. Shouts soon reached the city,
 and, once they heard the noise, Egyptians came, 340

as daylight first appeared. The entire plain
 filled up with chariots and infantry,
 all flashing bronze. Zeus, who hurls the lightning,
 threw a nasty panic in my comrades,
 so no one dared to stay and face the fight.
 We were badly threatened from all quarters. [270]
 They slaughtered many men with their sharp bronze
 and took some alive. They wished to force us
 to do their work for them. Then Zeus himself
 put an idea inside my heart—but still, 350
 I wish I'd died and met my fate right there,
 in Egypt, since all sorts of troubles still
 lay waiting for me—I at once removed
 the finely crafted helmet from my head
 and the shield I had slung round my shoulders.
 My hand let go my spear, and I ran out
 straight to the king's chariot, clutched his knee,
 and kissed it. The king felt pity for me
 and spared my life. He set me in his chariot,
 and, as I wept, he took me to his home. 360 [280]
 Many of his men, armed with their ash spears,
 came after me—their anger was so great,
 they were all keen to kill me. But the king
 kept them in check—he wanted to respect
 the rage of mighty Zeus, god of strangers,
 who is especially irked at impious deeds.
 I remained there seven years, amassing
 wealth in huge amounts from those Egyptians,
 for they all gave me gifts. When the eighth year
 came wheeling in, a Phoenician man arrived, 370
 a greedy rogue who understood deceit.
 He'd already brought men lots of trouble.
 Well, he won me over with his cunning [290]
 and I travelled with him, until we reached
 his house and his possessions in Phoenicia.
 I remained there with him an entire year.
 But as the days and months kept passing by
 and yearly seasons rolled around once more,
 he put me on a ship to Libya,
 making up a false story of some scheme 380
 that he would be taking cargo with him,
 whereas, in fact, once we were there, he meant
 to sell me for an enormous profit.
 Though I was suspicious, I had to go

with him and board the ship. North Wind blew
 a fresh and welcome breeze, and we sailed off,
 on a mid-sea course, the windward side of Crete.¹ [300]
 Then Zeus planned the destruction of his men.
 When we sailed past Crete, we saw land no more,
 only sky and sea. The son of Cronos 390
 sent a black cloud above our hollow ship.
 Underneath the sea grew dark. All at once,
 Zeus thundered and then hurled a lightning flash
 down on our ship, which shook from stem to stern
 and filled with sulphur smoke, as Zeus's bolt
 came crashing down. The crew fell overboard
 and floated on the waves, like cormorants,
 past our black ship—the god then took away
 the day of their return. As for myself, [310]
 though anguish filled my heart, lord Zeus himself 400
 let me wrap my hands around the main mast
 from our black-prowed ship, so that once again
 I could escape destruction. I hung on,
 and was carried along by dreadful winds
 for nine full days. Then on the tenth dark night,
 a huge rolling wave threw me up on shore
 in Thesprotian land, and there the king,
 Pheidon, ruler of the Thesprotians,
 welcomed me, without demanding ransom.²
 When I'd been beaten down by weariness 410
 and freezing winds, his dear son had met me,
 helped me stand up again, and brought me home,
 to his father's palace. He gave me clothes— [320]
 a cloak and tunic. There I heard reports
 about Odysseus. For king Pheidon said
 he had welcomed him with entertainments,
 as he was returning home to Ithaca.
 He showed me what Odysseus had collected,
 all the bronze and gold and well-worked iron,
 so many riches stored in Pheidon's house, 420
 they'd feed ten generations after him.
 Odysseus, he said, was in Dodona,
 to hear from the huge towering oak tree,

¹This seems to mean that the ship passed along the northern coast of Crete, but the precise meaning is disputed.

²The Thesprotians lived in southern Epirus, a coastal region in north-west Greece, nowadays on the border with Albania.

sacred to the god, what great Zeus had willed
 about his own return to that rich land
 of Ithaca, after his long absence. [330]
 Should he go back there openly or not?¹
 As he poured libations in his palace,
 he swore to me a ship had been hauled down
 and a crew prepared to take Odysseus 430
 back to his native land. But before that,
 he sent me off, since, as it so happened,
 a ship manned with a crew of Thesprotians
 was sailing to Dulichium carrying corn.
 He ordered them to take me there, treating me
 with all due kindness, and deliver me
 to king Acastus. But those sailors' hearts
 were more attracted to a nasty scheme
 concerning me—and I would be reduced
 to abject poverty. So when the ship 440
 had sailed some distance from the land, they tried
 from that day forward to make me their slave. [340]
 They ripped away my clothes, cloak and tunic,
 and dressed me differently, a ragged cloak
 and filthy tunic torn to shreds, these here—
 the ones you see before your very eyes.
 They reached the fields of sunny Ithaca
 that very night. Inside that well-decked ship
 they tied me up with tightly twisted rope
 and went ashore, eager to eat a meal 450
 beside the sea. But the immortal gods
 with ease untied my bonds, and so I wrapped
 my rags around my head and slipped away
 down a smooth plank, chest first into the sea. [350]
 Then with both arms I paddled and swam off.
 I left the water far away from them
 and moved inland, where leafy bushes grew,
 and lay crouching down. They began to shout
 and wandered here and there. But then they thought
 there was no point in searching any more. 460
 So they went back on board their hollow ship.
 The gods themselves concealed me easily
 and led me on my way. They brought me here,

¹Dodona was a very ancient shrine in the interior of Epirus, sacred to Zeus and Dione. The centre of the oracle was an oak tree where doves nested, and interpretations were made of the noises coming from the leaves of the tree, the doves, and brass ornaments hung in the branches.

to the farmyard of a man who understands.
My fate, I think, is to continue living.”

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you answered him and said:

[360]

“Stranger, you’re unlucky. The tale you tell
has really touched my heart, all those ordeals
you’ve suffered, all the places where you roamed.
But I don’t think it’s all just as you said,
and the things you mentioned of Odysseus
do not convince me. Given who you are,
why must you include such pointless falsehoods?

470

I know that in my master’s journey home
he was totally despised by all the gods.
That’s why they didn’t kill him over there,
among the Trojans or in his comrades’ arms,
when he was done with war. For the Argives
would have made him a tomb—and for his son
he would have won great fame in days to come.
Now the spirits of the storm have snatched him,
and there’s no glory. As for me, I live
here among the pigs, far away from men.

480 [370]

I don’t go to the town, unless I’m called
to travel there by wise Penelope,
when a message reaches her from somewhere.
Then people sit around the man who’s come
and ask him questions about everything,
those who are still grieving for their ruler,
who’s been away so long, and other men
who delight in using up his livelihood
without paying anything. I don’t like
to investigate it or ask questions,
not since the day an Aetolian man
tricked me with his story. He’d killed someone.

490

[380]

After roaming around in many lands,
he reached my home, where I made him welcome.
He claimed he’d seen Odysseus in Crete,
Idomeneus’s home, repairing ships
damaged in a storm, vowing he’d return
by summer or before they harvest crops,
with his fine comrades, bringing treasure home.
And so you, you long-suffering old man,
since a spirit led you here, should not try
to cheer me up or secure my favour

500

by telling falsehoods. That's not the reason
I show you respect and give you welcome,
but because I pity you and fear Zeus,
the god of strangers."

Resourceful Odysseus [390]
answered Eumaeus with these words:

"That heart in your chest 510
is truly hard to sway. The oath I swore,
even those words did not influence you
or win you over. But come now, let's make
this promise—the gods who hold Olympus
will stand as witnesses for both of us
in days to come—if your master does get back
to his own home, you'll give me some clothing,
a cloak and tunic, and then send me off
to Dulichium, as my heart desires,
and if your master does not come the way 520
I say he will, then set your men on me,
have them throw me from a towering cliff,
so some other vagrant will be careful [400]
to avoid deception."

The splendid swineherd
then said in reply:

"Yes, stranger, what a way for me
to gather fame and fortune among men,
both now and in the future, to kill you,
steal your precious life, after bringing you
to my own hut and entertaining you!
I could later pray to Zeus, son of Cronos, 530
with a sincere heart. Now it's time to eat.
I hope my comrades will get here quickly,
so we can cook our meal here in the hut."

As these two were talking like this to each other,
the other herdsmen came up, bringing home their swine. [410]
They shut the sows up in their customary pens,
so they could sleep. The pigs gave out amazing squeals,
as they were herded in. Then the trusty swineherd
called out to his companions:

“Bring a boar in here,
 the best there is, so I can butcher it 540
 for this stranger from another country.
 We too will get some benefit from it,
 seeing we’ve worked so hard for a long time
 and gone through hardships for these white-tusked pigs,
 while others gorge themselves on our hard work
 without paying anything.”

Once he’d said this,
 with his sharp bronze axe he chopped up wood for kindling,
 while others led in a huge great boar, five years old,
 and stood it by the hearth. The swineherd’s heart was sound— [420]
 he did not neglect the gods and began the meal 550
 by throwing in the fire some bristles from the head
 of the white-tusked boar and uttering a prayer
 that wise Odysseus would get back to his own home.
 He raised his arm, and with a club made out of oak,
 which he’d left lying beside him, he struck the boar.
 Life left the beast. The other herdsmen slit its throat,
 singed its bristles, and, working quickly, carved it up.
 At first, the swineherd offered pieces of the meat
 from all the limbs, wrapped up in layers of rich fat.
 After sprinkling white barley meal all over these, 560
 he threw them in the fire. The others sliced the rest, [430]
 put it on spits, cooked it with care, drew it all off,
 and set out heaps of meat on platters. The swineherd,
 whose heart always concerned itself with what was fair,
 stood up to carve, and as he shared each piece of meat,
 he split the food in seven portions. With a prayer,
 he set one aside for Hermes, son of Maia,
 and for the nymphs. The rest he gave out equally,
 honouring Odysseus with a long cut from the back
 of the white-tusked boar. That pleased his master’s heart. 570
 Then adventurous Odysseus spoke to him and said:

“Eumaeus, may father Zeus treat you as well [440]
 as you are treating me with this boar’s chine,
 the very finest cut of meat, even though
 I’m just a beggar.”

Then, swineherd Eumaeus,
 you replied by saying:

“Eat, god-guided stranger,
and enjoy the kind of food we offer.
A god gives some things and holds others back,
as his heart prompts, for he can do all things.”

Eumaeus spoke and offered to eternal gods 580
the first pieces he had cut. He poured gleaming wine
as a libation, handed it to Odysseus,
sacker of cities, then sat to eat his portion.
Mesaulius passed around the bread, a servant
Eumaeus purchased on his own, when his master [450]
was away from home. He’d not informed his mistress
or old man Laertes. He had acquired the slave
from Taphians, using resources of his own.¹
So they stretched out their hands to the generous meal
set out in front of them. Once they enjoyed their fill 590
of food and drink, and each man’s heart was quite content,
Mesaulius took away their food. They had eaten
so much bread and meat, they were eager for some rest.

Night came on, bringing stormy winds. There was no moon.
And Zeus sent blustery West Wind blowing in with rain,
a relentless downpour all night long. Odysseus
spoke to them, testing Eumaeus, to find out if,
given the hospitality he had offered,
he’d take off his cloak and give it to Odysseus, [460]
or would urge one of his comrades to give up his. 600

“Eumaeus and you others, his work mates,
hear me now—I wish to tell a story,
prompted by this wine, which addles our wits.
Wine can make a man, even though he’s wise,
sing out loud, or laugh softly to himself,
or leap up and dance. It can bring out words
which were better left unspoken. But still,
since I’ve begun to talk, I’ll hide nothing.
I wish I were as young, my strength as firm,
as when we were setting up an ambush 610
and leading men to it below Troy’s walls,
led by Menelaus, son of Atreus, [470]
and by Odysseus—and they had ordered

¹The Taphians lived on a cluster of islands in the Ionian Sea. In Book 1 of the *Odyssey*, when Athena visits Telemachus in Ithaca (1.138), she takes on the form of Mentès, son of the king of the Taphians.

that I was to be the third man in command.
 When we reached the steep walls of the city,
 we lay down in thick bushes round the place,
 crouching with our weapons in swampy reeds.
 A nasty night came on. North Wind dropped off,
 and it was freezing cold. Snow fell on us,
 like frost from high above, bitterly cold. 620
 Our shields were caked with ice. Now, the others
 all wore cloaks and tunics, and could rest there
 quite easily, shields across their shoulders.
 But when I'd set out, like a fool I'd left 630
 my own cloak behind with my companions,
 Not thinking I might feel cold without it,
 I'd only brought my tunic and my shield. [480]
 Well, when it was the third watch of the night
 and the stars had shifted their positions,
 I spoke to Odysseus, who was close by. 630
 When my elbow nudged him, he was all ears,
 instantly prepared to listen:

'Odysseus,
 you resourceful man, son of Laertes
 and child of Zeus, I won't be here for long,
 not among the living. Instead, this cold
 will kill me off—for I don't have a cloak.
 Some spirit deluded me, made me come
 with just a tunic. Now there's no way out.'

That is what I said. In his heart he had a plan— 640
 that's the kind of man he was for scheming [490]
 or for fighting war. With a quiet whisper,
 he spoke to me:

'Keep silent for the moment,
 in case one of our Achaeans hears you.'

Then he propped his head up on his elbow,
 and spoke out, saying:

'Listen to me, friends.
 As I slept here, a dream sent from the gods
 came to me. We've moved a long way forward,
 too far from our ships. I would like someone
 to tell Agamemnon, son of Atreus,

a shepherd of his people, in the hope
he'd tell more men to come out from the fleet.¹ 650

Once he'd said this, Thoas jumped up quickly,
Andraemon's son. He threw off his purple cloak [500]
and ran off to the ships. I grabbed the cloak
and was quite happy to crouch down again.
Then early Dawn arose on her golden throne.
I wish I were as young as I was then,
and my strength as firm. Then in this farmyard,
some swineherd would give me a cloak to wear,
from kindness and respect for a brave man. 660
But now, with filthy clothing on my skin,
I receive no honours.²

Then, swineherd Eumaeus,
you answered him and said:

“Old man, that story
you just told us is all right—you've spoken
very clearly and told us what you want.
You won't lack clothes or any other thing [510]
a long-suffering suppliant should get
from those he meets, at least for this cold night.
When morning comes you'll have to dance around
in those rags of yours. We don't have many cloaks
or other tunics. We've each got just one. 670
But when Odysseus's dear son arrives,
he'll give you some clothes, a cloak and tunic,
and send you where your heart desires to go.”

After saying this, he jumped up and placed a bed
for Odysseus near the fire. On the bed he threw
some skins from sheep and goats. Odysseus lay down there. [520]
Eumaeus covered him up with a huge thick cloak,
which he kept as a change of clothing in the hut,
something to wear whenever a great storm blew in. 680

¹Something seems awry with this speech, since we are given no details of what the dream might have been, and the rest has no apparent connection to a dream.

²The last lines of this speech (598-602) have long been rejected by many critics, since they obviously destroy the point of the story by making an explicit request at the end, rather than displaying a clever hint.

BOOK FOURTEEN

So Odysseus went to sleep there, and the young men
slept around him. But Eumaeus had no desire
to have his bed indoors and sleep so far away
from all his boars. So he prepared to go outside.
Odysseus was pleased the swineherd took such trouble
with his master's goods while he was absent far away.
First, Eumaeus slung a sharp sword from his shoulder
and wrapped a thick woollen cloak around his body,
to protect him from the wind. He took a huge fleece
from a well-nourished goat and grabbed a pointed spear
to warn off dogs and men. And then he left the hut,
going to lie down and rest where the white-tusked boars
slept beneath a hollow rock, sheltered from the wind.

[530]

690

BOOK FIFTEEN
TELEMACHUS RETURNS TO ITHACA

[Pallas Athena visits Sparta to urge Telemachus to return home, tells him to visit Eumaeus, the swineherd, when he gets back; Telemachus tells Menelaus he'd like to leave; Menelaus and Helen give gifts and a farewell banquet; they receive a favourable omen before leaving; Helen interprets the omen; Telemachus and Peisistratus leave Sparta and reach Pylos; Telemachus asks Peisistratus to leave him at his ship, so that Nestor won't delay his return; Peisistratus agrees; a stranger arrives, Theoclymenus, a descendant of the prophet Melampus, and asks for passage on Telemachus's ship; Telemachus agrees, and they sail for Ithaca; Odysseus and Eumaeus feast in the hut; Odysseus asks Eumaeus about his parents, and Eumaeus tells him; Eumaeus tells the story of how he got to Ithaca and was sold to Laertes; Telemachus lands in Ithaca and tells the crew to take the ship on without him; Theoclymenus interprets a bird omen; Telemachus walks to Eumaeus's farmyard.]

Pallas Athena went to spacious Lacedaemon,
to remind the noble son of brave Odysseus
about going home and to urge him to return.
She found Telemachus and Nestor's noble son
lying on the portico, resting in their beds,
inside the palace of splendid Menelaus.
A calming sleep had overpowered Nestor's son,
but for Telemachus no soothing sleep had come—
because deep in his heart through that immortal night
anxious thoughts about his father kept him awake.

10

Bright-eyed Athena stood beside him and spoke out:

“Telemachus, it's not good to wander
much longer from your home, abandoning
your property and leaving in your house
such overbearing men, who may divide
and use up all your goods. Then this journey
you have undertaken will be pointless.
You must, with all speed, urge Menelaus,
expert at war shouts, to let you go back,
so you can find your noble mother there,
still at home. Her father and her brothers
have already told her she should marry
brave Eurymachus—he offers her more
than other suitors. Now he's intending
to give even more as wedding presents.
Take care she does not carry from the house
some property, without your knowing it.

[10]

20

BOOK FIFTEEN

You understand what sort of spirit lies [20]
inside a woman's chest. She wants to help
the household of the man who marries her 30
and no longer thinks about her children
or her previous husband whom she loved.
Now he's dead, she doesn't ask about him.
You should go yourself and entrust your goods
to the female slave you think most worthy,
until the gods show you a splendid bride.
I'll tell you something else—take it to heart.
The bravest of the suitors lie in wait,
enough to set an ambush, in the straits
between Ithaca and rugged Samos. 40
Before you get back to your native land, [30]
they mean to murder you. But in my view,
that won't be happening. Before it does,
the earth will cover many of those men
who are consuming all your livelihood.
You must choose a course for your well-built ship
far from the islands, and keep on sailing
day and night. One of the immortal gods
who's watching over and protecting you
will make sure that you have favouring winds. 50
As soon as you set foot in Ithaca,
send your companions and the ship ahead,
on to the city—you yourself should go
to see the man who nourishes your pigs.
He is very well disposed towards you.
Spend the night there in his hut. And tell him [40]
to travel to the city and bring news
to wise Penelope that you are safe
and have returned from Pylos."

Athena spoke.

Then she moved away, going back to high Olympus. 60
With his foot Telemachus prodded Nestor's son
and roused him from sweet sleep. Then he spoke to him:

"Wake up, Peisistratus, son of Nestor.
Bring your well-shod horses here, and yoke them
to the chariot. We'll soon be on our way."

Peisistratus, Nestor's son, then replied and said:

BOOK FIFTEEN

“No matter how keen you may be to leave,
Telemachus, there’s no way we can ride
in this pitch-black night. Dawn will soon be here. [50]
So let’s wait until brave Menelaus, 70
son of Atreus, that famous spearman,
brings our gifts and puts them in the chariot,
then sends us off with a warm farewell speech.
A guest remembers all his life the man
who gave him hospitality and kindness.”

He spoke. Early Dawn appeared on her golden throne,
and lord Menelaus, expert in battle shouts,
rose up from the bed beside his fair-haired Helen
and came to see his guests. When he caught sight of him,
Odysseus’ dear son quickly put a tunic on, 80 [60]
slung a heavy cloak across his sturdy shoulders,
and left his room. He came up to Menelaus
and spoke to him, saying:

“Menelaus,
son of Atreus and cherished of Zeus,
leader of your people, send me back now
to my native land, for my heart is keen
to get back home.”

Then Menelaus,
expert at war cries, answered him:

“Telemachus,
I will not detain you here a long time,
not if you’re eager to return. I’d blame 90
another man who, as a host, provides [70]
too much hospitality or not enough.
It’s far better to show moderation.
It’s bad when someone does not want to leave
to be too quick to send him on his way,
but just as bad is holding someone back
when he’s ready to depart. For a host
should welcome any guest in front of him
and send away the one who wants to go.
But stay until I bring some fine gifts here 100
and set them in your chariot, where your eyes
can see them, and I can tell the women
to prepare a meal inside the palace

from the plentiful supply of food there.
 For a traveller to feast before he leaves
 to journey on the wide unbounded earth
 brings double benefits—it gives him help
 and gives me fame and honour. If you wish
 to go through Hellas and middle Argos, [80]
 then I'll accompany you in person.¹ 110
 I'll have a team of horses harnessed for you,
 and I'll escort you to men's cities there.
 Not one of them will send us from their town
 without insisting we accept a gift,
 a beautiful bronze tripod or a cauldron,
 a pair of mules or goblet made of gold."

Prudent Telemachus then answered him and said:

"Lord Menelaus, son of Atreus,
 child of Zeus, and leader of your people,
 I wish to get back home without delay— 120
 when I left there I did not leave behind
 anyone to protect my property.
 As I keep searching for my noble father, [90]
 I hope I don't get killed or in my home
 have men rob me of my fine possessions."

When Menelaus, skilled in war cries, heard these words,
 he quickly advised his wife and her attendants
 to gather some of the abundant food they stored
 and prepare a farewell feast. Then Etoneus,
 son of Boethous, came up to Menelaus— 130
 he lived close by and had just risen from his bed.
 Menelaus, skilled at war shouts, instructed him
 to get a fire started and to roast some meat.
 Once Etoneus heard, he did what he'd been asked.
 Menelaus went down to his fragrant storage room—
 not by himself, for Helen and Megapenthes [100]
 went with him as well. Once they reached the places
 where he stored his treasure, the son of Atreus
 selected a two-handled cup and told his son,
 Megapenthes, to take a silver mixing bowl. 140

¹This invitation from Menelaus seems to involve a detour on the journey back so as to include a trip through the northern Peloponnese. However, the terms Hellas and Argos in Homer are often very imprecise and ambiguous.

BOOK FIFTEEN

Helen went over to the storage chests which held
the richly woven garments she herself had made.
Then Helen, goddess among women, picked out one,
the largest and most beautifully embroidered—
it lay below the others, shining like a star.
Helen carried away this robe, and they returned,
back through the house, until they reached Telemachus.
Fair-haired Menelaus spoke to him:

[110]

“Telemachus,
may Zeus, Hera’s loud-thundering husband,
accomplish the return your heart desires.
Of all the treasured gifts stored in my home,
I’ll give you the one with highest value
and the loveliest—I’ll present to you
this finely crafted mixing bowl. It’s made
entirely of silver and its rims
are plated gold. Hephaestus crafted it.
Warrior Phaedimus, the Sidonian king,
presented it to me on my way home,
when his house gave me shelter. Now I’d like
to send it back with you.”

150

Menelaus spoke.
Then the son of Atreus handed Telemachus
the two-handled cup, and mighty Megapenthes
carried in the mixing bowl of shining silver
and set it down before him, and fair-cheeked Helen,
standing beside him with the fine robe in her hands,
spoke to Telemachus and said:

160

[120]

“My dear child,
I’m giving you this gift as a reminder
of Helen, something made by her own hands.
Your bride can wear it on her wedding day,
something to look forward to. Until then,
let it remain in your dear mother’s room.
As for you, I wish you a joyful journey
back to your well-built home and native land.”

170

With these words, Helen placed the garment in his hands.
Telemachus was delighted to receive the dress.
Noble Peisistratus took the gifts and packed them
in a box stored in the chariot, gazing at them

[130]

BOOK FIFTEEN

with wonder in his heart. Fair-haired Menelaus
escorted them inside the house, where they sat down
on stools and chairs. A female servant carried in 180
a beautiful gold jug and poured some water out
into a silver basin, so they could rinse their hands,
then placed a polished table beside each of them.
The worthy housekeeper then carried in some bread
and set it down before them, with platters of meat,
generous provisions from food she had in store.
Standing close to them, Etoneus carved the meat [140]
and handed out the portions, while Megapenthes,
son of glorious Menelaus, poured the wine.
Then their hands reached for the food spread out before them. 190
After they had satisfied their hearts with food and drink,
Telemachus and the noble son of Nestor
yoked the horses, climbed in the ornate chariot,
and drove from the portico through the echoing gate.
Fair-haired Menelaus followed them outside.
His right hand held a gold cup full of honey wine,
so they might pour libations before setting out.
Standing there beside the horses, Menelaus
made a pledge to both of them and said: [150]

“Farewell,
young men. Make sure you greet Nestor for me, 200
shepherd of his people. Over in Troy,
when we sons of Achaea went to war,
he truly was a gentle father to me.”

Prudent Telemachus then answered him and said:

“Zeus-fostered king, we will indeed tell him
what you ask, when we arrive in Pylos.
How I wish when I returned to Ithaca
I’d come across Odysseus in his home,
so I could tell him how, when I left here,
I’d met with every hospitality 210
and taken many splendid gifts away.”

As he said these words, a bird flew over them, [160]
to the right—an eagle clutching in its talons
an enormous white goose, a tame one from some farm.
A crowd of men and women hurried after it,
all shouting as they ran. The bird flew close to them,

then veered, wheeling to the right before the horses.
 When they saw that, they were happy—in every chest
 the spirits filled with joy. Then the son of Nestor,
 Peisistratus, was the first of them to speak:

220

“Menelaus, leader of your people,
 cherished by Zeus, tell us about this sign—
 whether god sent it to the two of us
 or just to you alone.”

Peisistratus spoke.
 War-loving Menelaus thought about the birds—
 How should he understand the omen properly
 and provide an appropriate interpretation?
 But before he said a word, long-robed Helen spoke
 and said these words:

[170]

“Listen to me.
 I will prophesy what the immortals
 have set into my heart, what I believe
 will happen. Just as this eagle came here
 from mountains where it and its young were born
 and snatched up this goose bred in the household,
 that’s how Odysseus, after all his toil
 and many hardships, will be coming back
 and take revenge. Or he’s already home,
 sowing destruction for all the suitors.”

230

Prudent Telemachus then answered her and said:

“Now may Zeus, Hera’s loud-thundering mate,
 bring that about. If so, I’ll pray to you
 as to a god.”

240 [180]

Telemachus said this,
 then flicked the horses with his whip. They sped off quickly,
 keen to move on through the city toward the plain.
 All day long the harness on their shoulders rattled.
 Then the sun went down, and all the roads grew dark.
 Their chariot reached Pherae, home of Diocles,
 son of Ortilochus, a child of Alpheus.
 Diocles welcomed them with hospitality
 the way one should with strangers. There they spent the night.

250

BOOK FIFTEEN

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
they yoked the horses, climbed in the ornate chariot, [190]
then drove out from the echoing portico and gate.
Peisistratus urged on the horses with his whip,
and they raced willingly ahead. They quickly reached
the lofty citadel of Pylos. Telemachus
then addressed the son of Nestor:

“Peisistratus,
will you promise to do something for me,
and see it through exactly as I say?
We claim that we have always been good friends, 260
because our fathers were good friends, as well,
and we are the same age. This trip of ours
will make our hearts united even more.
So, child of Zeus, don’t take me past my ship
but leave me there, in case old man Nestor [200]
detains me in his house against my will,
wishing to show me hospitality,
when I must now get home with all due speed.”

Telemachus spoke. Deep in his heart Nestor’s son
considered how he might make such a promise 270
and see it through to its conclusion. As he thought,
he followed what seemed to him the better option—
he turned the horses to the swift ship by the shore,
took out the lovely gifts, the clothing and the gold,
which Menelaus had given to Telemachus,
stowed them in the stern and urged Telemachus to go—
his words had wings:

“You must move quickly now.
Climb in your ship, and instruct your comrades
to do so, too, before I get back home [210]
and let old Nestor know what’s happening. 280
For in my heart and mind I know too well
he likes things done his way—he won’t agree
and will come in person to call you back.
I tell you, he won’t return without you.
In any case, he’s sure to be upset.”

Once he said this, Peisistratus drove his horses,
creatures with lovely manes, quickly back to Pylos.

BOOK FIFTEEN

He soon reached the palace. Meanwhile, Telemachus urged his companions on—he spoke to them and said:

“Comrades, put all the stuff in our black ship. 290
Let’s get ourselves on board, so we can sail.” [220]

When they heard these words, his shipmates obeyed at once.
Soon they were aboard, each man sitting at his oar.

Telemachus sat in the stern part of the ship,
praying to Athena and offering sacrifice.

Then a stranger approached, someone from far away,
running from Argos because he had killed a man.

He was prophet, descended from Melampus, 300
who many years earlier had lived in Pylos,
a sheep-breeding land. He had been a wealthy man,
living in a rich house among the Pylians.

But then Melampus went into a foreign land,
fleeing his country and great-hearted Neleus,
the most illustrious of living mortal men, [230]
who for one whole year had taken his wealth by force,

while Melampus lay tied up in savage bondage
in Phylacus’s palace, in cruel suffering,
all for the sake of a daughter of Neleus,

and thanks to the terrible blindness in his heart
which the goddess Erinyes, who strikes down families, 310
had fixed on him.¹ But then he got away from Fate

and drove the bellowing cattle from Phylace
to Pylos, thus succeeding in getting his revenge
for the disgraceful acts of noble Neleus,
and led the daughter home to be his brother’s wife.

But then he went off to Argos, where horses graze,
a land of strangers. He was destined to live there, [240]
ruling many Argives. He won himself a wife,

built a high-roofed house, and fathered two strong sons, 320
Antiphates and Mantius. Antiphates
fathered brave Oicles, who, in his turn, produced
Amphiaraus, a man who could rouse people up,
and whom lord Apollo and aegis-bearing Zeus

¹This passages gives yet another reference the story of Melampus (see previous references at 11.320 and 11.352), the prophet who could communicate with animals. His brother fell in love with Neleus’s daughter. Neleus said that whoever could steal the cattle of Phylacus could have the daughter. Melampus was caught trying to help his brother and imprisoned by Phylacus, but his prophetic powers persuaded Phylacus to release him and give him the cattle. These he brought back to Neleus and thus won the daughter for his brother.

BOOK FIFTEEN

loved in all sorts of ways. But he did not live long—
he died in Thebes, thanks to a woman's need for gifts.¹
He had two sons—Alcmaeon and Amphilocus.
Mantius fathered Cleitus and Polyphides.
Cleitus was so beautiful he was snatched away
by goddess Dawn on her golden throne, so he might live
with the immortal gods, and then lord Apollo
made noble-minded Polyphides his prophet,
the best of men, after Amphiaraus was dead.
He was angry with his father and moved away
to Hyperesia, where he lived and prophesied
to everyone. He had a son—Theoclymenus—
he was the one who now approached Telemachus,
as he poured libations by his swift ship and prayed.
Standing close beside him, Theoclymenus spoke—
his words had wings:

[250]

330

“Friend, since I’ve met you here
while making sacrifice, I’m asking you,
for the sake of your offerings and the god
and by your comrades’ lives and by your own,
answer what I ask, and tell me the truth,
hiding nothing. Among men who are you?
Where is your city? Who are your parents?”

[260]

340

Prudent Telemachus then answered him and said:

“All right, stranger, I will speak candidly.
I am from Ithaca by birth. My father
is Odysseus, as surely as he lived,
but now he’s died by some pitiful fate.
That’s why I got this crew and this black ship
and sailed in search of news about my father
who has been absent for so long.”

350

[270]

Theoclymenus
then replied and said:

“I, too, have run away
from my own land. I killed a relative,

¹Amphiaraus was married to Eriphyle, who was bribed with a gold necklace to persuade her husband to join a military expedition against Thebes. He died in the fighting. Eriphyle is one of the women Odysseus glimpses among the shades of the dead (see 11.414).

one of my family. His relations
 live in horse-nurturing Argos—they rule
 Achaeans there and have enormous power.
 I'm fleeing to prevent them killing me.
 So now it's my dark fate, my destiny, 360
 I think, to roam around among mankind.
 Let me board your ship—I'm a fugitive,
 and I'm begging you, so they won't kill me.
 I think they're on my track."

Prudent Telemachus
 then answered him and said:

"If you desire to come, [280]
 I will not stop you boarding my trim ship.
 So come with us. You'll find a welcome here,
 as much as we possess."

As he said these words,
 he took the spear Theoclymenus was holding,
 set it down lengthwise on the deck of the curved ship, 370
 and then clambered aboard the ocean-going boat.
 Theoclymenus sat beside him in the stern.
 The crewmen loosed the cables. Then Telemachus
 called his comrades, urging them to hoist the tackle.
 They hurried to obey, raising the mast of fir
 and setting it in place in its hollow socket.
 They tightened forestays and then hoisted a white sail [290]
 with twisted ox-hide ropes. Gleaming-eyed Athena
 send favouring winds blowing stiffly through the air,
 so the sailors could complete their voyage quickly 380
 across salt waters of the sea. So they sailed on
 past Crouni and past Calchis, with its lovely streams.
 Then the sun went down, and all the routes grew dark.
 They made for Pheae, driven on by winds from Zeus,
 and for fair Elis, where Epeians rule. From there,
 Telemachus steered them past the jagged islands,
 wondering if he could evade a fatal ambush. [300]

Meanwhile, Odysseus and the faithful swineherd
 and the other herders were eating in the hut,
 After they'd had food and drink to their heart's content, 390
 Odysseus spoke to all of them, testing the swineherd,
 to see if he would sustain his kindly welcome

and invite him to go on staying at the farm
or if he would send him off towards the city:

“Eumaeus and all you other herdsmen,
listen to me now. Tomorrow morning
I’d like to wander off and beg in town,
so I won’t exhaust you and your comrades.
Give me good advice, then send me away [310]
with a fine guide who can conduct me there. 400
I’ll have to roam the city by myself,
hoping to get a cup and piece of bread.
I could go to the home of lord Odysseus
and give some news to wise Penelope
and mingle with those arrogant suitors.
They might give me a meal—they’ve lots of food.
If so, I could well serve in what they want.
Let me tell you how. Listen carefully.
Thanks to Hermes the Messenger, the one
who pours grace and fame on all men’s work, 410 [320]
no other man can match the way I serve
in splitting dry wood, building a good fire,
roasting and carving meat, and serving wine,
all those actions performed by lesser men
when they are servants to nobility.”

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you were most upset
and spoke out to Odysseus:

“Why, stranger,
is your heart so in love with this idea?
You must possess a strong desire to die,
if you mean to go among the suitors, 420
that crowd whose pride and violence extend
right up to iron heaven. Their servants [330]
are not like you. No. The ones who serve them
are young men, well dressed in cloaks and tunics,
their heads and faces always sleek with oil.
They keep well-polished tables loaded down
with bread and meat and wine. You should stay here.
No one in this place finds you a bother—
I don’t, nor do the others here with me.
When the dear son of lord Odysseus comes, 430
he’ll give you clothing, a cloak and tunic,
and send you where your heart and spirit urge.”

Then much-enduring lord Odysseus answered him:

[340]

“Eumaeus, I hope father Zeus likes you
as much as I do—you’ve brought to an end
my wanderings and painful suffering.
Nothing is more wretched for human beings
than roaming around, but men must endure
all kinds of trouble for their stomach’s sake,
when they have to face the pain and sorrow
their travels bring. Now, since you keep me here,
telling me to wait for your young master,
talk about the mother of lord Odysseus
and his father, too. When he went away,
he left him just as he was growing old.
Are they still living in the sunshine here,
or have they died and now dwell in Hades?”

440

[350]

Then the swineherd, a splendid fellow, answered him:

“Well, stranger, I’ll tell you the honest truth.
Laertes is alive, but all the time
inside his home he keeps praying to Zeus
the spirit in his limbs will fade away.
He grieves excessively for his own son,
who has gone, and for the wife he married,
a wise lady, whose death, above all else,
caused him much distress and made him old
before his time. She died a wretched death
grieving for her splendid son. May no man
who lives here as my friend and treats me well
die the way she did! While she was alive,
though she was sad, I was always happy
to ask about her, find out how she was,
because she personally brought me up,
together with long-robed Ctimene,
her fine daughter, the youngest child she bore.
I was raised with her, though with less honour.
When we both reached our young maturity,
that time we long for, she was sent to Same
to be married and got countless wedding gifts.
She dressed me in fine clothes, cloak and tunic,
and gave me sandals to tie on my feet,
then sent me out into the fields. In her heart

450

[360]

460

470

[370]

BOOK FIFTEEN

she was especially fond of me. But now,
I miss all that, though personally for me
the sacred gods prosper the work I do.
From that I have had food and drink and helped
those men who have a claim on my attention.
But now bad times have fallen on the house
full of overbearing men. I don't hear
any news that's good, whether word or deed, 480
about my lady, although servants have
a powerful urge to talk face to face
with their mistress and find out everything,
to eat and drink and then take something back
into the fields—such things warm servants' hearts."

Resourceful Odysseus then answered him and said: [380]

"Swineherd Eumaeus, you were just a child
when you wandered far off from your parents
and your native land. Come now, tell me this—
and speak candidly—was the place ransacked, 490
that populated city with broad streets
in which your mother and your father lived,
or were you alone with sheep or cattle?
Did hostile people take you in their ships
and bring you here to sell you to the master
of the palace, who paid a decent price?"

The swineherd, an outstanding fellow, then replied:

"Stranger, since you ask questions about this, [390]
stay quiet, enjoy yourself, drink your wine,
as you sit there, and listen to my tale. 500
These nights go on forever. There's a time
to sleep, and there's a time to take delight
in hearing stories. You don't need to rest
before you're ready, and excessive sleep
can leave one weary. As for the others,
if any man's heart and spirit tell him,
let him go outside and sleep. Then at dawn
he can eat and walk behind our master's swine.
We two will drink and feast here in the hut
and enjoy each other's wretched troubles, 510
as we recall them. For once they're over, [400]
a man who's done a lot of wandering

BOOK FIFTEEN

and suffered much gets pleasure from his woes.
So now I'll give you answers to those questions.
There's an island you may have heard about
beyond Ogygia—it's called Syrie,
where Sun changes his course. The land is good.
Though not too many people live on it,
there are many herds and flocks, plenty of wine,
and lots of wheat. Famine never comes there, 520
no lethal sickness falls on mortal men.
Inside the town, when tribes of men get old,
Apollo comes there with his silver bow [410]
and Artemis as well. He attacks them
with his gentle arrows and kills them off.
There are two cities there, with all the land
divided up between them. My father
ruled both as king. His name was Ctesius,
son of Ormenus, like an immortal god.
Phoenicians came there, famous sailing men, 530
greedy rogues, who carried countless trinkets
in their black ship. Now, in my father's house
lived a beautiful Phoenician woman,
skilled in making lovely things. Phoenicians,
truly crafty men, seduced her. First of all,
while she was doing laundry, one of them
had sex with her beside the hollow ship— [420]
love like that distracts the minds of women,
even virtuous ones. When he asked her
who she was and where she came from, she said, 540
pointing to my father's high-roofed palace:

'I claim to come from Sidon, rich in bronze,
daughter of Arybas, a man whose wealth
was like a flood. But then I was captured
by Taphian pirates, as I was coming
from the fields. They brought me to this place
and sold me to the household of that man,
who paid an excellent price.'

Then the man [430]
who had made love to her in secret said to her:

'Would like you to sail home again with us, 550
to see your father's and your mother's house

and them, as well? Yes, they are still alive
and, so people say, are very wealthy.'

The servant woman answered him and said:

'I might come, if you sailors are willing
to promise me on oath to take me home,
and ensure my safety.'

When she said this,
they all took the oath, as she requested.
When they had sworn and finished promising,
the woman spoke to them again and said:

560

'Now, keep silent. None of your company
must talk to me, if we meet in the street
or maybe at the springs, in case someone
runs to tell the old king in the palace.
If he gets suspicious, he'll tie me up
in cruel bondage and then plan your death.
Keep what I say in mind, and finish off
your trading quickly. When your ship is full
and your goods stowed on board, send me a sign
at the palace right away. I'll bring gold,
whatever I can lay my hands on there.
And there's something else I'd like to offer
to pay my passage. Inside the palace
my master has a child. I am his nurse.
He's quite an impish boy—when we're outside
he runs beside me. I'll bring him on board.
He's worth an enormous sum of money,
if ever you run into foreigners.'

[440]

570

[450]

She said this, then left for the fine palace.
The men stayed there with us for one whole year,
and by trading filled their hollow ship with goods.
When the deep boat was loaded to return,
they sent a messenger to tell the woman.
The man, a shrewd one, reached my father's house
with a gold necklace strung with amber beads.
In the hall servants and my noble mother
were handling and inspecting it, haggling
about the price. He nodded at the woman,
without saying a word. After that sign,

580

[460]

he went back to his hollow ship. So then, 590
 she took my hand and led me from the house.
 In the front hall she found cups and tables
 left there by guests who had been at a feast,
 men who were attendants on my father.
 They had just left for a council meeting
 where public civic issues were discussed.
 She quickly hid three goblets in her clothes
 and then strolled out with them. I followed her, [470]
 without thinking a thing. The sun went down,
 and all the roads grew dark. But we rushed on 600
 and came to the fine harbour where we found
 the swift sailing ship and the Phoenicians.
 They put us both on board, climbed in themselves,
 and moved away across the watery road.
 Zeus sent a welcome wind. We sailed six days,
 all day and night. When Zeus, son of Cronos,
 brought us the seventh day, archer Artemis
 struck the woman, and she fell with a thud
 down in the hold, just like a sea bird's fall.
 They threw her overboard to make a meal 610 [480]
 for seals and fish. But I was left heart-sick.
 The winds and waters carried them along.
 They sailed to Ithaca, where king Laertes
 purchased me with his own money—that's how
 I came to see this land with my own eyes."

Odysseus, born from Zeus, then answered him and said:

"Eumaeus, by telling me what happened,
 you've truly stirred the heart here in my chest,
 all those ordeals your spirit has endured.
 But with the bad things Zeus has given you 620
 he's put some good—you've undergone much pain,
 but you ended up at a kind man's house.
 With a good heart, he gives you food and drink, [490]
 and the life you lead is good. As for me,
 I've reached here only after wandering
 through many cities of men."

So the two men
 kept talking to each other. Then they fell asleep.
 But they did not sleep long, for early Dawn arrived
 soon afterwards, seated on her golden throne.

As Telemachus and his crew were nearing land, 630
 they furled and stowed the sail, quickly lowered the mast,
 and used their oars to move into an anchorage.
 They tossed out mooring stones, lashed cables at the stern,
 and then left the boat, wading through the crashing surf.
 They prepared a meal and mixed the gleaming wine. [500]
 Once they had food and drink to satisfy their hearts,
 shrewd Telemachus was the first of them to speak:

“You men row the black ship to the city,
 while I’m checking on the fields and herdsman.
 I’ll come to the city in the evening, 640
 after I have visited my estates.
 In the morning I’ll lay out a banquet,
 as compensation to you for the trip,
 a splendid meal of meat and sweetened wine.”

Then godlike Theoclymenus spoke up and said:

“Where do I go, dear lad? Of those who rule
 in Ithaca, whose house do I go to— [510]
 the palace you live in with your mother?”

Prudent Telemachus then answered him and said:

“In things were different, I would invite you 650
 to go straight to our home—there is no lack
 of welcome there for strangers. But for you
 it would be worse, because I’ll not be there,
 and my mother will not see you. It’s rare
 for her to show up among the suitors
 when they are in the house—she stays away
 and does her weaving in an upstairs room.
 But I’ll mention another man to you
 and you can visit him—Eurymachus,
 a noble son of wise Polybius, 660
 whom men of Ithaca see as a god. [520]
 He’s the best man by far and truly keen
 to marry my mother and then possess
 the royal prerogatives of Odysseus.
 But Olympian Zeus, who lives in heaven,
 knows if, before that wedding day arrives,
 he’ll bring about a day of reckoning.”

As he said this, a bird flew past them on the right,
a hawk, Apollo's messenger. In its talons
it held a dove, which it was plucking—the feathers 670
fell to the ground halfway between Telemachus
and his ship. Theoclymenus called him aside,
away from his companions, grasped his hand, and spoke: [530]

“Telemachus, this bird flying to our right
has not come without prompting by some god.
When I saw it darting forward, I knew
it was an omen. Here in Ithaca
no family is more royal than yours.
No. You will be powerful forever.”

Prudent Telemachus then answered him and said: 680

“Stranger, I hope that prophecy of yours
may be fulfilled. If so, you'll quickly hear
of many gifts and kindnesses from me,
so any man you meet will call you happy.”

Then he spoke to Peiraeus, a faithful comrade:

“Peiraeus, son of Clytius, of those [540]
who came with me on the trip to Pylos
you're the one who is especially loyal.
So now conduct this stranger to your home,
take good care to welcome him with honour,
until I get there.” 690

Peiraeus, a famous spearman,
then answered him and said:

“Telemachus,
if you remain a long time on your land,
I will entertain him. He will not lack
a welcome that's appropriate for guests.”

After saying these words, he went on board the ship
and told the crew to get in and loose the cables.
They boarded quickly and sat down at their benches.

BOOK FIFTEEN

Telemachus tied sturdy sandals on his feet,
then from the deck picked up his powerful spear
with a sharp bronze point. The crew untied stern cables
and then pushed out to sea, sailing to the city,
as Telemachus, dear son of lord Odysseus,
had ordered them to do, while he strode quickly off,
his feet carrying him onward, until he reached
the farmyard and the herds of pigs in countless numbers,
among whom the loyal swineherd still lay asleep,
always thinking gentle thoughts about his master.

[550]

700

BOOK SIXTEEN
ODYSSEUS REVEALS HIMSELF TO TELEMACHUS

[Telemachus arrives at Eumaeus's farm; Eumaeus is overjoyed to see Telemachus back from his voyage; Telemachus, Eumaeus, and Odysseus (in disguise) talk together; Telemachus sends Eumaeus off to tell Penelope of his safe return; Athena tells Odysseus to reveal himself to his son and transforms his appearance; Telemachus and Odysseus are reunited; Telemachus and Odysseus discuss strategies for dealing with the suitors; Odysseus gives Telemachus instructions about hiding weapons and behaving in front of the suitors; a herald from Telemachus's crew announces to Penelope and others the news of his return from Pylos; the suitors are upset and discuss what to do; Penelope appears before the suitors and upbraids Antinous for his behaviour; Antinous replies; Eumaeus returns to Odysseus and Telemachus in the hut; Athena transforms Odysseus into an old beggar once again; Odysseus, Eumaeus, and Telemachus eat a meal and go to sleep.]

Meanwhile at dawn Odysseus and the loyal swineherd,
once they had sent the herdsmen out with droves of pigs,
lit a fire in the hut and prepared their breakfast.
As Telemachus approached the hut, the yelping dogs
stopped barking and fawned around him. Lord Odysseus
noticed what the dogs were doing and heard footsteps.
He quickly shouted to the swineherd—his words had wings:

“Eumaeus, some friend of yours is coming,
or someone you know. The dogs aren’t barking
and are acting friendly. I hear footsteps.”

10

He hardly finished speaking when his own dear son
stood in the doorway. The swineherd, amazed, jumped up—
the bowls he was using to mix the gleaming wine
fell from his hands. He went up to greet his master,
kissed his head, both his handsome eyes, and his two hands,
then through his tears he spoke. Just as a loving father
welcomes his dear son after a nine-year absence,
returning from a foreign land, an only son,
his favourite, for whom he’s undergone much grief,
that’s how the loyal swineherd hugged Telemachus
and kissed him often, as if he’d escaped his death.
And through his tears he spoke to him—his words had wings:

20 [20]

“You’ve come back, Telemachus, you sweet light.
I thought I’d never see you any more,
once you went off to Pylos in that ship.

Come in here now, dear boy, so that my heart
can feel the joy of seeing you in my home,
now that you've returned from distant places.
You don't often visit farms and herdsmen—
your life is in the town. Your heart, I think, 30
must enjoy the sight of those vile suitors."

Prudent Telemachus then answered him and said: [30]

"If you say so, old friend. I've come here now
on your account, to see you face to face
and to hear you talk about my mother.
Is she still living in the palace halls,
or has some other man now married her?
Is no one sleeping in Odysseus's bed?
Is it covered in disgusting cobwebs?"

The swineherd, that outstanding man, then answered him: 40

"Yes indeed, she still lives in your palace,
with a faithful heart, but always grieving,
wasting days and nights away with weeping."

He said this, took the bronze spear from Telemachus, [40]
and let him in, crossing the threshold made of stone.
As he approached, Odysseus, his father, got up
to offer him his seat, but from across the room
Telemachus stopped him and said:

"Stay put, stranger.
We'll find a seat somewhere inside this hut.
Here's a man who will arrange that for us." 50

He spoke. Odysseus went back and sat down again.
Eumaeus made a pile of green brushwood on the floor
and spread a fleece on top. Odysseus's dear son
sat down there. Then the swineherd set out before them
platters of roast meat, left over from the dinner [50]
they had made the day before, and quickly heaped up
baskets full of bread. In a wooden bowl he mixed
wine as sweet as honey and then sat down himself,
opposite godlike Odysseus. Their hands reached out
to the welcome meal prepared and spread before them. 60

BOOK SIXTEEN

When they had satisfied their hearts with food and drink,
Telemachus spoke out to the trusty swineherd:

“Old friend, where does this stranger come from?
How did sailors bring him to Ithaca?
Who do they claim to be? For I don’t think
there’s any way he could get here on foot.”

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you answered him and said:

[60]

“My child, I’ll tell you nothing but the truth.
He claims that he was born in spacious Crete
and says he has been roaming all around,
wandering through many human cities.
That how some god has spun a fate for him.
He’s just fled a ship of Thesprotians
and come here to my farm. You can have him.
Do as you wish. He’s a suppliant, he says.”

70

Prudent Telemachus then answered him and said:

“Eumaeus, I’m truly distressed at heart
by those words you said. How can I welcome
this guest into my home? I am too young—
I don’t believe my hands are strong enough
to fight a man who acts with violence
against me first. And, as for my mother,
in her chest the heart is quite divided,
whether to stay with me and tend the house,
out of respect for what the people say
and for her husband’s bed, or to go now
with the finest man of those Achaeans
who have been courting her within the halls,
the one who offers the most marriage gifts.
But anyway, now this stranger’s come here,
to your home, I’ll dress him in fine clothing,
cloak and tunic, and give a two-edged sword
and sandals for his feet. I’ll send him off
wherever his heart and spirit prompt him.
If you wish, you can keep him at this farm
and care for him. I’ll send some clothing here
and the food he’ll eat, so he won’t ruin
you and your friends. But I will not let him
go to my home and mingle with the suitors—

[70]

80

90

[80]

BOOK SIXTEEN

they are far too full of insolent pride
They might mock him, and I would die of shame.
It's difficult for one man on his own
even if he's very strong, to do much
against so many—they are far stronger.” 100

Then lord Odysseus, who had endured so much, [90]
said to Telemachus:

“Friend, surely it's all right
for me to answer, and my heart is torn
as I hear you talk—these suitors think up
such presumptuous actions in your home
and flout your will, though you're a decent man. 110
Tell me, do you agree with this oppression?
Do the people of the country hate you
and follow what some god is telling them?
Do you think the blame rests with your kinsmen,
whom a man relies on in a quarrel,
even when it's a serious dispute?
With my heart the way it is, how I wish
I were either as young as you, the son [100]
of brave Odysseus, or the man himself
returning from his travels—there's still room 120
for us to hope for that—then, if I came
to Odysseus' home, son of Laertes,
and did not bring destruction on them all,
I'd let a stranger's sword slice off my head.
If I, acting alone, was overwhelmed
by their great number, I would rather die,
killed in my own home, than keep on watching
such disgraceful acts—guests treated badly,
women servants shamelessly being dragged
through the fine palace, wine drawn and wasted, 130 [110]
and all the time food eaten needlessly,
acts which go on and on, without an end.”

Prudent Telemachus then answered him and said:

“Well, stranger, I'll speak candidly to you.
The people are not all angry with me,
nor do they bear a grudge. And I don't blame
my kinsmen, the ones a man relies on
in a fight, even a serious dispute.

BOOK SIXTEEN

The son of Cronos made our family
follow a single line. It goes like this— 140
Arceisius fathered a single son,
Laertes, and he, too, was the father
of only a single son, Odysseus,
and he, in turn, fathered me, just one son,
then left me by myself in his own hall. [120]
He got no joy of me. That's the reason
so many hostile men are in our home.
All those lords with power in the islands—
Dulichium, Same, wooded Zacynthus—
and those who rule in rocky Ithaca, 150
all of them trying to court my mother
and destroy my home.¹ She does not turn down
the hateful marriage, but cannot decide
how to bring these matters to an end.
With their feasting they consume my household,
and they'll soon be the ruin of me, too.
But all this lies in the lap of the gods.
Old friend, you must go quickly and report [130]
to wise Penelope that I've come back,
I'm safely home from Pylos. I'll stay here, 160
until you've told the news to her alone
and have returned. No other Achaean
must learn about it, for many of them
are hatching dangerous plans against me."

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you answered him and said:

"I know what you're saying—I understand.
You're speaking to a man who thinks things through.
But come, tell me this, and be frank with me.
On this trip should I go to see Laertes
with the news? The poor man is miserable. 170
For a while, though suffering great distress
about Odysseus, he'd supervise the fields [140]
and in his home eat and drink with servants,

¹As a number of commentators have observed, the exact political status of the suitors is ambiguous and in places confusing. Sometimes, as here, they are called the chief leaders or rulers of the islands or those with ruling power in Ithaca. They all appear to live in Ithaca and visit the palace during the day. However, the islands listed here are sometimes described as under Odysseus's control. What does seem clear is that the suitors have political importance as noblemen, as the most important leaders (or their sons), whatever the precise arrangements between them and the royal family of Odysseus in Ithaca.

BOOK SIXTEEN

as the heart inside his chest would urge him.
But now, since the time you left for Pylos,
people say he no longer eats and drinks
the way he used to or inspects the fields,
but sits there, groaning and wailing, in tears,
with his flesh shrivelling around his bones.”

Prudent Telemachus then answered him and said:

180

“That’s more distressing, but nevertheless,
though it makes us sad, we’ll leave him alone.
If mortal men could somehow get all things
simply by wishing, we would first of all
select the day my father gets back home.
After you have informed her of the news,
get back here right away. Don’t go roaming
around the fields looking for Laertes.
Instead, tell my mother to send her maid,
the housekeeper, quickly and in secret.
She can report the news to the old man.”

[150]

190

His words spurred on the swineherd. He took his sandals,
tied them on his feet, and set off for the city.

It did not escape the notice of Athena
that swineherd Eumaeus was going from the farm.
She approached the hut, appearing like a woman,
beautiful, tall, and skilled in making lovely things.
She stood there, just outside the entrance to the farm
and was visible to no one but Odysseus.
Telemachus could not observe her shape or face
or notice she was there. For when the gods appear,
they do not let all men perceive the form they take.
But Odysseus saw her. So did the dogs, as well.
But there was no barking. Instead, they slunk away,
whimpering in fear, to the far side of the hut.
She gave a signal with her eyebrows—Odysseus
noticed and went out of the hut, past the large wall
that ran around the yard, and stood in front of her.
Then Athena spoke to him:

200 [160]

“Son of Laertes,
adventurous Odysseus, sprung from Zeus,
Now is the time to speak to your own son—

210

BOOK SIXTEEN

make yourself known and don't conceal the facts,
so you can plan the suitors' lethal fate,
then go together to your famous city. [170]
I won't be absent from you very long—
I'm eager for the fight."

As she said this, Athena
touched Odysseus with her golden wand. To start with,
she placed a new unblemished cloak around his body,
then made him taller and restored his youthful looks.
His skin grew dark once more, his countenance filled out, 220
and the beard covering his chin turned black again.
Once she'd done this, Athena left, and Odysseus
went back into the hut. His dear son was amazed.
He turned his eyes away, afraid it was a god,
and spoke to him—his words had wings: [180]

"Stranger,
now you look different than you did before—
you're wearing different clothes, your skin has changed.
You're one of the gods who hold wide heaven.
If so, be gracious, so we can give you
pleasing offerings, well-crafted gifts of gold. 230
But spare us."

Long-suffering lord Odysseus
then answered him and said:

"I'm not one of the gods.
Why do you compare me to immortals?
But I am your father, on whose account
you are grieving and suffer such distress,
having to bear men's acts of insolence."

He spoke, then kissed his son. He kept his self-control, [190]
until a tear slid down his cheek, falling in the dirt.
But Telemachus, who could not yet believe
it was his father, spoke to him again, saying: 240

"You cannot be Odysseus, my father.
No. Some spirit has cast a spell on me,
to make me lament and grieve even more.
There's no way a mortal man could plan this
with his own wits, unless some god himself

BOOK SIXTEEN

were present, who could, if he so desired,
make him look young or old quite easily.
Not long ago you wore filthy clothing
and were an older man. But now you're like
the immortal gods who hold wide heaven."

250 [200]

Then resourceful Odysseus answered him and said:

"Telemachus, it's not appropriate
to be overly surprised your father
is back home or to be too astonished.
You can rest assured—no other Odysseus
will ever be arriving. I am here.
I've borne a lot in many wanderings,
and now, in the twentieth year, I'm back
on my native soil. This present business,
you should know, is forager Athena's work.
She's made me look like this—it's what she wants,
and she has that power—in one moment,
like a beggar, and in another one,
a younger man dressed in much finer clothes.
It's easy for the gods who hold wide heaven
to glorify or else debase a man."

260

[210]

Once he'd said this, he sat down, and Telemachus
embraced his noble father, cried out, and shed tears.
A desire to lament arose in both of them—
they both wailed aloud, as insistently as birds,
like two sea eagles or hawks with curving talons
whose young chicks have been carried off by country folk
before being fully fledged. That's how those two men
let tears of sorrow fall from underneath their eyes.
And now light from the sun would have gone down on them,
as they wept, if Telemachus had not spoken.
He suddenly addressed his father:

270

[220]

"In what kind of ship,
dear father, did sailors carry you here,
to Ithaca? Who did they say they were?
For I don't think you made it back on foot."

280

Noble long-suffering Odysseus answered him:

“All right, my child, I will tell you the truth.
 Phaeacians, those famous sailors, brought me.
 They escort other men, as well, all those
 who visit them as guests. I stayed asleep
 as they transported me across the sea
 in their swift ship and left me on the shore.
 They gave me splendid gifts of bronze and gold
 and woven clothing. Now, thanks to the gods,
 these things are stored away in caves. I’ve come
 at Athena’s bidding, so we may plan
 destruction for our foes. But now it’s time
 to tell me the number of the suitors,
 so I may know how many men there are
 and what they’re like. Then, once my noble heart
 has thought it over, I’ll make up my mind,
 whether we two are powerful enough
 to take them on alone, without assistance,
 or whether we should seek out other men.”

[230]

290

Shrewd Telemachus then answered him and said:

300 [240]

“Father,
 I’ve always heard about your great renown,
 a mighty warrior—your hands are strong,
 your plans intelligent. But what you say
 is far too big a task. I’m astonished.
 Two men cannot fight against so many—
 and they are powerful. In an exact count,
 there are not just ten of them or twice ten,
 but many more. Here, you can soon add up
 their numbers—from Dulichium there are
 fifty-two hand-picked young men, six servants
 in their retinue, from Same twenty-four,
 from Zacynthus twenty young Achaeans,
 and from Ithaca itself twelve young men,
 all nobility. Medon, the herald,
 is with them, as is the godlike minstrel,
 and two attendants skilled in carving meat.
 If we move against all these men inside,
 I fear revenge may bring a bitter fate,
 now you’ve come home. So you should consider
 if you can think of anyone who’ll help,
 someone prepared to stand by both of us
 and fight with all his heart.”

310

[250]

320

Then lord Odysseus,
who had endured so much, replied to him and said:

“All right, I’ll tell you. Pay attention now,
and listen. Do you believe Athena,
along with Father Zeus, will be enough
for two of us, or should I think about
who else might help us?” [260]

Prudent Telemachus
answered with these words:

“Those two allies you mention
are excellent. They sit high in the clouds,
ruling others, men and immortal gods.” 330

Long-suffering lord Odysseus then said to him:

“The two of them won’t stand apart for long
from the great fight—we can be sure of that—
when Ares’s warlike spirit in my halls
is put to the test between these suitors
and ourselves. But for now, when Dawn arrives,
go to the house, join those haughty suitors. [270]
The swineherd will bring me to the city
later on. I’ll be looking like a beggar,
old and wretched. If they’re abusive to me,
let that dear heart in your chest endure it,
while I’m being badly treated, even if
they drag me by my feet all through the house
and out the door or start hurling things at me.
Keep looking on, and hold yourself in check.
You can tell them to stop their foolishness,
but seek to win them over with nice words,
even though you’ll surely not convince them,
because the day they meet their fate has come. 340
I’ll tell you something else—keep it in mind.
When wise Athena puts it in my mind,
I’ll nod my head to you. Once you see that,
take all the weapons of war lying there,
inside the hall. Stow them in a safe place,
all of them, in the lofty storage room.
When the suitors notice they’ve gone missing 350 [280]

BOOK SIXTEEN

and ask about it, you must deceive them
with reassuring words:

‘I’ve placed them
well beyond the smoke, since they’re no longer
like the weapons Odysseus left behind
when he went off to Troy. They’re all tarnished—
the fire has breathed on them too many times.
Beyond that, the son of Cronos has put
a greater worry in my heart that you,
after too much wine, may start up a fight
amongst yourselves and then hurt each other,
dishonouring your courtship and the feast.
Iron attracts a man all on its own.’

But leave behind a pair of swords, two spears,
and two ox-hide shields, for the two of us
to grab up when we make a rush at them—
Pallas Athena and Counsellor Zeus
will keep the suitors' minds preoccupied.
I'll tell you something else—keep it in mind.
If you are my son—truly of our blood—
let no one hear Odysseus is back home.
Don't let Laertes know or the swineherd,
or the slaves, or Penelope herself.
You and I alone will investigate
how the women feel, and we will check out
some of the serving men, to discover
if any of them fears and honours us
in his heart—and the ones with no respect,
who malign you for being who you are.”

Then his splendid son answered him and said:

“Father,
I think you’ll later come to recognize
my spirit, for no timidity of mind
possesses me. But still, I do not think
your plan will benefit the two of us.
I’d ask you to consider this—you’ll spend
a long time simply testing every man,
as you visit the farms, while those others,
in their proud way, relax inside your halls
and use your property without restraint.

BOOK SIXTEEN

I'd suggest you learn about the women,
those disgracing you and the guiltless ones.
As for men on the estates, I'd prefer
we did not test them. There'll be time enough
to do that later, if you recognize
signs sent from Zeus, who bears the aegis."

400

[320]

So the two men talked about these things together.

Meanwhile, the well-built ship which brought Telemachus
from Pylos with his comrades had reached Ithaca.
Once the crew had rowed the boat inside the harbour,
they hauled the black ship up on shore. Eager servants
carried away their weapons and without delay
took the lavish gifts to the home of Clytius.
They also sent a herald to the royal home,
to report to wise Penelope, telling her
Telemachus had gone to visit the estates
and had told the ship to sail off for the city,
in case the noble lady might get sick at heart
and start to weep. This herald and the swineherd met
because they'd both been sent off with the same report
to tell the queen. When they reached the royal palace,
the herald spoke out in front of female servants:

410

[330]

"My queen, your much-loved son has just returned."

But the swineherd walked up, straight to Penelope,
and informed her of all the details her dear son
had instructed him to say. Once he had mentioned
in his account what he had been ordered to report,
he went away, leaving the courtyard and the hall,
to get back to his pigs. The suitors were unhappy,
their hearts dismayed, and they departed from the hall,
moving past the courtyard wall. There, before the gates,
they sat down. The first one of them to speak a word
was Eurymachus, son of Polybus:

420

[340]

"My friends,
to tell the truth, in his great arrogance
Telemachus has carried out his trip,
and has had great success. We never thought
he would complete it. So let's do something.
Let's launch a ship, the very best we have,

430

collect some sailors, a crew of rowers,
so they can quickly carry a report
to those other men to come home at once.”¹

[350]

No sooner had he said this, than Amphinomus,
turning in his place, saw a ship in the deep harbour.
Men were bringing down the sail, others holding oars.
With a hearty laugh, he then addressed his comrades:

440

“Don’t bother with a message any more.
They have arrived back home. Either some god
gave them news, or they saw his ship themselves,
as it sailed past, but could not attack it.”

He spoke. They all got up and went to the sea shore,
then quickly dragged the ship up onto drier ground,
while eager attendants carried off the weapons.
Then in a large group they went to their meeting place.
No others were permitted to sit there with them,
no old or younger men. Antinous addressed them,
son of Eupheithes:

[360]

450

“Well, this is bad news—
the gods made sure Telemachus was safe.
Our lookouts sat each day on windy heights,
always in successive shifts. At sunset,
we never spent the night on shore, but sailed
over the sea in our swift ship, waiting
for sacred Dawn, as we set our ambush
for Telemachus, so we could capture
and then do away with him. But some god
has brought him home again. So let’s devise
a sad end for Telemachus right here—
ensure he does not get away from us.
For as long as he’s alive, I don’t think
what we’re doing will bring us much success.
He himself is clever, shrewd in counsel,
and people don’t regard us well at all.
So come now, before he calls Achaeans
to assembly. I don’t think he will concede.
He’ll get angry and stand up to proclaim

[370]

460

¹The “other men” are the ones waiting in the islands to ambush Telemachus on his voyage home. They may be still unaware that he has slipped past them.

to everyone how we planned to kill him 470
 and how our ambush failed. Then the people
 will turn against us, once they learn about [380]
 what we have done. Take care. They may harm us
 and force us out, away from our own homes,
 then send us off into a foreign land.
 Let's move first—capture him out in the fields,
 far from the city, or else on the road.
 We suitors will retain his property
 and his wealth, with each of us receiving
 an appropriate share. As for his home, 480
 that's something we should let his mother keep—
 together with the man who marries her.
 If what I've been saying displeases you,
 and you prefer he still remain alive,
 retaining all the riches of his fathers,
 let's not keep on gathering in this place,
 consuming his supply of pleasant things.
 Instead, let each man carry on his courtship [390]
 from his home, seeking to prevail with gifts.
 She can marry the one who offers most, 490
 the husband her own fate has set for her."

He finished. They all sat quiet, saying nothing.
 Then Amphinomus spoke out and addressed them,
 a son of noble Nisus, Areteias' son,
 the leader of the suitors from Dulichium,
 land rich in grass and wheat. Penelope found him
 especially pleasant because of the way he talked,
 for he understood things well. With good intentions,
 he spoke to them and said:

"My friends, [400]
 I would not want to slay Telemachus. 500
 It's reprehensible to kill someone
 of royal blood. But first let's ask the gods
 for their advice. If Zeus's oracles
 approve the act, I myself will kill him
 and tell all other men to do so, too.
 But if the gods decline, I say we stop."

Amphinomus finished. They agreed with what he'd said.
 So they immediately got up and went away
 to Odysseus's house. Once they reached the palace,

BOOK SIXTEEN

they sat on polished chairs in the great hall. By then, 510
wise queen Penelope had thought of something else—
to put in an appearance before the suitors, [410]
despite their arrogance, because she heard about
their plot to kill Telemachus in his own home.
The herald Medon, who heard their plans, had told her.
So Penelope set out, moving to the hall,
escorted by her attendant servant women.
As soon as the noble lady reached the suitors,
she stood beside the doorpost of the well-built room
and, holding a bright veil across her lovely face, 520
she spoke to Antinous, reprimanding him:

“Antinous, though you’re an arrogant man
and come up with crafty schemes, people say
you are the best among those men your age
at offering advice and making speeches.
But you don’t seem to be a man like that. [420]
You madman, why devise a fatal plan
to kill Telemachus and disregard
the things involved with being a suppliant,
who has Zeus as witness? It’s impiety 530
to plot evil things against each other.
Do you not know how your father came here
a fugitive, afraid of his own people?
They had grown extremely angry at him,
because he’d joined with Taphian pirates
to cause trouble for the Thesprotians,
who were allied with us, and those men wished
to kill him, rip out his heart, and devour
his huge and pleasant livelihood. But then,
Odysseus held them back, kept them in check, 540 [430]
for all their fury. And now you eat up
that man’s home without paying anything—
you court his wife, attempt to kill his son,
and cause me much distress. So stop all this,
I tell you, and order other suitors
to do the same.”

Then Eurymachus,
son of Polybus, answered her and said:

“Wise Penelope,
child of Icarius, cheer up. Don’t let

BOOK SIXTEEN

these things concern your heart. No man living,
no man born and no one yet to be, 550
will lay hands on your son Telemachus,
not while I'm alive, gazing on the earth.
I tell you—and this will truly happen— [440]
that man's black blood will quickly saturate
my spear, for Odysseus, sacker of cities,
also set me on his knees many times
and put roast meat into my hands and held
red wine up for me. Thus, Telemachus
is far the dearest of all men to me.
I say to him—don't be afraid of death, 560
not from the suitors, but there's no way out,
when our death comes from the immortal gods."

He said these words to ease her mood, while he himself
was planning how her son would die. Penelope
climbed the stairs to her bright upper room and wept there [450]
for Odysseus, her dear husband, until sweet sleep
from gleaming-eyed Athena spread across her eyes.

At evening the fine swineherd came to Odysseus
and to his son, both busy preparing dinner.
They killed and singed a boar, a yearling. Athena 570
went up to Odysseus and touched him with her wand,
transforming him into an old man once again.
She put shabby clothing on his body, in case
the swineherd, by looking up, would recognize him
and then go off to tell faithful Penelope,
unable to keep secret what was in his heart.
Telemachus addressed the swineherd first and said: [460]

"Eumaeus, you've come back from the city.
Is there some news? Are those haughty suitors
already in the house, after their trip, 580
or are they still out there watching for me,
as I travel on my journey homeward?"

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you answered him and said:

"I did not bother to find out such things
or ask any questions on my travels
through the town. Once I'd given my report,
my heart told me to get myself back here

BOOK SIXTEEN

as quickly as I could. A swift messenger,
who was sent by your companions, met me,
a herald. Your mother got the first report
from him. But I discovered something else,
which I saw with my own eyes. As I walked
above the city, by the hill of Hermes,
I saw a fast ship coming into harbour,
with lots of men aboard and loaded down
with weapons—shields and two-edged spears. I thought
it could be the suitors, but I'm not sure."

590

[470]

Eumaeus finished. Telemachus, with a smile
full of fresh confidence and strength, allowed his eyes
to glance over at his father, avoiding contact
with the swineherd. Then, once they had finished working
and dinner was prepared, they ate a meal. Their hearts
did not lack a thing—they shared the food as equals.
When they had satisfied their hearts with food and drink,
they thought of rest, and so they took the gift of sleep.

600

[480]

BOOK SEVENTEEN
ODYSSEUS GOES TO THE PALACE AS A BEGGAR

[Telemachus leaves Eumaeus and Odysseus at the farm, telling the swineherd that the beggar (Odysseus) must go to the city; Telemachus is welcomed in the palace by Eurycleia and his mother; Telemachus joins the suitors; Peiraeus leads in Theoclymenus; Theoclymenus and Telemachus dine with Penelope; Telemachus tells Penelope about his journey; Theoclymenus makes a prophecy of Odysseus's return; Eumaeus and Odysseus leave the farm for the city; they meet Melanthius, the goat herder, on the way, who insults them; Eumaeus and Odysseus arrive at the palace, meet Odysseus's old dog, Argus, who recognizes him and dies; Eumaeus enters the palace and joins Telemachus at dinner; Odysseus sits by the entrance way; Telemachus offers food to the disguised Odysseus, who then starts begging from the suitors; Melanthius and Antinous insult Eumaeus and Odysseus; Odysseus tells Antinous his story, they trade insults, and Antinous throws a foot stool at Odysseus and hits him; Penelope summons Eumaeus to her, asks him to call the disguised beggar to her; Odysseus tell Eumaeus that he'll meet Penelope in the evening; Eumaeus tells Penelope, talks to Telemachus, and returns to the farm, leaving the feast still in progress.]

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
Telemachus, dear son of god-like Odysseus,
tied sandals on his feet, took a powerful spear,
well suited to his grip, and, as he headed off
towards the city, called out to the swineherd:

“Old friend, I’m now leaving for the city,
so I can see my mother. I don’t think
her dreadful grieving and her sorry tears
will stop until she sees me for herself.
So I’m telling you to do as follows—
take this vagrant stranger to the city.
Once there, he can beg food from any man
who’ll offer him bread and cups of water.
I can’t take on the weight of everyone,
not when I have these sorrows in my heart.
As for the stranger, if he’s upset at this,
things will be worse for him. Those are the facts,
and I prefer to speak the truth.”

10

[10]

Odysseus,
that adventurous man, then answered him and said:

“Friend, I myself am not all that eager
 to be held back here. For a beggar man
 it’s better to ask people for a meal
 inside cities instead of in the fields.
 Whoever’s willing should give me something.
 For an old man, it’s not appropriate [20]
 to linger any longer at the farm,
 obeying everything a master says.
 So you should be on your way. This swineherd,
 who you give orders to, will take me there,
 as soon as I’ve warmed up beside the fire 30
 and the sun gets hot. These clothes I’m wearing
 are miserably bad, and I’m afraid
 the morning frost may be too much for me—
 you say the city is a long way off.”

Odysseus finished. Telemachus walked away,
 out through the farmyard, moving at a rapid pace.
 He was sowing seeds of trouble for the suitors.
 When he entered the beautifully furnished house,
 he carried in his spear and set it in its place,
 against a looming pillar. Then he moved inside, 40 [30]
 across the stone threshold. His nurse, Eurycleia,
 saw him before the others, while spreading fleeces
 on the finely crafted chairs. She burst out crying,
 rushed straight up to him, and other female servants
 of brave Odysseus were quick to gather round them.
 They kissed his head and shoulders in loving welcome.
 Then from her chamber wise Penelope emerged,
 looking like Artemis or golden Aphrodite.
 She embraced the son she loved, while shedding tears,
 and kissed his head and both his beautiful eyes. 50
 As her eyes wept, she spoke to him—her words had wings: [40]

“You’ve returned, Telemachus, you sweet light.
 I thought I’d never see you anymore,
 when you secretly sailed off to Pylos
 in that ship, against my wishes, seeking
 some report of your dear father. So come,
 describe for me what you have heard of him.”

Prudent Telemachus then answered her and said:

“Mother, do not encourage me to grieve,
 or get the heart inside my chest stirred up. 60
 I’ve just escaped being utterly destroyed.
 You should have a bath and put fresh clothing
 on your body. Then, with your attendants
 go to your upper chambers and promise
 the gods you’ll make a perfect sacrifice, [50]
 if Zeus will somehow bring to fulfillment
 actions which will give us retribution.
 I’ll go to the place where we assemble,
 so I can call upon a foreign man
 who came with me on my trip from Pylos. 70
 I sent him to town with my fine comrades,
 telling Peiraeus to make him welcome,
 to treat him kindly, and to honour him,
 until I got there.”

Telemachus finished.

Penelope was quiet—no winged words flew from her.
 She bathed herself, took fresh clothing for her body,
 and promised she would offer a perfect sacrifice
 to all the gods, if Zeus would somehow bring about
 a way of gaining her revenge against the suitors. [60]
 Telemachus walked through the hall, gripping his spear. 80
 Two swift dogs went with him. Athena poured on him
 such marvellous beauty that, as he moved along,
 all people gazed at him. The arrogant suitors
 thronged around him, making gentle conversation,
 but deep within their hearts they nurtured evil plans.
 Avoiding the main group of them, he chose a seat
 where Mentor, Antiphus, and Halitherses sat,
 companions of his father many years ago. [70]
 They asked him all kinds of questions. Then Peiraeus,
 the well-known spearman, approached, leading the stranger 90
 through the city to the place where they assembled.¹
 Telemachus did not keep his back turned for long
 upon the stranger, but went up to him. Peiraeus
 was the first to speak:

“Telemachus,
 get some women to hurry to my home,

¹The “stranger” being led to the city is the prophet Theoclymenus, who earlier (in Book 16) asked Telemachus to take him in his ship to Ithaca.

so I may have those gifts brought here to you—
the ones from Menelaus.”

Shrewd Telemachus
then answered him and said:

“Peiraeus,
we don’t know how these matters will turn out.
If these overbearing suitors kill me
in my own halls in secret and divide
the goods my father owns amongst themselves,
I’d much prefer you keep those gifts yourself
and enjoy them than any of those men.
But if I sow a lethal fate for them,
then bring those presents to me in my home,
for I will be rejoicing in my heart.”

With these words, he led the long-suffering stranger
towards the house. When they reached the stately palace,
they removed their cloaks, put them on the stools and chairs,
and went into the polished tubs to take a bath.
After the attending women had washed both men,
rubbed their bodies down with oil, and wrapped around them
woollen cloaks and tunics, they came out from the bath,
and both of them sat down. A servant brought water
in a lovely golden pitcher and poured it out
into a silver bowl, so they could wash their hands.
Beside both men she set in place a polished table.
The worthy housekeeper brought bread and set it down,
then added plates of meat, giving freely from her stores.
Telemachus’s mother sat across from him,
by the doorpost of the hall, leaning from her seat
to spin fine threads of yarn. They reached out with their hands
to take the fine food prepared and set before them.
When they had satisfied their hearts with food and drink,
the first to speak to them was wise Penelope:

“Telemachus, once I’ve gone up to my room,
I’ll lie in bed, which has become for me
a place of sorrow, always damp with tears,
ever since Odysseus sailed off to Troy
with Atreus’s sons. Yet you don’t dare
to tell me clearly of your father’s trip,

before those haughty suitors come back here
and shame my home, no word of what you learned.”

Prudent Telemachus then answered her and said:

“All right then, mother, I’ll tell you the truth.
First, we sailed to Pylos and reached Nestor,
shepherd of his people. He welcomed us [110]
into his home with hospitality
and kindness, like a father for a son 140
who has just returned from far-off places
after many years—that’s how lord Nestor
looked after me, helped by his splendid sons,
with loving care. But of brave Odysseus,
alive or dead, he had not heard a thing
from any man on earth. He sent me off
with horses and a well-built chariot
to that famous spearman Menelaus,
son of Atreus. I saw Argive Helen,
for whom countless Trojans and Achaeans 150
struggled hard, as the will of gods decreed.
Menelaus, skilled at war shouts, at once [120]
questioned me: Why had I come to Sparta?
What was I was looking for? I told the truth,
all the details. He answered me and said:

“That is disgraceful! They want to lie down
in the bed of a courageous warrior,
when they themselves are cowards—just as if
a doe has put two new-born suckling fawns
in a lion’s thicket, so they can sleep, 160
and roams mountain slopes and grassy valleys
seeking pasture, and then the lion comes
back to that lair and brings a dismal fate [130]
for both those fawns—that is how Odysseus
will bring those men to their disastrous end.
By Father Zeus, Athena, and Apollo,
how I wish he could be as he was once
in well-built Lesbos, in a wrestling match,
when he stood and fought Philomeleides,
threw him decisively, and all Achaeans 170
felt great joy—if he were that sort of man,
Odysseus might well mingle with the suitors
and destroy them all, a bitter courtship.

As for the things you're asking me about,
 begging me to speak, I'll not evade them
 or lead you astray. No. I won't neglect
 or hide a single word that I was told
 by that all-knowing Old Man of the Sea. [140]
 He claimed to me that he had seen Odysseus
 on an island, suffering great distress 180
 in nymph Calypso's home—she keeps him there
 by force. He can't get to his native land
 because he has no ship available,
 no oars, and no companions, men who might
 transport him on the broad back of the sea.'

That's what great spearman Menelaus said,
 the son of Atreus. When I was finished,
 I came home, and the immortals gave me
 favouring winds which quickly carried me
 back to my home once more."

Telemachus's words 190 [150]
 stirred the heart within her chest. Then among the group
 Theoclymenus, a godlike man, spoke out and said:

"Noble wife of Odysseus, Laertes' son,
 Menelaus has no certain knowledge.
 You should attend to what I have to say,
 for I will make a truthful prophecy
 and not conceal a thing. Now, let lord Zeus,
 first among the gods, act as my witness,
 and this fine table welcoming your guests,
 and the hearth of excellent Odysseus, 200
 which I have reached—Odysseus is, in fact,
 in Ithaca already, sitting still
 or moving, learning of these wicked acts,
 and sowing trouble for every suitor. [160]
 That's how I interpret that bird omen
 which I saw, sitting on the well-decked ship—
 that's what I told Telemachus back then."

Wise Penelope then answered him and said:

"Ah stranger, how I wish what you've just said
 might come about. For then you'd quickly learn 210

how kind we are, how many gifts I'd give—
anyone you met would call you blessed."

That is how they talked to one another of these things.
Meanwhile, in front of the palace of Odysseus,
the suitors were relaxing, throwing a discus,
and tossing javelins on a patch of level ground,
as was their custom, displaying their arrogance.
When it was time for dinner and the sheep arrived,
coming from the fields in all directions, with those
whose task it was to drive them there, Medon spoke up.
He was the herald they liked more than all the rest,
and he was always with them when they had a feast:

[170]

220

"Young men, now you have entertained your hearts
with tests of skill, so come inside the house,
and we'll prepare a meal. There's nothing wrong
with eating when it's time to have some food."

Medon spoke. Persuaded by his words, the suitors
stood up and moved away. When they reached the palace,
they removed their cloaks and draped them on stools and chairs.
Men sacrificed huge sheep and goats with lots of fat.
They killed some plump hogs and a heifer from the herd,
as they prepared the meal.

230 [180]

Meanwhile Odysseus

and the loyal swineherd were hastening to leave
their country fields and start walking to the city.
Eumaeus, a worthy man, was the first to speak:

"Stranger, you are eager to reach the town,
as my master asked, and to go today.
Myself, I'd rather leave you at the farm
to guard it, but I respect and fear him,
for he may reprimand me afterwards,
and a master's punishment can be severe.
So come now, let's be off. Most of the day
has passed already, and as evening comes
you'll quickly sense how cold the air can get."

240

[190]

Resourceful Odysseus then answered him and said:

“I see that. I know. You’re talking to a man
 who understands. So let’s be setting out.
 You take the lead. Show me the way to town.
 But if you’ve got a pole somewhere that’s cut
 for you to lean on, then give it to me. 250
 For you did say the road is slippery.”

Odysseus finished, then threw around his shoulders
 his tattered bag, full of holes, with a twisted strap.
 Eumaeus offered Odysseus a staff he liked.
 Then the two of them set off, while dogs and herdsmen [200]
 remained behind to guard the farmyard. The swineherd
 led his master to the city, like a beggar
 leaning on a stick, an old and wretched vagrant,
 with his body covered by shabby, threadbare rags.
 But as they made their way along the rugged path, 260
 getting near the city, they reached a well-made spring,
 built by Ithacus, Neritus and Polyctor,
 where townsfolk drew their water from a steady flow.¹
 Around it was a poplar grove, fed by its stream.
 They grew on all sides of the spring. Cold water flowed
 down from a rock above. High up on the summit, [210]
 an altar had been dedicated to the nymphs,
 where all the people passing by made offerings.
 Here Melanthius, son of Dolius, met them—
 he was driving a herd of goats, the finest ones 270
 in all the flocks, to serve as dinner for the suitors.
 Two herdsmen followed him. When he caught sight of them,
 Melanthius started yelling shameful insults—
 Odysseus in his heart was enraged at such abuse:

“Now here we have a truly filthy man
 leading on another filthy scoundrel.
 As always, a god matches like with like.
 You wretched swineherd, where are you off to
 with this disgusting pig, this beggar man,
 a tedious bore who’ll interrupt our feasts? 280 [220]
 He’ll rub his shoulders on many doorposts,
 begging scraps—no need for sword or cauldron.²
 If you’d let me have him guard my farmyard,

¹Ithacus, Neritus, and Polyctor were the ancient founders of Cephallenia and Ithaca.

²Melanthius is mocking the beggar’s status. All he wants is scraps of food, so the traditional trophies sought by and awarded to successful warriors (swords and cauldrons) are irrelevant to him.

clean out the pens, and carry tender shoots
 to my young goats, then he could drink down whey
 and put some muscle on those thighs of his.
 But since he's picked up his thieving habits,
 he has no urge to cope with real work.
 No. He'd rather creep around the country
 and beg food to fill his bottomless gut. 290
 I'll tell you something—and this will happen—
 if he goes in the home of brave Odysseus, [230]
 many a footstool hurled by real men
 will hit his ribs and all parts of his head,
 while he gets tossed around all through the house."

Melanthius spoke, and as he moved on past them,
 the stupid herder kicked Odysseus on the hip.
 But that did not dislodge Odysseus from the path.
 He stood there without budging. He was wondering
 whether he should charge in and kill him with his staff, 300
 or grab him by the waist, lift him up, and smash his head
 down on the ground. But he controlled himself, checking
 the fury in his heart. Eumaeus looked at the man,
 scolded him, then, lifting up his hands in prayer,
 he cried aloud:

"You spring nymphs, daughters of Zeus, 240
 if for your sake Odysseus ever burned
 pieces of thigh from lambs or from young goats,
 richly wrapped in fat, grant me this prayer—
 let my master come, guided by some god.
 He would soon shatter the rude presumption 310
 that you now, in your insolence, display,
 always wandering down into the town,
 while wicked herdsmen devastate our flocks."

Melanthius the goatherd answered him and said:

"Dear me, the things this crafty mongrel says!
 I'll take him someday on a trim black ship
 far from Ithaca—he can make me rich. [250]
 O how I wish Apollo's silver bow
 would strike Telemachus in his own house
 this very day, or that he'd be silenced 320
 by all the suitors, for the day Odysseus

will be returning home has disappeared
in some land far away.”

Melanthius said this
and left them there, as they trudged slowly onward.
He strode ahead and quickly reached the royal house.
He went in at once and sat among the suitors,
opposite Eurymachus, who was fond of him
more so than were the others. A household servant
set down a portion of the meat in front of him.
The worthy housekeeper then carried in the bread
and placed it there for him to eat. 330

Meanwhile Odysseus [260]
and the loyal swineherd paused as they came closer.
Around them rang the music of the hollow lyre,
for Phemius was striking up a song to sing
before the suitors. Odysseus clutched the swineherd
by the hand and said to him:

“Eumaeus,
this place surely is the splendid palace
belonging to Odysseus. It’s easy
to recognize, even when one sees it
among many others, for here there is 340
building after building, and this courtyard—
it’s finished off with walls and coping stones,
and there’s a double gateway well fenced in.
No man could criticize a house like this.
I notice many men are eating here—
there’s smoke from roasting meat above the house, [270]
and a lyre is playing. A god made that
to serve as our companion at a feast.”

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you answered him and said:

“You recognized it easily enough, 350
for in other things you’re quite perceptive.
But come, let’s consider how this business
will be carried out. Either you go first
and move inside the finely furnished house
to join the suitors, while I stay outside,
or, if you wish, stay here. I’ll go ahead.
But don’t hang around for long, just in case

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someone sees you here outside and hits you
or starts throwing something. That's my advice.
You should think about it."

Long-suffering Odysseus 360 [280]
then said to Eumaeus:

"I know. I see that.
You're talking to a man who understands.
But you go on ahead. I'll stay out here.
Having things thrown at me or being hit
is nothing new. My heart can bear all that,
for I've put up with numerous hardships
in war and on the waves. So let all this
be added in with those. There is no way
someone can hide a ravenous stomach—
that torment which brings mortal men such grief. 370
Because of it, they launch their well-built ships
and transport evil to their enemies
across the restless seas."

And so these two men [290]
talked to each other about these things. Then a dog,
prone in the dirt, raised its head and pricked up its ears.
It was Argus, brave Odysseus's hunting dog,
whom he himself had brought up many years ago.
But before he could enjoy being with the hound,
he left for sacred Troy. In earlier days, young men
would take the dog to hunt wild goats, deer, and rabbits, 380
but now, with his master gone, he lay neglected
in the piles of dung left there by mules and cattle,
heaped up before the doors, until the household slaves
took it to manure some large field. Argus lay there, [300]
covered in fleas. But then, when he saw Odysseus,
who was coming closer, Argus wagged his tail
and dropped his ears. But he no longer had the strength
to approach his master. Odysseus looked away
and brushed aside a tear—he did so casually
to hide it from Eumaeus. Then he questioned him: 390

"Eumaeus, it's strange this dog is lying here,
in the dung. He has a handsome body.
I'm not sure if his speed once matched his looks

or if he's like those table dogs men have,
the pets their masters raise and keep for show." [310]

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you answered him and said:

"Yes, this dog belongs to a man who died
somewhere far away. If he had the form
and acted as he did when Odysseus
left him and went to Troy, you'd quickly see 400
his speed and strength, and then you'd be amazed.
No wild animal he chased escaped him
in deep thick woods, for he could track a scent.
He's in a bad way now. His master's dead
in some foreign land, and careless women
don't look after him. For when their masters [320]
no longer exercise their power, slaves
have no desire to do their proper work.
For Zeus steals half the value of a man
the day he's taken and becomes a slave." 410

This said, Eumaeus went inside the stately palace,
straight into the hall to join the noble suitors.
But once he'd seen Odysseus after nineteen years,
Argus died, seized by the fatal clutch of Death.

As the swineherd Eumaeus came inside the house,
godlike Telemachus was the first to see him,
well before the others. He quickly summoned him
by nodding. Eumaeus looked around, then picked up [330]
a stool placed where a servant usually sat
and carved massive cuts of meat to feed the suitors, 420
when they were feasting in the house. He took this stool,
placed it by Telemachus's table, facing him,
and then sat down. Meanwhile, a herald offered him
a portion of the meat, set it in front of him,
and helped him to some bread served in a basket.
Odysseus came in the house behind Eumaeus,
looking like an old and miserable beggar,
leaning on his staff, with his body dressed in rags.
He sat on the ash wood threshold in the doorway,
propping his back against a post of cypress wood, 430
which a craftsman had cut and planed with utmost skill [340]
and set in true alignment. Then Telemachus
called the swineherd to him and from the basket took

an entire loaf and as much meat as he could hold
in both his hands. As he did this he spoke to him:

“Take this food, and give it to the stranger.
Tell him he can move among the suitors
and solicit each of them in person.
When a man is hungry, they say that shame
is not a good companion.”

Telemachus spoke.
Once he had heard these words, Eumaeus went and stood
beside Odysseus, then spoke to him—his words had wings:

440

“Stranger, Telemachus gives you this food
and invites you to move around and beg
among the suitors, each in turn. He says,
when one’s in need, it’s bad to feel ashamed.”

[350]

Resourceful Odysseus then answered him and said:

“May lord Zeus, I pray, grant Telemachus
be blest among all men. May he obtain
whatever he desires in his heart.”

Once he’d said this,
he took the food in his two hands and set it down
right there at his feet, on his tattered bag, and ate,
while the minstrel sang to those feasting in the hall.
When he had eaten and the godlike singer finished,
the suitors were causing an uproar in the room.

450

Athena approached Odysseus, Laertes’ son,
and urged him to beg for bread from all the suitors,
so he might find out those who did respect the law
and those who flouted their traditions. Even so,
she would not let any of them evade his fate.

[360]

Odysseus then moved off to beg for scraps of bread,
holding his hand out to each of them on every side,
starting on the right, as if he had been a beggar
for years and years. They pitied him and gave him bread,
then asked about him, questioning one another
who he was and where he came from. Then the goatherd,
Melanthius, spoke out to them:

460

"Listen to me, [370]
 those of you courting the glorious queen,
 about this stranger. I've seen him before.
 The swineherd was the one who brought him here. 470
 I don't know his identity for sure
 or the family he claims to come from."

Once he said this, Antinous turned on Eumaeus,
to reprimand him:

"You really are a man
 who cares for pigs—why bring this fellow here
 into the city? As far as vagrants go,
 do we not have enough apart from him,
 greedy beggars who disrupt our banquets?
 Do you believe too few of them come here
 and waste away your master's livelihood, 480
 so you invite this man to come as well?"

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you answered him and said: [380]

"Antinous, you may be a noble man,
 but what you've said is not a worthy speech.
 Who looks for strangers from another land
 and then in person asks them to come in,
 unless they're workers in a public space—
 prophets, healers of disease, house builders,
 or gifted minstrels, who sing for our delight?
 Such men are summoned to where people live 490
 everywhere on boundless earth. But no one
 invites a beggar to consume his goods.
 You are abusive to my master's slaves,
 more so than any of the other suitors,
 especially to me. But I don't care,
 not while faithful Penelope lives here, [390]
 with brave Telemachus inside these halls."

Then prudent Telemachus answered him and said:

"Be quiet. For my sake don't reply to him
 with a long speech. It's Antinous's habit 500
 always to offer nasty provocation,
 to start a quarrel with abusive words.
 He urges other men to do the same."

That said, he spoke to Antinous—his words had wings:

“Antinous, you really do care for me,
like fathers for their sons, when you tell me,
in your forceful way, to drive this stranger
from the house. May god forbid such action.
Take some food and give it to him yourself—
I don’t mind. I’m asking you to do it.
You need not worry about my mother
or any of the servants in this house
belonging to godlike Odysseus. But still,
there is no thought like this inside your heart—
you’d much prefer to stuff yourself with food
than give it to another man.”

510 [400]

Antinous

then answered him and said:

“Telemachus,
you’re a braggart and won’t control your rage.
What are you saying? If every suitor
offered him as much as I will, this house
would make him stay away at least three months.”

520

As he said this, he picked up a stool standing there,
where he used to rest his shining feet while feasting,
and lifted it up high, as if about to throw it.
But every other suitor offered Odysseus food,
and so his bag was quickly filled with meat and bread,
enough to make him stop and shuffle to his place
back in the doorway where he could squat down and eat
the food the suitors gave. But he stopped by Antinous,
and spoke to him, saying:

[410]

“My friend, give something.
You don’t seem to me the worst Achaean,
but one of the best—you have a regal look.
So you should give a bigger piece of bread
than other men. I’d publicize your fame
across the boundless earth. For once I, too,
lived among those in my home, a rich man
with a happy life. There were many times
I’d offer presents to some vagabond,

530

[420]

no matter who he was or what he needed
 when he came. I had countless servants 540
 and many other things that people have
 when they live well and are considered rich.
 But Zeus, son of Cronos, destroyed all that.
 That's what he wanted, I suppose. He sent me
 with some roaming pirates off to Egypt,
 a lengthy trip. He wanted me to die.
 I moored my curving ships in Egypt's river
 and told my loyal comrades to stay there
 and protect the ships. Then I sent out scouts [430]
 to go up to the lookouts. But the crew, 550
 giving way to impulse and counting on
 their numbers, quickly set off to ravage
 the attractive farms of the Egyptians,
 capturing the women and their children,
 while slaughtering the men. The cry went up,
 and soon it reached the city. Hearing noise,
 the people came as soon as dawn appeared—
 the entire plain was filled with men on foot
 and in chariots, armed with gleaming bronze.
 Then Zeus, who hurls the thunderbolt, threw down 560
 dreadful panic on my crew. None of them
 dared stand and face up to the enemy.
 Disaster loomed for us from every side.
 With their sharp bronze they killed a lot of us, [440]
 but others they led off while still alive
 so they could be compelled to work for them.
 They gave me to a stranger they had met,
 bound for Cyprus, Dmetor, son of Iasus,
 a man with power and king of Cyprus.
 From there I reached this place in great distress." 570

Then Antinous answered him and said:

"What god
 sent this nuisance to interrupt our feast?
 Leave my table alone! Go over there,
 in the middle, or you'll soon find yourself
 somewhere worse than Cyprus or in Egypt.
 You're an insolent and shameless beggar—
 you come up to each of us, one by one,
 and they give you things, with no holding back, [450]
 for there's no check or scruple when one gives

from someone else's goods, and each of us
has so much food set here in front of him." 580

Resourceful Odysseus then moved back and replied:

"Well now, it seems as if that mind of yours
doesn't match your looks—you'd refuse to give
even a grain of salt from your own house
to a followers of yours, and now you sit
in someone else's house and do not dare
to take some bread and offer it to me.
And yet there's plenty right in front of you."

Odysseus finished. Antinous deep in his heart 590
was even angrier than before. He glared at him,
and, with a scowl, gave his response—his words had wings:

"I do not think you'll leave this hall unharmed, [460]
now that you've begun to babble insults."

As he said these words, he grabbed the stool and threw it.
It hit Odysseus at the base of his right shoulder,
where it joins the back. But he stood firm, like a rock—
what Antinous had thrown did not make him stagger.
He shook his head in silence, making cruel plans.
He shuffled to the door, set down his well stuffed bag, 600
crouched in the entranceway, and addressed the suitors:

"Listen to me, you suitors of the queen—
for in my chest my heart prompts me to speak.
A man's heart feels no pain and does not grieve [470]
when he's hit fighting for the things he owns,
for cattle or white sheep. But Antinous
just struck me thanks to my wretched belly,
that curse which brings such pain to mortal men.
So if beggars have their gods and Furies,
may Antinous come to a fatal end, 610
before his wedding day."

Antinous, Eupheithes' son,
gave him this reply:

"Sit still and eat, stranger,
or go someplace else, in case younger men

BOOK SEVENTEEN

haul you through the house by your hands and feet
for what you say, scraping your whole body.” [480]

He finished. But all those proud men were furious,
and one of the more insolent young men spoke out:

“Antinous, it was wrong of you to hit
a wretched beggar. And you may be doomed,
if somehow he’s a god come down from heaven. 620
For gods can truly make themselves appear
like foreign strangers, assuming many shapes
and haunting cities, to investigate
men’s pride and their obedience to laws.”

That’s what the suitors said. However, Antinous
paid no attention to their words. Telemachus,
having seen the blow, felt pain growing in his heart.
But no tear passed his eyelids and dripped onto the floor. [490]
He remained silent, shaking his head and planning
dark schemes in his heart.

But when wise Penelope 630
heard that the stranger had been hit inside the hall,
she spoke out to her attendant women, saying:

“O how I wish Antinous might be struck
by the famous archer god, Apollo!”

The housekeeper, old Eurynome, said to her:

“If what we all pray for could be fulfilled,
not one of them would see Dawn’s lovely throne.”

Wise Penelope then answered her:

“Good nurse,
they are all enemies with evil plans,
but Antinous, more than any of them, 640 [500]
is like black fate. Some unhappy stranger
wanders through the house, begging from the men.
His own need drives him to it. The others,
all of them, gave him gifts and filled his bag,
but Antinous threw a footstool at him
and hit a bone in his right shoulder blade.”

So Penelope talked with her serving women,
sitting in her upper room, while Odysseus ate.
Then she called out to the loyal swineherd, saying:

“Good Eumaeus, go and ask the stranger
to come here, so I can greet him warmly
and ask if he perhaps has heard about
my brave Odysseus, or caught sight of him
with his own eyes. For he looks like a man
who’s spent a long time wandering around.”

650

[510]

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you answered her and said:

“How I wish Achaeans would keep quiet,
my queen, for he tells the kind of stories
which delight one’s heart. I had him with me
for three nights, and for three days I kept him
in my hut. He came to me first of all—
he was fleeing in secret from a ship.
He never finished what he had to say
of his misfortunes. Just as any man
hears a minstrel who sings enticing songs
to mortal men, ones the gods have taught him,
and there’s no end to his desire for more,
no matter what he sings, that’s how this man
enchanted me, as he sat in my home.
He claims that he’s a guest-friend of Laertes
from Crete, where the race of Minos lives,
He’s come from there, after many hardships,
as he keeps wandering from place to place.
He insists he’s heard about Odysseus—
who is close by, living in the rich land
of Thesprotians—with many treasures
which he intends to bring back home.”

660

[520]

670

Wise Penelope
then answered him:

“Go and call him here—
he can tell me for himself. Let the men
keep sitting in the hall or at the door
enjoying themselves—their hearts are cheerful.
Their own possessions lie untouched at home,

[530]

680

sweet wine and bread, which their house servants eat.
 But they fill up our home day after day,
 butchering our cattle, fat sheep, and goats,
 carousing and drinking our gleaming wine
 without restraint. Much of it is wasted.
 There's no one like Odysseus here who'll guard
 our house from ruin. If Odysseus came
 back here to Ithaca, he and his son
 would quickly seek revenge on all these men
 for their unseemly ways."

690

[540]

As Penelope said this,
 Telemachus gave a mighty sneeze—it echoed
 through the house. Penelope laughed and quickly spoke
 some winged words to Eumaeus:

"Call the stranger.
 Bring him here before me. Did you not see
 my son sneezing at everything I said?
 The complete destruction of the suitors
 will not go unfulfilled—for all of them—
 not one will flee his fatal destiny.¹
 I'll tell you something else. Lay it to heart.
 If I can see he's telling me the truth,
 I'll offer him fine clothes, a cloak and tunic."

700

[550]

Penelope finished. Once Eumaeus heard her,
 he went off and, standing close beside Odysseus,
 spoke to him—his words had wings:

"Honoured stranger,
 wise Penelope is summoning you,
 Telemachus's mother. For her heart,
 in spite of bearing much anxiety,
 is urging her to ask about her husband.
 If she perceives that everything you say
 is true, she'll give you a cloak and tunic,
 things you desperately need. As for food,
 you can beg for it throughout the country
 and fill your stomach. Whoever's willing
 will give it to you."

710

¹Sneezes were sometimes viewed as omens, hence Penelope's prophetic tone.

Long-suffering lord Odysseus [560]
then answered him:

“Eumaeus, I’ll tell the truth,
all the details, to wise Penelope,
daughter of Icarius, and quickly, too.
I know Odysseus well—for both of us 720
have had the same misfortunes. But I fear
this abusive crowd of suitors, whose pride
and violence reach up to iron heaven.
Just now, as I was moving through the house,
doing nothing wrong, one of them struck me
and caused me pain—and no one sitting there,
not even Telemachus, could do a thing
to stop him. So you should tell Penelope,
for all her eagerness, to wait right now,
there in the hall, until the sun goes down. 730 [570]
Let her ask me then about her husband
and the day of his return. Let me sit
close by the fire, for the clothes I’m wearing
are pitiful, as you yourself well know,
since I came to you first of all for help.”

Odysseus finished. Once he’d listened to these words
the swineherd went away. As he crossed the threshold,
Penelope said:

“He’s not with you, Eumaeus.
Why is the beggar acting in this way?
Is he somehow too afraid to come here, 740
or does he feel ashamed by something else?
He’s a poor beggar if he feels disgraced.”

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you answered her and said:

“What he said made sense—what any man [580]
would think if he was planning to avoid
the insolence of those presumptuous men.
He says you should wait for him till sunset.
And, my queen, it would be appropriate
for you to talk in person to this man,
so you yourself may hear what he may say.” 750

Wise Penelope then answered him and said:

“The stranger is not stupid. For he thinks
about the dangers that may well threaten.
I don’t believe that any mortal men
are as high-handed as these suitors are,
the way they plan their wicked foolishness.”

Penelope spoke. Once he’d told her everything,
the loyal swineherd mixed with the crowd of suitors. [590]
Moving up close to Telemachus, so others
could not hear, he spoke to him—his swift words had wings: 760

“Friend, I’m going to leave and guard the swine
and other things, your livelihood and mine.
You take charge of what’s going on in here.
First and foremost, protect yourself. Your heart
must stay alert, so you don’t suffer harm.
Many Achaeans are hatching evil plans—
may Zeus kill them all before they hurt us.”

Prudent Telemachus then answered him and said:

“It will happen, old friend. Now, you should eat
before you leave. Come here in the morning, 770
and bring fine animals for sacrifice. [600]
Everything in here will be my concern,
mine and the immortals.”

Telemachus spoke.
The swineherd sat down on the polished chair again.
Once he had filled his heart with food and drink, he left,
returning to his pigs, through the hall and courtyard,
where the throngs of suitors were enjoying themselves
with dance and song, for evening had already come.

BOOK EIGHTEEN
ODYSSEUS AND IRUS THE BEGGAR

[Irus the beggar arrives at the palace and starts abusing Odysseus; the suitors encourage them to fight; in the scrap Odysseus knocks Irus out; Odysseus warns Amphinomus of trouble ahead; Athena makes Penelope want to appear before the suitors; Athena puts Penelope to sleep and makes her more beautiful; Penelope wakes up and goes downstairs to mix with the suitors; Telemachus and Penelope talk about the stranger; Penelope encourages the suitors to bring presents for her, and they do so; Odysseus talks to the female servants, criticizing them for assisting the suitors; Odysseus holds up the lamps for the suitors at their feast; Eurymachus makes fun of Odysseus, and Odysseus give him a heated reply; Eurymachus throws a stool at Odysseus but misses and hits the wine steward; Telemachus and Amphinomus restore order; the suitors continue feasting and then leave.]

Then a vagrant from the community arrived,
who used to beg through all the town of Ithaca,
a beggar famous for his gluttonous stomach,
with an incessant appetite for food and drink.
He looked huge, but had little energy or strength.
This man was called Arnaeus—his honoured mother
had given him that name when he was born, but now
all young men called him Irus, since he ran around
carrying messages for anyone who asked.¹
Entering the hall, he tried to drive Odysseus
away from his own home by shouting out abuse—
his words had wings:

10

“Get out of the door, old man,
or you’ll be hauled off by your feet. You see
how they’re all winking at me, telling me
to pull you out? As far as I’m concerned,
I’d be ashamed to do it. So get up,
or else we’ll fight this quarrel with our fists.”

[10]

Resourceful Odysseus frowned, looked at him, and said:

“My good man, I am not bothering you,
nor am I shouting insults. I don’t mind
if someone gives you something, even if
he offers a generous portion. This door

20

¹The name *Irus* is probably a masculine version of *Iris*, the name of the goddess who carries messages for the gods.

has room for both of us, and there's no need
 to care about what someone else may get.
 You seem to be a vagrant, just like me—
 gods are supposed to make us happy men.
 But don't provoke me too much with your fists, [20]
 in case you make me angry. Though I'm old,
 I might spatter your lips and chest with blood.
 If so, I could enjoy more peace tomorrow, 30
 for I don't think you'd come a second time
 to Odysseus' home, son of Laertes."

That made the beggar Irus angry, so he said:

"Well, how nicely this filthy beggar talks,
 like an old woman from the baking ovens.
 But I'll make trouble for him. I'll punch him
 with both fists on the jaw, smash all his teeth
 into the ground, and treat him like a sow
 who's been devouring the crop. Come now,
 tighten your belt, so all these people here 40 [30]
 can recognize that we're about to fight.
 How can you go against a younger man?"

As their tempers heated up, they both grew angry
 on the polished threshold beside the lofty doors.
 Strong and powerful Antinous observed them there,
 and, laughing cheerfully, shouted to the suitors:

"My friends, here's something we've not seen before.
 A god has sent this house some entertainment!
 There's a quarrel—Irus and the stranger.
 They're going to fight each other with their fists. 50
 Let's get them started now!"

Antinous's words [40]
 made the suitors jump up laughing. They gathered there,
 around the shabby beggars. Then Eupeithes' son,
 Antinous, said to them:

"Listen to me,
 you brave suitors. I've something to suggest.
 We've got goats' bellies lying by the fire,
 stuffed full of fat and blood, our dinner meal.
 Whichever of these two men wins this fight

and proves the better man, let him stand up
 and take the one he wishes for himself. 60
 And he will always eat his meals with us.
 Nor will we allow another beggar
 to come into our group and ask for food.”

Antinous finished. They were pleased with what he said. [50]
 Then, resourceful Odysseus with his crafty mind
 spoke to them:

“My friends, there’s no way an old man
 weighed down with grief can fight a younger man.
 But that trouble-making stomach of mine
 urges me to try, so he may beat me
 with his blows. But come now, let all of you 70
 swear a binding oath that not one of you
 supporting Irus will use his heavy fists
 to strike at me unfairly, and by force
 overpower me on Irus’s behalf.”

Odysseus spoke. They all vowed to act as he had asked.
 After they had promised and finished with the oath,
 Telemachus spoke up with strength and confidence, [60]
 so all could hear:

“Stranger, if your proud spirit
 and your heart drive you on to beat this man,
 don’t fear a single one of these Achaeans. 80
 Whoever strikes at you will have to fight
 with many more as well. I am your host,
 and the two princes here agree with me,
 Antinous and Eurymachus, both men
 who understand things well.”

Telemachus spoke,
 and everyone endorsed his words. Then Odysseus,
 while hitching up the rags around his private parts,
 exposed his fine large thighs, and they could also see
 his well muscled shoulders, chest and powerful arms.
 Athena stood beside that shepherd of his people 90 [70]
 and enlarged his limbs. Each suitor, quite astonished,
 glanced quickly at the man beside him and muttered
 words like these:

BOOK EIGHTEEN

“Irus will soon be in trouble,
something he brought on himself—he won’t be
Irus any more, judging from the thighs
that old man shows under those rags of his.”

That’s how they talked. Irus’s heart was badly shaken.
The servants girded up his clothes and led him out.
He was afraid—flesh quivering on every limb—
but they pushed him forward. Antinous sneered at him,
addressing him right to his face:

100

“You bragging fool,
if you’re afraid and tremble at this man,
you should not live or ever have been born.
He’s a old man worn down by misfortunes
that have made him feeble. I’ll tell you this,
and what I say will happen—if this beggar
beats you and proves himself the better man,
I’ll throw you in a black ship and take you
over to the mainland to king Echetus,
who tortures everyone.¹ With pitiless bronze
he’ll cut off your nose and ears, slice away
your cock and balls and throw them to the hounds,
raw meat for his dogs to rip to pieces.”

[80]

110

Antinous spoke. An even greater trembling seized
the vagrant’s legs, as they led him to the middle.
Both men raised their fists. At that point lord Odysseus,
who had endured so much, was of two minds—should he
hit Irus so his life would leave him where he fell,
or should he strike him with a less destructive blow
and stretch him on the ground? As he thought about it,
this seemed the better choice—to hit him with less force,
so Achaeans would not look at him too closely.
They both raised their fists, and Irus struck Odysseus
on his right shoulder, but Odysseus then struck him
on his neck, just below his ear, and crushed the bones.
Immediately blood came flowing from his mouth.
He fell down moaning in the dirt, grinding his teeth.
His feet kept kicking at the ground. The brave suitors
all threw up their hands and almost died of laughter.
Odysseus grabbed Irus by the foot and dragged him

[90]

120

[100]

130

¹Echetus was king of Epirus and notorious for his extreme cruelty.

out the entranceway until he reached the courtyard
and the portico gate. There he left him, leaning
against the courtyard wall with his stick in his hands.
Odysseus then spoke to Irus—his words had wings:

“Sit there and scare away the pigs and dogs.
And do not, in your miserable state,
try to bully foreigners and strangers.
You may end up in even worse distress.”

As he spoke, he threw his tattered bag full of holes
across his shoulders, hanging by a twisted strap. 140
Then he went back into the doorway and sat down.
The suitors went inside, laughing uproariously, [110]
and threw him words of greeting as they passed him.
One of the arrogant young men said something like:

“May Zeus and the other eternal gods
give you, stranger, the thing you most desire,
what fills your heart—since now you will prevent
that greedy vagrant begging in this place.
We’ll soon take him over to the mainland,
to Echetus, who mutilates all men.” 150

That is how they talked. Odysseus was happy
at such friendly words. Antinous set down by him
the immense goat stomach stuffed full of blood and fat,
and Amphinomus picked two loaves from the basket, [120]
placed them before Odysseus, and then toasted him
with a golden cup, saying:

“Greetings, honoured stranger,
though right now you’re facing many miseries,
may happiness be yours in future days.”

Then resourceful Odysseus answered him and said:

“Amphinomus, you seem to be a man 160
with true intelligence. Your father, too,
had the same quality. I’ve heard about
his noble name—Nisus of Dulichium,
a brave and wealthy man. And people say
you come from him, and you do seem discreet.
I’ll tell you something you should keep in mind.

BOOK EIGHTEEN

Listen to me. Of all the things that breathe
and move along the ground, Earth does not raise [130]
any creature more powerless than man.
He thinks he'll never suffer any harm 170
in days to come, as long as gods provide
prosperity and his knees stay supple.
But when blessed gods bring on misfortunes,
he bears those, too, though much against his will.
The father of gods and men brings us days
which shape the hearts of earth's inhabitants.
Among men I was set to be successful,
but, yielding to my strength and influence,
I did many reckless things, relying
on my father and my family. No man 180 [140]
should ever practise any lawlessness.
He should hold his gifts from gods in silence,
whatever they give. I see suitors here
planning desperate acts, wasting the wealth
and dishonouring the wife of a man who,
I think, will not remain away for long,
not from his family and native soil.
He is close by. May some god lead you home,
and may you not have to confront the man
whenever he comes back to his own house. 190
For I do not believe, once he returns
under his own roof, he and the suitors
will separate until much blood is shed." [150]

Odysseus spoke. After pouring a libation,
he drank some honey wine, then handed back the cup
to Amphinomus. That leader of the people
went through the house, head bowed, with foreboding
in his heart—he had a sense that many troubles
still lay in store. Still, he did not escape his fate.
Athena had ordained that he would be destroyed 200
by a spear in the strong hand of Telemachus.
He moved away, sitting where he had sat before.

Then goddess Athena with the glittering eyes
put an idea in the mind of wise Penelope,
Icarius's daughter—to approach the suitors,
so she might truly stir the feeling in their hearts [160]
and acquire more honour from her son and husband

than she had before.¹ With an unnatural laugh
she spoke out and said:

“Eurynome, though my heart
has never once desired to show myself
before these suitors, it does now, shameless
though they may be. And I’ve got words to say
to my own son—he would be better off
not mingling with those arrogant suitors.
They may say nice things, but they’re making plans
for nasty schemes in future.”

210

Old Erynome,
her housekeeper, then answered her and said:

“My child,
all these things you say make sense. You must go
and say that to your son. Do not hide it.
But first of all, you should wash your body
and rub ointment on your face. Don’t leave here,
not like this, showing both cheeks stained with tears.
It’s not right to show your grief forever
and never stop. Your son is old enough
to grow a beard—and you prayed very hard
to gods that you would see him reach that age.”

[170]

220

Then wise Penelope answered her and said:

“Eurynome, although you care for me,
don’t tell me I should rinse my body off
or rub oil on my skin. Gods on Olympus
have ravaged all my beauty, since the day
Odysseus went off in his hollow ships.
Tell Hippodameia and Autonoe
to come in here—they can stand beside me
in the hall. For I won’t go there alone
among the men. I’d be ashamed.”

230 [180]

Once she said this,
the old woman went through the chamber to instruct
the women and urge them to appear. Then once again,

¹This entire incident (lines 203 to 380) has been the subject of much scholarly discussion, especially concerning Penelope’s motivation and the style of the writing.

BOOK EIGHTEEN

Athena, bright-eyed goddess, thought of something else.
She poured sweet sleep over Icarius's child, 240
who leaned back and closed her eyes, lying on the couch,
all her limbs relaxed. Meanwhile, the lovely goddess [190]
gave her immortal gifts, so those Achaean men
would be enchanted with her. First, she cleansed her face
with a divine ointment made from ambrosia,
like lotion lovely Cythera rubs on her skin
when she attends the joyful dancing of the Graces.¹
She made her seem taller, too, and changed her figure,
so she looked more like a queen, and whitened her skin—
it shone more pale than fresh-cut ivory. That done, 250
the lovely goddess left, and white-armed servants came,
all chattering as they moved there from their chambers.
Then sweet Sleep released Penelope. With her hands
she rubbed her cheeks and said: [200]

“In spite of my great grief,
a deep sweet sleep has held me in its arms.
I wish pure Artemis would quickly bring
a gentle death to me right now, so I
no longer waste my life away, mourning
in my heart and craving my dear husband,
a man with every form of excellence, 260
the finest of Achaeans.”

Once she said this,
she made her way from her shining upper chambers.
She was not alone—two attendants went with her.
When the noble lady reached the suitors, she stood
beside a pillar holding up the well-made roof,
with a bright veil across her face. Loyal servants [210]
stood there with her, one on either side. The suitors
in their hearts felt immediately overwhelmed,
consumed by sexual desire. Their legs grew weak.
Each of them prayed that he could go to bed with her. 270
She began to speak, first addressing her dear son:

“Telemachus, your wit and understanding
are not as steady as they used to be.
While still a child, the way you used to think
was more astute. But now you're fully grown,

¹Cythera is another name for Aphrodite, the goddess of sexual attraction and beauty.

on the verge of being a man. Anyone
 from somewhere far away who looked at you
 and only saw your beauty and your size
 might well observe that you're a rich man's son.
 Yet your mind and thoughts are no longer wise.
 What sort of actions are going on here,
 in this house, when you allow a stranger
 to be mistreated in this way? And now,
 what if this stranger, sitting in our home,
 should suffer harm from such severe abuse?
 You'd be disgraced among all men and shamed."

280 [220]

Prudent Telemachus then answered her and said:

"Mother, I don't take issue with you now
 for being angry. I know about these things.
 My heart understands them, all the details,
 good and bad. I was still a child before.
 But I can't think through everything correctly,
 with these men sitting round me on all sides—
 they strike at me, devising evil plans,
 and I have no one here to guard me. Still,
 this battle between Irus and the stranger
 did not turn out the way the suitors wished.
 The stranger's strength made him the better man.
 By Father Zeus, Athena, and Apollo,
 I wish these suitors now inside our home
 could be defeated, just as Irus was,
 their heads drooping down inside the courtyard
 and inside the hall, each man's arms and legs
 gone limp—that's how Irus is now sitting
 beside the courtyard gate, nodding his head,
 like some drunken fool. He can't stand upright
 or wander home, wherever his home is,
 because his precious limbs have all gone slack."

290

[230]

300

[240]

As they were talking to each other in this way,
 Eurymachus spoke to Penelope and said:

310

"Child of Icarius, wise Penelope,
 if all Argives in Iasian Argos
 saw you now, more suitors would be feasting
 in your home from tomorrow on, since you

excel all women for your form, your poise,
and for the wisdom you have in your heart.”¹

Wise Penelope then answered him:

[250]

“Eurymachus,
what’s excellent about my form and beauty
the gods destroyed when Argives left for Troy
and Odysseus, my husband, sailed with them.
If he would come and organize my life,
then I’d be more beautiful and famous.
But now I’m grieving. A god has sent me
so much trouble! You know, when he went off
and left his native land, he held the wrist
on my right hand and said to me:

320

‘Dear wife,
I don’t believe that all well-armed Achaeans
will make it safely back from Troy unharmed.
For Trojans, people say, are warriors,
who know how to fight with spears and arrows
and guide swift-footed horses, all those skills
which soon decide the outcome of a battle
in impartial war. So I do not know
if gods will get me back or I’ll be killed
over there in Troy. You must take control
of everything back here. While I’m away,
take care of my parents in the palace
the way you do right now, but even more.
But when you see our son has grown a beard,
then marry whom you wish, and leave the house.’

[260]

330

340 [270]

That’s what he said. Now it’s all happening.
The night will come when some hateful marriage
will be my lot, for now I am accursed—
Zeus has deprived me of my happiness,
and painful grief has come into my heart,
into my spirit. The way you men behave
was not proper for suitors in the past.
Those who wish to court a noble lady,
daughter of a wealthy man, and compete

¹The phrase *Iasian Argos* seems to mean *the entire Peloponnese* (i.e., all of mainland Greece south of the Isthmus of Corinth). In Homer, the term *Argos* is often rather imprecise.

against each other, bring in their cattle, 350
 their own rich flocks, to feast the lady's friends,
 and offer splendid gifts. They don't consume
 another's livelihood and pay him nothing." [280]

Penelope finished. Long-suffering Odysseus
 was pleased that she was getting them to give her gifts,
 with charming, soothing words, her mind on other things.

Then Antinous, son of Eupeithes, spoke to her:

"Child of Icarius, wise Penelope,
 if one of the Achaeans wants to bring
 a gift for you in here, you should accept it. 360
 It's not good if you refuse a present.
 But we will not return to our estates
 or any other place, until you marry
 whoever is the best of the Achaeans."

Antinous spoke. The suitors all agreed with him, [290]
 and each man sent a herald out to fetch some gifts.
 One of them brought back, at Antinous's bidding,
 a large and lovely robe with rich embroidery.
 On it hung golden brooches, twelve in all, each one
 fitted with graceful curving clasps. Another man 370
 brought in a chain of gold made for Eurymachus,
 a finely crafted pendant strung with amber beads
 glowing like the sun. Two attendants carried back
 some earrings for Eurydamas, with three droplets
 in a stylish shining cluster. For Peisander,
 Polyctor's son, an attendant brought a necklace, [300]
 a splendid piece of jewellery. All Achaeans
 offered her some sort of gorgeous, costly gift.

Noble Penelope then left and went upstairs.
 Her servants carried up the lovely gifts for her. 380
 Then the suitors turned to joyful songs and dances,
 enjoying themselves and waiting for the sunset,
 and as they entertained themselves, black evening came.
 They set up three braziers in the hall for light
 and stacked hard seasoned wood around them, dry kindling
 freshly split by axe, placing torches in between. [310]
 Odysseus's servants held up the blazing flames.

Then Odysseus, born from Zeus, man of many schemes,
addressed those slaves in person:

“Servants of Odysseus,
your master, who has been away so long, 390
go to the rooms the honoured queen lives in,
and twist the yarn beside her. Sit down there.
Make her happy, by staying in the room
or combing wool by hand. As for these lamps,
I’ll keep providing light for all these men.
Even if they wait here for fair-throned Dawn,
they cannot wear me down, for I’m a man
who can endure much suffering.”

Odysseus spoke. [320]

The slaves looked at each other and burst out laughing.
Then fair-cheeked Melantho, daughter of Dolius, 400
spoke out shamelessly. Penelope had raised her,
treating her as her own daughter, providing toys,
whatever she desired. And yet, in spite of this,
her heart was never sorry for Penelope,
for she loved Eurymachus and had sex with him.
In an abusive speech, she rebuked Odysseus:

“You idiotic stranger, you’re a man
whose mind has had all sense knocked out of it.
You’ve no desire to sleep just anywhere,
not in a blacksmith’s home or public house. 410
Instead you’re here and babbling all the time.
Around these throngs of men, you’re far too brash. [330]
There’s no fear in your heart. In fact, the wine
has stolen your wits, or else your spirit
has always been that way and forces you
to prattle on. Are you playing the fool
because you beat up that beggar Irus?
Take care another man, better than him,
does not quickly come to stand against you.
His heavy fists will punch you in the head, 420
stain you with streams of blood, and shove you out,
send you packing from this house.”

With an angry frown,

crafty Odysseus then answered her and said:

“You bitch! I’ll go and tell Telemachus
the way you talk, so he can cut you up,
limb from limb, right here.”

Once Odysseus spoke, [340]
his words made the women afraid, and they scattered,
moving off and fleeing through the hall. Each of them
could feel her limbs grow slack with fear—they all believed
he was telling them the truth. Then Odysseus stood 430
by the flaming braziers, keeping them alight.
He looked at all the men. But in his chest his heart
was making other plans, which he would act upon.

There was no way Athena would allow the suitors,
those arrogant men, to stop behaving badly,
so even more distress would sink into the heart
of Laertes’ son, Odysseus. So Eurymachus,
son of Polybus, began shouting to the suitors,
insulting Odysseus, to make his comrades laugh. [350]

“Listen to me now, those of you courting 440
the splendid queen, so I may speak to you
of what the heart here in my chest is urging.
The gods were not unwilling this man came
into Odysseus’ home. In fact, I think
the torchlight emanates from his own head
because he’s got no hair up there at all.”¹

Once he had said this, he then called to Odysseus,
destroyer of cities:

“Stranger, do you like work?
What if I hired you for some distant farm—
I guarantee I’d pay—gathering stones 450
to build up walls or planting lofty trees?
I’d bring some food there for you all year round, [360]
clothe you, and get some sandals for your feet.
But since you’ve only learned to misbehave,
you won’t want to acquaint yourself with work.

¹The point seems to be that Odysseus, who is standing by the burning braziers, must be radiating light (hence must be divine or getting divine help) because he has no hair on his head which might burn to produce a flame.

No. You'd prefer to beg throughout the land,
collecting food for your voracious gut."

Resourceful Odysseus then answered him and said:

"Eurymachus, I wish the two of us
could have a contest working in the spring, 460
when long days come, both mowing down the grass.
I'd have a curved scythe in my hands, and you
with one just like it. Then we'd test ourselves,
in lush grass, with no food to eat till dusk. [370]
If we had oxen there, the best there are,
massive tawny beasts, both well fed on grass,
with strength that never tires, and in a field
measuring four acres and holding soil
which turns beneath the plough, then you would see
if I could cut a straight unbroken furrow. 470
If today the son of Cronos stirred up
a battle somewhere and I had a shield,
a pair of spears, and helmet made of bronze,
well fitted to my temples, then you'd see
how I'd join in with fighters at the front.
And you'd not chatter on, insulting me [380]
about my stomach. But you're much too proud,
and your mind's unfeeling. You really think
you have great influence and power,
because you mingle with a few weak men. 480
But if Odysseus ever got back here,
to his native land, those doors over there,
although they're really wide, would quickly seem
too narrow for you, as you fled outside."

Odysseus finished. Eurymachus in his heart
grew even angrier, and, with scowl, he spoke—
his words had wings:

"You miserable man,
I'll bring you trouble soon enough. You talk
brashly in this way when you're in a crowd, [390]
no fear in your heart! Wine has seized your wits, 490
or else your mind has always been like this,
and prattles vainly on. Have you gone mad
just because you beat that beggar Irus?"

As he said this, he picked up a stool. Odysseus
took a seat beside the knee of Amphinomus
from Dulichium, avoiding Eurymachus.

So Eurymachus struck a person serving wine
on his right hand. The wine jug fell and hit the ground
with a resounding clang. The server gave a groan,
then fell over, backwards in the dirt. The suitors
broke into an uproar in the shadowy halls,
and one man, glancing at the person next to him,
said something like these words:

500

[400]

“How I wish
that wandering stranger there had perished
somewhere else before he reached this place.
He’d not be causing such a fuss among us.
We are brawling over beggars. This meal,
this splendid feast, will bring us no delight,
now this dispute has got the upper hand.”

Telemachus then spoke with royal authority:

510

“You fools, you’ve gone insane and in your hearts
no longer hide how much you eat and drink.
You must be being incited by some god.
So, now you’ve feasted well, return back home.
When the spirit bids, you can get some rest.
Still, I’m not chasing anyone away.”

Telemachus spoke. The suitors all bit their lips,
astonished that he had spoken out so boldly.
Then Amphinomus, the splendid son of Nisus,
son of lord Aretias, spoke to them and said:

[410]

520

“Friends, when what a man says is something just,
no one should get enraged and answer him
with hostile words. Don’t abuse this stranger
or any slaves in the home of lord Odysseus.
But come, let the wine server pour some drops
into our cups so we can make libations,
and then go home and rest. This stranger here,
we’ll leave him in Odysseus’s palace,
and Telemachus can cater to him—
after all, it is his home he came to.”

[420]

530

BOOK EIGHTEEN

Amphinomus finished. They were all delighted
with what he said. A herald from Dulichium,
lord Muius, attending on Amphinomus,
mixed wine in a bowl for them and served the suitors,
every one in turn. Then they poured libations
to the sacred gods and drank wine sweet as honey.
Once they had poured libations and had drunk more wine
to their heart's content, they all went on their way,
each man going to his own house to get some sleep.

BOOK NINETEEN
EURYCLEIA RECOGNIZES ODYSSEUS

[Odysseus and Telemachus hide the weapons; Telemachus leaves to go to bed; Penelope comes down; Melantho insults Odysseus a second time; Penelope upbraids her, then has a conversation with Odysseus; Penelope tells him of her deception of the suitors; Odysseus gives her a long false story of his Cretan ancestry and talks of meeting Odysseus; Penelope questions him about Odysseus's clothes and comrades; Penelope orders Eurycleia to wash Odysseus's feet; the story of the scar on Odysseus's knee, how Odysseus got his name; the hunting expedition with Autolycus; Eurycleia recognizes the scar; Odysseus threatens her; Penelope and Odysseus resume their conversation; Penelope tells about her dream; Odysseus comments on the interpretation of the dream; Penelope talks about the two gates of dreams, then proposes the contest of firing an arrow through twelve axe heads; Odysseus urges her to have the contest; Penelope goes upstairs to sleep.]

So lord Odysseus remained in the hall behind,
thinking of ways he might overcome the suitors,
with Athena's help. He spoke out immediately
to his son—his words had wings:

“Telemachus,
all these war weapons we must stash inside,
and when the suitors notice they're not there
and ask you questions, then reassure them,
using gentle language:

‘I've put them away
in a place far from the smoke. Those weapons
are no longer like the ones Odysseus left
when he set off for Troy so long ago.
They've been tarnished. Fires have breathed on them
and left their stain. Then, too, a god has set
great fear inside my heart—you men may drink
far too much wine and fight amongst yourselves
and wound each other. That would shame the feast
and harm your courtship. For iron by itself
can draw a man to use it.’”

10 [10]

Odysseus finished.
The words his father said convinced Telemachus.
He called his nurse, Eurycleia, and said to her:

20

BOOK NINETEEN

“Nurse, come here and help me. Keep the women
in their rooms, so I can put in storage
these splendid weapons, which were my father’s.
Since the time he left, when I was a child,
no one’s looked after them, and they’ve been tarnished
by smoky fires. Now I wish to keep them
where they cannot be stained by breathing flames.”

[20]

His dear nurse, old Eurycleia, then said to him:

“Yes, my child, may you always think about
caring for this house, guarding all its wealth.
But come, who will go off and fetch a light
and carry it for you, if you won’t let
the servant women, who could bear torches,
walk out in front of you?”

30

Shrewd Telemachus

then answered her and said:

“This stranger will.
I won’t let anyone who’s touched my food
rest idle, not even if he’s come here
from somewhere far away.”

Telemachus spoke.

She did not answer him—her words could find no wings.
So in that stately hall she bolted shut the doors.
Then both Odysseus and his splendid son jumped up
and carried off the helmets, embossed body shields,
and pointed spears. Pallas Athena was their guide,
holding a golden lamp, which cast a lovely light.
Then, all of a sudden, Telemachus spoke up:

40 [30]

“Father, what my two eyes are witnessing
is an enormous wonder. In this room
the beautiful rafters, the well-built walls,
the fir beams, and high supporting pillars
are glowing in my eyes, as if lit up
by fire. Some god who holds wide heaven
must be inside the hall.”

50

[40]

Resourceful Odysseus

then answered him and said:

“Keep quiet.

Check those ideas and ask no questions.
This is how the gods who hold Olympus work.
You should go and get some rest. I’ll stay here,
so I can stir the servants even more—
and your mother. As she laments, she’ll ask
for each and every detail.”

Odysseus finished.

Telemachus moved away, striding through the hall, 60
below the flaming torches, out into the room
where he used to rest when sweet Sleep came to him.
Then he lay down in bed, waiting for early Dawn. [50]
Lord Odysseus stayed there, lingering in the hall,
thinking how to kill the suitors with Athena’s help.

Then wise Penelope emerged out of her room,
looking like Artemis or golden Aphrodite.
Beside the fire where she used to sit, servants placed
a chair for her, inlaid with ivory and silver.
Imalcus, a craftsman, had made it years ago. 70
He’d fixed a footstool underneath, part of the chair,
on which attendants used to throw a large sheep fleece.
Here wise Penelope sat, while white-armed servants [60]
came from the women’s hall and started to remove
lavish amounts of food, the tables, and the cups
high-spirited suitors had used to hold their wine.
They threw the embers in the braziers on the floor,
then filled them up once more with plenty of fresh wood
for warmth and light. But then Melantho once again
went at Odysseus, chiding him a second time: 80

“Stranger, are you about to pester us
in here at this hour and throughout the night,
roaming around the house, spying on slaves?
Get outside, you wretch, and be satisfied
with what you’ve had to eat, or soon enough
you’ll have to leave, beaten out with torches.”

Resourceful Odysseus scowled and then said to her: [70]

“You’re a passionate woman—why is it
you go at me like this, with such anger

in your heart? Is it because I'm filthy, 90
 have shabby clothing covering my limbs,
 and beg throughout the district? I have to—
 sheer need forces that on me. That is what
 beggars and vagabonds are like. But once
 I was wealthy and lived in my own home,
 in a rich house, too, among my people.
 I often gave gifts to wanderers like me,
 no matter who they were or what their needs
 when they arrived. I had countless servants
 and many other things that people own 100
 when they live well and are considered rich.
 But then Zeus, son of Cronos, ruined me. [80]
 That's what he wanted, I suppose. And so,
 woman, take good care that you, too, someday
 do not lose that beauty which now makes you
 stand out among the woman servants here.
 Your mistress may lose her temper with you
 and make things difficult, or Odysseus
 may come home, for there's still a shred of hope.
 Even if he's dead and won't come home again, 110
 thanks to Apollo he's got Telemachus,
 a son just like himself. And no woman
 in this palace who acts with recklessness
 escapes his notice. He's a child no more."

Odysseus spoke. Wise Penelope heard his words
 and rebuked Melantho, saying:

"You can be sure,
 you bold and brazen bitch, that I have seen
 your shameless acts. You'll wipe away the stain
 with your own head. You clearly know full well,
 because you heard me say it—I'm planning 120
 to ask this stranger in my halls some questions
 about my husband, since I feel such grief."

Penelope paused, then spoke to Eurynome,
 her housekeeper, and said:

"Eurynome,
 fetch a chair over here with a thick fleece,
 so the stranger can sit down, talk to me,
 and hear me out. I want to question him."

Once Penelope had spoken, Eurynome [100]
 quickly brought a polished chair and placed it by her.
 She threw a sheep fleece over it. Lord Odysseus, 130
 who had endured so much hardship, sat down with her.
 Then wise Penelope began to speak to him:

“Stranger, first of all I’ll ask this question—
 Who are you among men? Where are you from?
 From what city? And where are your parents?”

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

“Lady, no man living on boundless earth
 could find fault with you. And your fame extends
 right up to spacious heaven, as it does
 for an excellent king who fears the gods 140
 and governs many courageous people, [110]
 upholding justice. His black earth is rich
 in barley and in wheat, and his orchards
 are laden down with fruit. His flocks bear young
 and never fail, while seas yield up their fish—
 all this from his fine leadership. With him
 his people thrive. So here inside your home
 question me about anything you wish
 except my family or native land,
 in case you fill my heart with still more grief, 150
 as I remember them. For I’m a man
 who’s suffered a great deal, and there’s no need
 for me to sit here weeping my laments
 in someone else’s house—for it’s not good [120]
 to wallow in one’s grief and never stop,
 in case the slaves or you yourself resent it
 and say I swim in tears because my mind
 is now besotted, drenched in too much wine.”

Wise Penelope then answered him and said:

“Stranger, the immortal gods took away 160
 the excellence in my poise and body
 when Argives got on board their ships for Troy,
 and Odysseus went with them, my husband.
 If he would come and organize my life,
 my reputation would be even greater,

more beautiful, as well. But now I grieve.
 Some god has laid on me a heavy load.
 All the finest men who rule the islands— [130]
 Dulichium, Same, wooded Zacynthus—
 and those who live in sunny Ithaca, 170
 these men are courting me against my will.
 And they are ruining the house. That's why
 I have no time for suppliants and strangers,
 or for heralds who do the people's work.¹
 Instead I waste away my heart, longing
 for Odysseus. They're all keen on marriage,
 but I tricked them with my weaving. Some god
 was the first to breathe into my heart the plan
 that I should place a huge loom in the halls
 and weave a robe of delicate design. 180 [140]
 So I spoke to them at once:

'You young men,
 my suitors, since Odysseus is dead,
 you're keen for me to marry. You must wait
 until I have finished with this garment,
 so I don't weave this twisted yarn in vain.
 It's a burial shroud for lord Laertes,
 for when the lethal fate of his sad death
 will seize him, so no Achaean woman
 in the district will get angry with me
 that a man who has acquired such great wealth 190
 should have to lie in death without a shroud.'

That's what I said, and their proud hearts agreed.
 So every day I'd weave at the big loom.
 But at night, once the torches were set up, [150]
 I'd unravel it. And so for three years
 I tricked Achaeans into believing me.
 But as the seasons came and months rolled on,
 and many days passed by, the fourth year came.
 That's when they caught me unravelling yarn—
 thanks to my slaves, those ungrateful hussies. 200
 The suitors all shouted speeches at me,
 and, against my will, forced me to complete
 that piece of weaving. Now I can't escape

¹Public heralds worked on public business, as opposed to heralds retained by rich aristocrats to carry their private messages.

the marriage or invent some other scheme.
 My parents are urging me to marry,
 and my son is worried about those men
 eating his livelihood. He notices,
 because he's now a man, quite capable
 of caring for a household to which Zeus
 has granted fame. But tell me of your house,
 the race you come from. For you did not spring
 up from an oak tree in some ancient tale
 or from a stone."

[160]

210

Odysseus, a man of many schemes,
 then answered her and said:

"Noble lady,
 wife of Odysseus, Laertes's son,
 will you never cease from asking questions
 about my family? All right, I'll tell you.
 But you'll be giving me more miseries
 than those which grip my heart—as is the rule
 when a man's been absent from his homeland
 as long as I have, wandering around,
 through many towns of mortal men, suffering
 great distress. Still, I'll answer what you ask,
 the questions you have posed. There's a place
 in the middle of the wine-dark sea called Crete,
 a fertile land surrounded by the sea.
 Many men live there, more than one can count,
 in ninety cities. The dialects they speak
 are all mixed up. There are Achaeans there,
 as well as stout-hearted native Cretans,
 Cydonians, three groups of Dorians,
 and noble Pelasgians. Their cities
 include great Cnossos, where king Minos reigned,
 after he'd talked with Zeus for nine full years,
 the father of my father, Deucalion,
 who, in turn, sired Idomeneus and me.
 Idomeneus went away to Troy
 in his beaked ships with Atreus's sons.
 My name's well known—Aethon—the younger son.
 Idomeneus, my elder brother,
 was the finer man. I saw Odysseus there
 and gave him welcoming gifts. The wind's force
 brought him to Crete, as he was sailing on,

220

[170]

230

[180]

240

headed for Troy—it drove him off his course
 past Malea. He'd moored at Amnisus,
 where the cavern of Eilithyia lies,
 in a dangerous harbour, fleeing the storm,
 but only just.¹ He went immediately [190]
 to the town, seeking Idomeneus,
 saying he was his loved and honoured friend. 250
 But by this time nine or ten days had passed
 since Idomeneus and his beaked ships
 had left for Troy. So I invited him
 into my house and entertained him well,
 with a warm welcome, using the rich store
 of goods inside my home. For the others,
 comrades who followed him, I gathered up
 and gave out barley from the public stores,
 gleaming wine, and cattle for sacrifice,
 enough to satisfy their hearts. Those men, 260
 Achaean lords, remained there for twelve days.
 The howling North Wind kept them in that place— [200]
 he would not even let them stand up straight.
 Some angry deity had stirred him up.
 But on the thirteenth day, the wind eased off,
 and they put out to sea."

As Odysseus spoke,
 he made his many falsehoods seem just like the truth.
 Penelope listened, tears flowing from her eyes.
 Her flesh melted—just as up on high mountain peaks
 snow drifts melt away beneath West Wind's warm thaw, 270
 once East Wind starts to blow them down, and, as they melt,
 the flowing rivers fill—that's how her lovely cheeks
 melted then, as she kept weeping for her husband,
 the man sitting there beside her.² Lord Odysseus
 in his heart felt great pity for his grieving wife, [210]
 but he held his eyes steady between his eyelids,
 like horn or iron, and he kept up his deceit
 and concealed his tears. But then, when Penelope
 had had enough of her laments and shedding tears,
 she spoke to him once more and said:

¹Eilithyia is the goddess of childbirth, especially associated with the pains of labour.

²Following the suggestion of another editor (Myres), I have exchanged the name of the winds, since in Homer the West Wind is commonly associated with warmth and the East Wind with cold weather and snow.

280

“Now, stranger,
 I think I’d really like to test you out,
 to see if you did, in fact, entertain
 my husband and his fine companions there,
 in your halls, as you just claimed. So describe
 the style of clothing he was wearing then
 and the kind of man he was. And tell me
 about his comrades, the ones there with him.”

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said: [220]

290

“Lady, it’s difficult to tell you this
 for any man who’s been away so long—
 it’s almost twenty years since he set out
 and sailed from Crete. But I’ll describe for you
 how my heart pictures him. Lord Odysseus
 wore a woollen purple cloak, a double one.
 The brooch on it was made of gold—it had
 a pair of clasps and a fine engraving
 on the front, a dog held in its forepaws
 a dappled fawn and gripped it as it writhed.
 Everyone who saw it was astonished
 at those gold animals—the dog held down
 the fawn, as he throttled it, and the fawn
 was struggling with its feet, trying to flee.
 I noticed the tunic on his body
 glistening like a dried-out onion skin—
 it was so soft and shone out like the sun.
 In fact, many women kept watching him
 in wonder. And I’ll tell you something else.
 Keep in mind I don’t know if Odysseus
 dressed in these clothes when he was at home,
 or whether some comrade gave them to him
 on his swift ship after he went aboard,
 or perhaps a stranger did—Odysseus
 was liked by many men. Few Achaeans
 could equal him. I gave him gifts myself,
 a bronze sword, an exquisite purple cloak,
 with a double fold, and a fringed tunic,
 and I sent him off on his well-benched ship
 with every honour. In his company
 he had a herald, older than himself,
 but not by much. I’ll describe him for you.

300 [230]

310

[240]

320

He looked like this—he had rounded shoulders,
a dark skin, and curly hair. And his name
was Eurybates. Odysseus valued him
above all the rest of his companions—
for he had a mind that could match his own.”

As Odysseus spoke, in Penelope he roused
desire to weep still more, because she recognized
in what Odysseus said signs that he spoke the truth. [250]
But then, when she had had enough of tearful grief,
she answered him and said these words:

“Stranger, 330
though I pitied you before, in my home
you’ll now find genuine welcome and respect.
I was the one who put him in those clothes
you talk about. I brought them from the room,
smoothed them out, and pinned on the shining brooch
to be an ornament for him. But now,
I’ll not be welcoming him here again,
when he returns to his dear native land.
Odysseus set off with an evil fate
to catch a glimpse of wicked Ilion, 340
a place that we should never speak about.” [260]

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

“Wife of Odysseus, Laertes’s son,
don’t mar your lovely skin or waste your heart
by weeping for your husband any more.
I don’t blame you in the least, for anyone
would lament the husband she had married
and then lost, one she’d had loving sex with
and to whom she’d borne a child, even if
he were not Odysseus, who, people say 350
is just like the gods. But end your crying,
and listen to my words. I’ll speak the truth,
hiding nothing—I have already heard [270]
about Odysseus’ return. He’s close by,
in the wealthy land of Thesprotians,
still alive and bringing much fine treasure
with him. He’s urging men to give him gifts
throughout that land. He lost his loyal crew
on the wine-dark sea and his hollow ship,

as they were sailing from Thrinacia. 360
 Zeus and Helios were angry with him—
 his crew had slaughtered Helios's herds.
 So they all perished in the surging sea.
 But Odysseus, by clinging to the keel,
 made it to shore, tossed by the waves on lands
 of the Phaeacians, who by their descent
 are close relations of the gods. These men
 honoured him with all their hearts, as if [280]
 he were a god. They gave him many gifts
 and were eager to bring him home unharmed. 370
 Odysseus would have been here long ago,
 but to his heart it seemed a better plan
 to visit many lands collecting wealth.
 For above all mortal men, Odysseus
 knows ways to win many advantages.
 No other man can rival him in this.
 That's what Pheidon, king of Thesprotians,
 told me, and he swore to me in person,
 as he poured out libations in his home,
 the ship was launched and comrades were prepared 380
 to take him back to his dear native soil. [290]
 But before they left he sent me away.
 It happened that a Thesprotian ship
 was sailing for wheat-rich Dulichium.
 He showed me all the expensive presents
 lord Odysseus had assembled—enough
 to feed ten generations of his family—
 that's how much was lying in storage there,
 in that king's house. He told me Odysseus
 had travelled to Dodona to find out 390
 from the towering oak what plans Zeus had
 for the voyage back to his dear native land,
 after being away so long.¹ Should he come
 openly or not? He's nearby and safe [300]
 and will be here soon. He won't stay away
 from his friends in Ithaca much longer.
 I'll make an oath on that for you. May Zeus
 be my first witness, highest and best of gods,
 and the hearth of excellent Odysseus,
 which I have reached, all these things will happen 400

¹Dodona, in Epirus, was an ancient centre for the worship of Zeus and a popular place to consult an oracle. The rustling sounds in the large oak tree there were believed to be the words of Zeus himself.

just as I describe. In this very month
Odysseus will come, as the old moon wanes
and the new moon starts to rise.”

Wise Penelope
then answered him and said:

“O stranger,
I wish what you have said might come about.
You’d soon come to recognize my friendship, [310]
so many gifts from me that any man
who met you would call you truly blessed.
But my heart has a sense of what will be—
Odysseus won’t be coming home again, 410
and you’ll not find an escort out of here,
because there are no leaders in this house,
not the quality of man Odysseus was,
if there was ever such a man, to welcome
honoured strangers and send them on their way.
But, you servant women, wash this stranger,
and prepare a place to sleep—a bed, cloaks,
bright coverlets—so in warmth and comfort
he may await the golden throne of Dawn.
Tomorrow morning early give him a bath 420 [320]
and rub him down with oil, so he’ll be ready
to take his seat inside the hall and eat
beside Telemachus. Things will not go well
for any one of them who injures him
and pains his heart—that man will accomplish
nothing further here, even though his rage
is truly fierce. How will you learn from me,
stranger, that I in any way excel
among all women for my prudent plans
and my intelligence, if you dine here, 430
in my halls, dressed in filthy ragged clothes?
Men don’t live long. And if a man is harsh
and thinks unfeelingly, then everyone
lays painful curses on his future life, [330]
and when he’s dead they all make fun of him.
But if a man is innocent and thinks
with no sense of injury, then strangers
spread his fame far and wide among all men,
and many say ‘He truly is a man.’”

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

440

“Honoured wife of Odysseus, Laertes’ son,
 I’ve hated cloaks and shining coverlets
 since I first left the mountain snows of Crete,
 when I departed on my long-oared ship.
 So I’ll lie down, as I have done before
 through sleepless nights. For I have often lain
 on filthy bedding, awaiting bright-throned Dawn.
 And having my feet washed brings no delight
 into my heart. No woman in your house
 will touch my feet, none of those who serve you
 in your home, unless there is an old one,
 who knows true devotion and has suffered
 in her heart as many pains as I have.
 I’d not resent it if she touched my feet.”

[340]

450

Wise Penelope then answered him and said:

“Dear stranger, no visitor from far-off lands
 who’s come into my house has ever been
 as wise as you or more welcome—your words
 are all so sensible and kind. I have
 a woman with an understanding heart.
 She gave my helpless husband her fine care
 the day his mother first gave birth to him.
 Although she’s weak and old, she’ll wash your feet.
 So come now, stand up, wise Eurycleia,
 and bathe a man the same age as your master.
 Odysseus may have feet and hands like his,
 for mortal men soon age when times are bad.”

[350]

460

[360]

Penelope spoke. The old woman clasped her hands
 across her face and shed warm tears. Then she spoke out
 uttering words of sorrow:

“Alas for you, my child.
 There’s nothing I can do. Zeus must hate you
 above all people, though you have a heart
 that fears the gods. No mortal up to now
 has given Zeus, who hurls the thunderbolt,
 so many rich burned pieces of the thigh,
 or offered such well-chosen sacrifice
 as you have made to him, praying to reach

470

a sleek old age and raise your splendid son.
 But now from you alone he's taken away
 the day that you'll return. And it may be
 that women in some strange and distant land
 make fun of him, as well, when he arrives
 at some famous home, the way these hussies
 mock you here, all of them. To stop their slurs,
 their insults, you won't let them wash your feet.
 But wise Penelope, Icarius' child,
 has asked me to do it, and I'm willing.
 For Penelope's sake I'll bathe your feet,
 and for yours, since the heart in me is stirred
 with sorrow. But come now, listen to me.
 Hear what I say. Many worn-out strangers
 have come here, but none of them, I tell you,
 was so like him to look at—your stature,
 voice, and feet are all just like Odysseus."

480 [370]

490

[380]

Then resourceful Odysseus answered her and said:

"Old woman, those who've seen the two of us
 with their own eyes all say the same—we both
 look very like each other, as you've seen
 and mentioned."

After these words from Odysseus,
 the old woman took a bright bowl to wash his feet.
 She poured in plenty of cold water and added
 warmer water to it. Odysseus then sat down
 some distance from the hearth and quickly turned around
 towards the darkness. For suddenly in his heart
 he was afraid that, when she touched him, she might see
 a scar he had, and then the truth would be revealed.
 When Eurycleia began to wash her master,
 she recognized the scar immediately, a wound
 he'd suffered years ago from white tusks on a boar,
 when he went to Parnassus, making a visit
 to Autolycus, his mother's splendid father,
 and his sons. Autolycus surpassed all others
 in thievery and swearing. A god himself, Hermes,
 had given him those skills. For him he used to burn
 pleasing offerings, thighs of younger goats and lambs.
 So Hermes travelled with him, bringing willing gifts.
 When he travelled to the rich land of Ithaca,

500

[390]

510

Autolycus had met his daughter's new born son, [400]
 and once he had eaten dinner, Eurycleia
 set the young child upon his knees and spoke to him: 520

“Autolycus, you're the person who must name
 your daughter's child. We have been praying now
 for a long time to have a child like this.”

So Autolycus then answered her by saying:

“My son-in-law and daughter, give the boy
 whatever name I say. Since I've come here
 as one who's been enraged at many people,
 men and women, on this all-nourishing earth,
 let him be called Odysseus, a man of rage.¹
 And I say this: when he is fully grown 530 [410]
 and travels to his mother's family home,
 by Mount Parnassus, where I keep my wealth,
 I'll give him some of it and send him off.
 He'll be delighted.”

Odysseus had travelled there
 to fetch those splendid presents from Autolycus.
 When he got there, Autolycus and his splendid sons
 clasped his hand and welcomed him with real affection.
 His mother's mother, Amphihea, embraced him,
 kissed him on the head and both his beautiful eyes.
 Autolycus instructed his distinguished sons 540
 to prepare a meal, and they did what he had asked.
 They hastened to bring in a male ox, five years old, [420]
 flayed it, and prepared the beast, slicing up the limbs.
 They cut these with great skill, skewered the meat on spits,
 roasted them with care, and passed around the portions.
 All day long they feasted until the sun went down.
 Each one had a share, and their hearts were quite content.
 After the sun descended and the world grew dark,
 they went to bed to rest and took the gift of Sleep.
 But as soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared, 550
 they set off to hunt, with Autolycus's sons
 and dogs, as well. And young Odysseus left with them. [430]
 They climbed up Mount Parnassus, through the forest there,

¹This explanation for Odysseus's name derives it from the Greek verb *odussomai*, meaning *to be angry at*.

and quickly reached its windy gullies. By this time,
 Helios's rays had started to strike the fields,
 rising from deep streams of gently flowing Ocean.
 The beaters reached a clearing. The dogs went in first,
 ahead of them, following the tracks. Behind them
 came Autolycus's sons, with lord Odysseus
 in their group, close to the dogs. He was holding up 560
 his long-shadowed spear. Now, right there a huge wild boar
 was lying in a tangled bush—it was so dense
 the power of watery winds could not get through, [440]
 none of Helios's rays could pierce it, and rain
 would never penetrate. There were fallen leaves
 in piles around the place. The sound of rustling feet
 made by the men and dogs, as they pursued the hunt,
 disturbed the boar—it came charging from the thicket
 to confront the hunters—with bristles on its back,
 eyes flashing fire, the beast stood at bay before them. 570
 Odysseus ran up first, eager to strike the boar,
 his long spear held up in his two powerful fists.
 The beast jumped out at him, attacking from the flank,
 and struck above his knee, a long gash in his flesh
 sliced by the creature's tusk. It did not reach the bone. [450]
 Then Odysseus struck back at the boar, hitting it
 on its right shoulder. That long spear's glittering point
 went straight through—with a grunt the beast fell in the dust,
 and its life force flew away. Autolycus' sons
 attended to the carcass. They neatly bound up 580
 brave Odysseus's wound, using a healing spell
 to staunch the flow of dark blood seeping from his skin.
 The hunters hurried back to their dear father's home.
 Once Autolycus and Autolycus's sons
 had fully cured him and presented lavish gifts, [460]
 they soon sent him back in a joyful frame of mind
 to Ithaca, his native land. When he got back,
 his father and honoured mother were delighted,
 asked him every detail of how he got the wound,
 and he told them the truth—how, while he was hunting 590
 on Mount Parnassus with Autolycus's sons,
 a boar's white tusk had gored him. That was the scar
 that old Eurycleia was grasping in her hands.
 She traced it out, recognized it, and dropped his foot.
 His leg fell in the basin, and the bronze rang out.
 It tipped over on its side and spilled the water. [470]
 All at once, joy and sorrow gripped her heart. Her eyes

welled up with tears, and her full voice was speechless.
She reached up to his chin and said:

“It’s true, dear child.
You are Odysseus, and I did not know you,
until my hands had touched my master’s leg.”

600

She spoke, and her eyes glanced over at Penelope,
anxious to tell her that her husband had come home.
But Penelope could not see her face or notice,
for Athena had diverted her attention.
Odysseus’s arms reached out for Eurycleia—
with his right hand he grabbed her firmly by the throat, [480]
and with the other pulled her even closer to him.
Then he said:

“My good mother, why this wish
to have me slaughtered? You yourself nursed me
at this breast of yours. In the twentieth year,
after suffering through numerous ordeals, 610
I’ve come back to my native soil. And now,
you’ve recognized me—a god has put that
in your heart. Stay silent, so in these halls
no one finds out. For I’ll tell you something—
and it will happen. If gods overcome
these haughty suitors, set them at my feet,
I will not spare you, though you are my nurse,
when I kill other women in my home.”

[490]

Prudent Eurycleia then answered him:

“My child,
what words escaped the barrier of your teeth! 620
You know how strong and firm my spirit is.
I’ll be as tough as a hard stone or iron.
I’ll tell you something else. Keep it in mind.
If a god does overwhelm these suitors
and sets them under you, then I’ll tell you
about the women in your home, the ones
demeaning you and those who bear no shame.”

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said: 630

“Good mother, why speak to me about them? [500]
 There’s no need. I myself will look at them
 and get to know each one. But keep this news
 to yourself. Leave the matter with the gods.”

Once Odysseus spoke, the old woman left the room
 to fetch water for his feet, since what she had before
 had all been spilled. When she had finished bathing him,
 she rubbed him with rich oil. Then Odysseus once more
 pulled his chair closer to the fire to warm himself.
 He hid the scar beneath his rags. Wise Penelope 640
 began to speak. She said:

“Stranger, there’s one small thing
 I’ll ask you myself. Soon it will be time
 to take a pleasant rest. And sleep is sweet [510]
 to every man, even if he’s troubled.
 But gods have given me unmeasured grief.
 Every day I get my joy from mourning,
 from laments, as I carry out my work
 and supervise the servants in the house.
 But when night comes and Sleep grips everyone,
 I lie in bed, and piercing worries crowd 650
 my throbbing heart and give me great distress,
 while I mourn. Just as Pandareus’s child,
 the nightingale of the green woods, sings out
 her lovely song when early spring arrives,
 perched in thick foliage of the forest, [520]
 pouring forth her richly modulating voice
 in wailing for her dear child Itylus,
 Zethus’s son, whom with a sword one day
 she’d killed unwittingly—that’s how my heart
 moves back and forth in its uncertainty.¹ 660
 Should I stay with my son keeping an eye
 on all possessions and my female slaves
 and my large and lofty home, honouring
 my husband’s bed and what the people say,
 or marry the best of those Achaeans
 who court me in my halls—the one who gives
 countless bridal gifts. For my son, while young [530]

¹Itylus, son of king Zethus, was killed by his mother Aedon accidentally. The mother was then transformed into a nightingale, whose song is a constant lament for her dead child. In some versions of the story, Itylus is a daughter.

and with a feeble mind, would not agree
 I should get married and leave my husband's home.
 But now he's grown—his youth has reached an end—
 he's begging me to go back home again,
 away from here, for he is truly worried
 about our property, which these Achaeans
 are using up. But come now, hear my dream
 and interpret it for me. In this house
 twenty geese approach me from the water
 to eat my wheat. And when I look at them
 I am delighted. Then from the mountains
 a huge hook-beaked eagle came and killed them—
 snapping all their necks. They lay there in piles,
 inside my hall, while he was carried up
 into a shining sky. Now in that dream
 I wept and wailed. Meanwhile, all around me
 fair-haired women of Achaea gathered,
 as, in my sorrow, I was there lamenting
 that the eagle had slaughtered all my geese.
 But he came back and, sitting on a beam
 projecting from the roof, checked my sorrow,
 and in a human voice spoke out to me:

670

680

[540]

'Daughter of illustrious Icarius,
 you must be resolute. That was no dream,
 but a glimpse of what will truly happen.
 The suitors are those geese, and I am here—
 before I was an eagle, now I've come
 as your own husband, who will execute
 a cruel fate on each and every suitor.'

690

[550]

That's what he said. Then sweet Sleep released me.
 When I looked round the hall, I saw the geese—
 pecking the wheat beside the water trough,
 as they used to do before."

Resourceful Odysseus
 then answered her and said:

700

"Lady, it's impossible
 to twist another meaning from this dream—
 the real Odysseus has revealed to you
 how he will end all this. The suitors' deaths

are all plain to see, and not one of them
will escape destruction and a lethal fate.”

Wise Penelope then replied to him and said:

“Stranger, stories told in dreams are difficult— [560]
their meanings are not clear, and for people
they are not realized in every detail. 710
There are two gates for insubstantial dreams,
one made of horn and one of ivory.
Those which pass through the fresh-cut ivory
deceive—the words they bring are unfulfilled.
Those which come through the gate of polished horn,
once some mortal sees them, bring on the truth.
But I don’t think, in my case, the strange dream
came through that gate. It truly would have been
a welcome thing to me and to my son.
I’ll tell you something else. Keep it in mind. 720 [570]
That morning is already drawing near
when I leave the palace of Odysseus,
a day of evil omen. I will arrange
a competition featuring those axes
he used to set up in his hall, aligned
like ribs on ships, twelve axes in a row.
He’d stand and shoot an arrow through them all.¹
I’ll suggest this contest for the suitors.
The one whose hand most deftly strings his bow
and then shoots an arrow through twelve axes 730
is the one I’ll go with. I’ll leave my house,
a lovely home where I’ve lived as a wife, [580]
full of what one needs—even in my dreams
it will stay in my memory forever.”

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

“Honoured wife of Odysseus, Laertes’s son,
do not delay this contest in your halls

¹The details of this famous trial of shooting an arrow through a row of axes have been much discussed. Some interpreters have suggested that it makes sense if we imagine that there is a hole in the head of each axe and that they can be lined up so that an arrow might pass through them all (obviously a very difficult shot). Some ancient axes apparently had this feature. Others have suggested that the holes are rings at the bottom end of the shaft or that the holes are those which normally hold the axe shaft (so that the line of axes is actually a line of axe heads with the shaft removed).

a moment longer. I can assure you,
 Odysseus will be here with all his schemes,
 before these men pick up the polished bow, 740
 string it, and shoot an arrow through the iron.”

Wise Penelope then answered him:

“Stranger,
 if you wished to sit with me in these halls
 to bring me pleasure, Sleep would never sit [590]
 on these eyelids of mine. But there’s no way
 men can go on forever without sleep.
 Immortal gods have set a proper time
 for every man on this grain-bearing earth.
 So now I’ll go up to my upstairs room
 and lie down on the bed, which is for me 750
 a place for grieving, always damp with tears,
 since Odysseus went to wicked Ilion,
 a name no one should ever talk about.
 I’ll lie down there. But you can stretch out here,
 in the house, putting cushions on the floor.
 Or let the servants make a bed for you.”

Once she said this, she went to her bright upper room, [600]
 not by herself, for two attendants went with her.
 When she and both her servants reached the upstairs room,
 she cried out for Odysseus, her dear husband, 760
 until Athena cast sweet sleep across her eyes.

BOOK TWENTY
ODYSSEUS PREPARES FOR HIS REVENGE

[Odysseus has trouble sleeping; Athena visits him and gives him reassurance; Penelope prays to Artemis, longing for her life to end; Odysseus asks Zeus for two omens; Zeus peals his thunder, and a woman grinding grain prays aloud to Zeus; Telemachus asks Eurycleia about the treatment of his guest; Eurycleia organizes the clean up the house; Eumaeus arrives with some animals and talks to Odysseus; Melanthius insults Odysseus again; Philoetius arrives and talks to Eumaeus, then wishes Odysseus well; the suitors plan to kill Telemachus but are dissuaded by an omen; Telemachus tells Odysseus he'll protect him at the feast and speaks forcefully to the suitors; Ctesippus throws a piece of meat at Odysseus, but misses; Telemachus threatens him; Agelaus proposes that Penelope make up her mind; Pallas Athena makes the suitors laugh uncontrollably and sends images of disaster; Theoclymenus interprets them and warns the suitors; they all laugh at Telemachus; Penelope sits and listens to the conversations.]

So lord Odysseus went to the portico to sleep.
Underneath he spread an untanned hide and on top
fleeces from many sheep slaughtered for sacrifice
by the Achaeans. Eurynome spread cloaks on him,
once he lay down to rest. But still he could not sleep.
His heart was hatching destruction for the suitors.
Then servant women went from the hall, all the slaves
who earlier had enjoyed sex with the suitors.
They were laughing, having fun with one another.
Odysseus in his chest was stirred—his mind and heart
engaged in fierce debate whether he should charge out
and put each one to death or allow the suitors
to make love with them one final time. Inside him
his heart was growling. Just as a bitch stands snarling
above her tender pups when she sees anyone
she does not recognize and is prepared to fight,
that how, in his anger, the heart within him growled
at their shameless acts. But he struck his chest and said,
rebuking his own heart:

10 [10]

“Hang on, my heart.
You went through troubles worse than this that day
the Cyclops, in his frantic rage, devoured
your courageous comrades. You held out then,
until your cunning led you from that cave,
where you thought you would die.”

20

[20]

He said these words,
to calm the heart within his chest, and his spirit
submitted, bravely resolving to endure it all.
He still tossed and turned, back and forth. Just as a man
eager to roast a stomach stuffed with fat and blood
turns it quickly round and round on a blazing fire,
that how lord Odysseus tossed and turned, wondering 30
how he might get the haughty suitors in his grip,
one man against so many. Then Athena came, [30]
moving down from heaven, looking like a woman.
She stood above his head and spoke to him, saying:

“Why now, you most ill-fated of all men,
are you awake? This is your home—your wife
lives in this palace, so does your child,
whom anyone would pray for as a son.”

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

“Yes, goddess, everything you say is true. 40
But the heart inside my chest is anxious.
How can I handle the shameful suitors,
just a single man against so many. [40]
And in the house they’re always in a group.
There’s something else my heart is thinking of—
it’s more important—if I do kill them,
with Zeus’s help and yours, how do I find
a way of making my escape? That point
I’d like you to consider.”

Then the goddess,
bright-eyed Athena, gave him her reply:

“You stubborn man, 50
men put their trust in weaker friends than me—
in a mortal man who lacks my wisdom.
I’m a god, and I’m there to protect you
to the end of your ordeal. I tell you—
to make things clear—if there were fifty groups
of other men standing here around us, [50]
intent on slaughter, even so, I say,
you’d still drive off their cattle and fine sheep.
Let Sleep take hold of you. To stay awake,

remain alert all night, will tire you out. 60
 These are harsh times, but you'll soon make it through."

Once Athena spoke, she poured sleep on his eyelids.
 Then the lovely goddess went back to Olympus.

While Sleep, who brings relief to troubled human hearts,
 relaxed his mind, his faithful wife woke up and wept,
 sitting up on her soft bed. But after her heart
 had had its fill of crying, the lovely lady
 began by uttering a prayer: [60]

"Artemis,
 royal goddess, child of Zeus, how I wish
 you'd shoot an arrow in my chest right now 70
 and take my life or that storm winds would come,
 lift me up, carry me away from here,
 across the murky roads, and cast me out
 in Ocean's backward-flowing stream, just as
 those storms snatched Pandareus's daughters,
 whose parents the gods killed, thus leaving them
 orphans in their home. Fair Aphrodite
 cared for them, offering cheese, sweet honey,
 and fine wine, while Hera bestowed on them [70]
 beauty and wisdom beyond all women. 80
 Artemis made them tall, and Athena
 gave them their skills in famous handicrafts.
 But when fair Aphrodite went away
 to high Olympus, petitioning Zeus,
 who hurls the thunderbolt, so that the girls
 could find fulfillment in a happy marriage,
 for Zeus has perfect knowledge of all things,
 what each man's destiny will be or not,
 spirits of the storm snatched away the girls
 and placed them in the care of hateful Furies.¹ 90
 How I wish those gods who hold Olympus
 would do away with me like that, or else
 that fair-haired Artemis would strike at me, [80]
 so with my husband's image in my mind

¹This legend of the daughters of Pandareus is very different from the story of Pandareus's daughter Aedon, told in Book 19, who killed her son Itylus by accident and was turned into a nightingale. The Furies are the goddess of blood revenge who live underground and are generally hated by the other gods. It's not clear why the girls should be killed and given to them.

I could descend beneath this odious earth
 and never bring delight of any kind
 to the heart of some inferior man.
 But when someone laments all day, his heart
 thick with distress, and Sleep holds him at night,
 he can endure that—Sleep makes him forget
 all things good and bad, once it settles down
 across his eyelids. But some god sends me
 bad dreams as well. This very night again
 a man who looked like him lay down with me,
 just as he was when he sailed with the fleet.
 My heart rejoiced—I thought it was no dream,
 but finally the truth.”

100

[90]

Penelope finished.
 Then Dawn appeared on her golden throne. As she wept,
 lord Odysseus heard her and lost himself in thought.
 To his heart she seemed to know him and was standing
 beside his head. Gathering up the cloak and blankets
 he had been lying on, he placed them on a chair
 inside the hall. He took an ox-hide from the house,
 set it on the ground, and, raising his hands up high,
 made this prayer to Zeus:

110

“O Father Zeus,
 if you wished to bring me over land and sea
 to my own land, after loading on me
 so much distress, let someone in the house
 wake up and say something in there for me,
 provide an omen, and outside the house
 let there appear another sign from Zeus.”

[100]

120

That is what he prayed. And Counsellor Zeus heard him.
 At once he thundered down from glittering Olympus,
 from high beyond the clouds. Lord Odysseus rejoiced.
 And then some slave woman at the nearby grinding stones
 sent out a word of omen from inside the place
 where the shepherd of his people placed his millstones.¹
 At these grinding stones twelve women used to work,
 making barley meal and flour, which feed men’s marrow.
 The other women had already milled their wheat

130

¹The mills are flat stones set on the ground and used to grind wheat and barley. The servant women kneel on the ground to use them. Here they are, it seems, in a building adjacent to the main house.

and were asleep, but this one, weaker than the rest, [110]
had not yet finished. She paused, set the stone aside,
and uttered a prayer, an omen for her master:

“Father Zeus, who governs both gods and men,
you’ve thundered loud high in the starry sky,
and yet there’s not a single cloud up there.
You must be offering a sign to someone.
I’m a poor wretch, but what I have to say—
O make that happen. May these suitors here
for the last and final time this very day 140
have a fine dinner in my master’s home.
Those men have hurt my knees with this hard task
of making flour—may this meal be their last.”

She spoke. That word of omen and Zeus’s thunder [120]
made Odysseus happy—he thought he’d be revenged
on those malicious men.

Inside Odysseus’s home,
other women slaves were up, making tireless fire
inside the hearth, as young godlike Telemachus
rose from bed, put on his clothes, and on his shoulders
slung a keen-edged sword. On his shining feet he tied 150
his lovely sandals. He picked up a sturdy spear,
with a sharp bronze point, went out to the threshold,
stood there, and said to Eurycleia:

“My dear nurse,
have you shown our guest respect inside our home
with bed and food, or is he lying there [130]
unattended to? That’s how my mother is—
she’s wise, but she seems to deal with people
at random—some inferior mortal man
she’ll honour, while someone more distinguished
she’ll send away with no respect at all.” 160

Wise Eurycleia then answered him:

“My child,
don’t blame her now about such things. That man
sat drinking wine as long as he could wish.
He said he had no appetite for food.
She asked him. He thought of going to bed

BOOK TWENTY

to get some sleep, so she told the women
to spread out bedding, but like some poor wretch [140]
familiar with hard times, he had no wish
to lie down under blankets on a bed.
So he stretched out on the portico to sleep 170
on sheep fleeces and an untanned ox-hide,
and then we threw a cloak on top of him.”

Once she'd finished, Telemachus went through the hall,
spear in hand, with two swift dogs accompanying him.
He went to join the group of finely dressed Achaeans.
Then that good nurse Eurycleia, daughter of Ops,
Peisenor's son, called out, summoning female slaves:

“Come on, some of you get busy in here—
sweep the hall and sprinkle it. Spread out [150]
purple covers on these well-fashioned chairs. 180
And you others, wipe down all those tables
with wet sponges, clean up the mixing bowls,
those finely crafted double-handled cups.
And you women, get water from the spring.
Carry it back here. And do it quickly—
the suitors won't be absent from this hall
for very long. They'll be back really soon.
Today's a banquet day for everyone.”

As Eurycleia spoke, they listened carefully,
then acted on her words. Twenty of the women 190
went to the dark-water spring. The others stayed there,
busy working diligently throughout the house.
Then the men who served the Achaean lords arrived. [160]
While they were working with great skill chopping firewood,
the women who had gone off to the spring returned.
Behind them came the swineherd, leading in three hogs,
the best of all he had. He turned them loose to feed
inside the splendid yard, while he talked to Odysseus,
with words of reassurance:

“Stranger, these Achaeans—
do they have any more regard for you? 200
Or in these halls are they insulting you,
they way they did before?”

Shrewd Odysseus
then answered him and said:

“Well, Eumaeus,
I hope the gods pay back the injuries
arrogant men so recklessly have planned [170]
in another’s home, with no sense of shame.”

As these two were talking to each other in this way,
Melanthius, the goatherd, came up close to them,
leading the very finest she-goats in his flocks,
part of the suitors’ feast. Two herdsman came with him. 210
He tied the goats up by the echoing portico,
then started once more hurling insults at Odysseus:

“Stranger, are you still bothering us here,
inside the house, begging from the people?
Why don’t you get out? I think it’s obvious [180]
we two will not say good bye, not until
we’ve had a taste of one another’s fists.
The way you beg is not appropriate.
Achaeans do hold feasts in other homes.”

Melanthius spoke, but shrewd Odysseus said nothing. 220
He shook his head in silence. Deep within his heart
he was planning trouble. Then a third one joined them,
Philoetius, an outstanding man, bringing
a sterile heifer and plump goats for the suitors.
Some ferrymen, who transport passengers across,
whoever comes to them, had brought them over
from the mainland. He tied these animals with care
below the portico, went up to Eumaeus, [190]
and questioned him in person:

“Swineherd,
who’s the man who has just come to this house? 230
What people does he claim to come from?
Where are his family and his native land?
He’s had bad luck, but in his appearance
he seems just like a noble king. But still,
the gods bring miseries to wandering men,
whenever they spin their threads of trouble,
no matter if they come from royal blood.”

Once he said these words, he walked up to Odysseus,
held his right hand out in greeting, and spoke to him—
his words had wings:

“Greetings, honoured stranger. 240
Though you are facing many troubles now,
may you find happiness in future days. [200]
O Father Zeus, none of the other gods
is more destructive than you are. For men,
once you yourself have given birth to them,
you have no pity. You plunge them into
painful hardships and abject poverty.
When I recall Odysseus and think of him,
I start to sweat. My eyes fill up with tears.
For he, I think, is dressed in rags like these, 250
roaming among men somewhere, if indeed
he’s still alive, looking at the sunlight.
If he’s already dead and down in Hades,
then I grieve for excellent Odysseus,
who, when I was a boy, put me in charge
of cattle herds in Cephallenia.¹ [210]
Their numbers now are more than one can count—
this breed of broad-faced cattle has increased
more than it could in any other way
for a different man. Now strangers tell me 260
to drive the cattle in for their own meals.
They do not care about the son in there
or tremble at the vengeance of the gods.
They are too keen to share amongst themselves
my master’s goods—he’s been away so long.
And as for me, the heart here in my chest
keeps turning over many things—it’s bad,
truly bad, while his son is still alive,
for me to leave here with the cattle herds
and move away to some other region, 270
to groups of strangers. But it’s even worse [220]
to stay here, putting up with what’s not right,
herding his cattle for these other men.
In fact, I would have run off long ago
to one of the other high-minded kings—

¹The word Cephallenian describes Odysseus’s subjects generally, but Cephallenia is the name of a large island immediately to the west of Ithaca. In the *Iliad*, Odysseus soldiers are called Cephallenians.

for things are now unbearable—but still,
my poor master is always on my mind.
Perhaps he'll come home from some foreign place
and send the suitors packing from his home."

Resourceful Odysseus then answered him and said: 280

"Herdsman, you don't appear to be a man
who's bad or one who lacks intelligence.
for I can sense your sympathetic heart.
And so I'll swear a mighty oath to you.
I'll speak the truth—let Zeus be my witness, [230]
first among the gods, and this guest table,
and the hearth of excellent Odysseus,
to which I've come: while you are in these halls,
Odysseus will come home. With your own eyes,
you'll see the suitors killed, if that's your wish, 290
those men who act as if they own the place."

The cattle herder answered him:

"Ah stranger,
how I wish Cronos' son might bring about
what you've just told me. Then you would find out
how strong I am and what my hands can do."

Eumaeus also prayed like that to all the gods
for Odysseus to return to his own home.

As they were talking in this way to one another, [240]
the suitors were making plans against Telemachus,
scheming to bring him to a fatal destiny. 300
But then a bird went soaring past them, on their left,
an eagle flying high, gripping a trembling dove.
So lord Amphinomus addressed them all and said:

"My friends, this plan to kill Telemachus
will not proceed the way we want it to.
We should instead prepare to have our feast."

Amphinomus spoke. The suitors agreed with him.
So they went inside godlike Odysseus's home,
threw their cloaks on stools and chairs, and sacrificed [250]
big sheep and fattened goats. They killed the plump swine, too, 310

and the heifer from the herd. They roasted entrails,
 passed them around, and blended wine in mixing bowls.
 The swineherd handed out the cups. Philoetius,
 an outstanding man, brought bread in a fine basket,
 and Melanthius served the wine. Then the suitors
 reached out to take the fine food set in front of them.
 Thinking it might be advantageous, Telemachus
 sat Odysseus down inside the well-constructed hall,
 beside the entrance made of stone. He set down there
 a modest stool and table, and placed before him
 a share of inner organs. Then he poured some wine
 in a golden cup and said:

320

[260]

“Sit here for now,
 among these men. Drink your wine. I myself
 will protect you from all suitors’ insults
 and their fists—this is not a public house
 but a home belonging to Odysseus.
 He acquired this place for me. You suitors,
 make sure your hearts do not encourage you
 to gibes and blows, so that no arguments
 or fights will happen in this hall.”

As he said this,
 the suitors bit their lips. They were all astonished
 Telemachus had talked to them so forcefully.
 Then Antinous, son of Eupeithes, spoke to them:

330

[270]

“Achaean, what Telemachus has said
 is challenging, but let’s accept his words,
 although his speech is a bold threat to us.
 For Zeus, son of Cronos, has not given
 his permission, or here within these halls
 by this time we’d have put a stop to him,
 for all his clear-voiced talk.”

Antinous spoke.
 But Telemachus paid no attention to his words.

340

As heralds led sacred offerings to the gods
 down through the city, long-haired Achaeans gathered
 in the shadowy groves of archer god Apollo.
 They cooked the outer flesh and pulled away the spits,

then passed around the meat and had a splendid feast.¹ [280]
 The servers placed beside Odysseus a portion
 matching what they themselves received—Telemachus,
 lord Odysseus' son, had given them those orders.

But there was no way Pallas Athena would permit 350
 those proud suitors to hold back their bitter insults,
 so that Odysseus, Laertes' son, would suffer
 still more heartfelt pain. Now, among the suitors
 there was man who had a lawless heart. His name
 was Ctesippus, and he made his home in Same.
 Relying on his prodigious wealth, he courted
 the wife of Odysseus, who had been away so long. [290]
 He now shouted to the overbearing suitors:

“You noble suitors, listen to me now—
 I've got something to say. This stranger here 360
 has for some time had an equal portion,
 as is right, since it's by no means proper,
 nor is it just, for Telemachus's guests
 to go without—no matter who it is
 who shows up at the house. So now I, too,
 will provide a present to welcome him.
 Then he, for his part, can pass it along
 to a bath attendant or some other slave
 here in the home of the great Odysseus.”

As he said this, his strong hand picked up an ox hoof 370
 from the basket where it lay, and then he threw it. [300]
 But by quickly pulling his head back, Odysseus
 dodged the throw. In his heart he smiled with bitter scorn.
 The gristle hit the solid wall. Telemachus
 then went at Ctesippus and said:

“Ctesippus,
 in your heart you know well what's good for you—
 that must be why you did not hit the stranger.
 All on his own he made you miss your target.
 Otherwise, I'd have taken my sharp spear
 and rammed you in the chest. Then your father 380

¹This reference to a feast in the grove of Apollo is rather abrupt and confusing, since up to this point the feast has been taking place inside Odysseus's home and further details suggest the same location.

would be here planning for your funeral
 and not a wedding feast. So none of you
 make any show of trouble in my house.
 For now I am observing every detail—
 both good and bad—I know what’s going on.
 Before now, I was still a foolish child. [310]
 But we must still look on and bear these things—
 the slaughtered sheep, the wine and bread consumed.
 It’s hard for one man to restrain a crowd.
 Come now, no longer show me such ill will 390
 or give me so much trouble. If you’re keen
 to kill me with your swords, that’s what I’d choose—
 it would be far better to meet my death
 than constantly to watch these shameful deeds,
 strangers being abused and female slaves
 dragged through this lovely home. It’s a disgrace.”

Telemachus finished. They all sat in silence, [320]
 saying nothing. Then Agelaus, Damastor’s son,
 at last spoke up:

“My friends, no man could answer
 what’s been so justly said and in his rage 400
 respond with words provoking enmity.
 So don’t insult the stranger any more
 or any of the servants in this home
 belonging to godlike Odysseus. Still,
 to Telemachus and to his mother
 I have some reassuring things to say,
 which both their hearts should find agreeable.
 As long as you had in your hearts some hope
 that wise Odysseus would return back home,
 no blame attached itself to you by waiting, 410 [330]
 holding off the suitors here in your home.
 This was the better choice, if Odysseus
 had returned and come back to his palace.
 But surely it’s already clear by now
 he won’t be coming back, not any more.
 So come, sit down by your mother. Tell her
 to choose whoever is the finest man
 and offers the best bridal gifts. And then
 you can enjoy all your paternal goods—
 they are yours to keep, all the food and wine, 420
 while she looks after someone else’s home.”

Shrewd Telemachus then answered him and said:

“I swear to you, Agelaus, by Zeus
and by the sufferings of my father,
who’s perished or is wandering around [340]
somewhere far from Ithaca, there’s no way
I’m trying to delay my mother’s marriage.
I tell her to marry any man she wants,
and I’ll give her innumerable gifts.
But I’m ashamed to drive her from the home 430
against her wishes, to give an order
which forces her to leave. I hope the god
will never bring about an act like that.”

Once Telemachus had spoken, Pallas Athena
roused them all to laughter, with no sense of control.
She unhinged their minds, so the laughing from their mouths
came from an alien source, and the meat they ate
became blood-spattered. Their eyes filled up with tears.¹
All their hearts were filled with thoughts of lamentation.
Then godlike Theoclymenus addressed them all: 440 [350]

“O you miserable men, what troubles
are you feeling now? Your heads, your faces,
your lower limbs are shrouded in the night.
You’re on fire with grief, faces wet with tears,
fine pedestals and walls have gobs of blood,
the porch is full of ghosts, so is the yard—
ghosts rushing in the dark to Erebus.
Up in the sky the sun has disappeared—
an evil mist is shrouding everything.”

Theoclymenus said these words. But they all laughed, 450
enjoying themselves at his expense. The first to speak
was Eurymachus, a son of Polybus:

“He’s mad, [360]
this stranger who’s just recently arrived
from some far-off land. So come on, young men,

¹The Greek says (literally) “they laughed with the jaws of other men,” an expression which seems to mean they had no idea of why they were laughing. The blood on the meat is, one assumes, a hallucination, part of the madness Athena has forced upon them.

hurry and carry him outside the house,
so he can make his way to the assembly,
since he believes it's like the night in here."

Godlike Theoclymenus then said in reply:

"Eurymachus, I'm not requesting you
to furnish me with guides. I've got my eyes 460
and my two feet. And here inside my chest
I've got a mind that's not made for a fool.
I'll go outside with these, for I can see
you're headed for disaster—no suitors
who, in the home of the great Odysseus,
mistreat others and plan their reckless schemes
will be able to avoid it or escape." [370]

After he said this, he left the stately palace
and went to Peiraeus, who gladly welcomed him.
The suitors all looked around at one another 470
and tried to hurt Telemachus with mockery,
laughing at his guests. Some insolent young man
would make a comment using words like these:

"Telemachus,
no one is more unlucky with his guests
than you are. You have a man like this one,
a dirty tramp in need of food and wine,
with no work skills or strength, just a burden
on the land. Then some other man stood here [380]
spouting prophecies. You'd be better off
to follow my advice. Let's throw these guests 480
onboard a well-decked ship and send them off
to Sicily. You'd get good prices there."

That is what the suitors said. But Telemachus
paid no attention to their words. He kept quiet,
looking at his father, keeping his eyes on him,
ready for the moment his hands struck the suitors.

But wise Penelope, Icarius's child,
was sitting in a lovely chair across from them
and heard what each man in the hall was saying.
While they kept on laughing, the men prepared the food, 490

BOOK TWENTY

butchering many beasts to satisfy their hearts
with a fine feast. But there would never be a meal
more sorrowful than the one the mighty warrior
and the goddess would set before them very soon,
a feast the suitors earned for their disgraceful acts.

[390]

BOOK TWENTY ONE
THE CONTEST WITH ODYSSEUS'S BOW

[Penelope decides to set up the archery contest with the axes; she goes to a storeroom to fetch the bow, arrows, and axes; the story of how Odysseus got the bow from Iphitus; Penelope addresses the suitors, saying she will marry whoever succeeds in the competition; Eumaeus and Philoetius weep; Antinous upbraids them; Telemachus addresses the suitors, sets up the bows in line, and tries unsuccessfully to string the bow; Leiodes attempts to string the bow and fails; Antinous criticizes Leiodes, then suggests they rub fat on the bow by the fire to make it more supple; Odysseus reveals his identity outside to Eumaeus and Philoetius and gives them instructions; Eurymachus tries to string the bow and fails; Antinous proposes they postpone the contest for today; Odysseus suggests he be given a chance to succeed with the bow; Antinous objects; Penelope intervenes; Telemachus tells his mother to go upstairs; Eumaeus hands the bow to Odysseus and orders Eurycleia to lock the doors; Philoetius closes the courtyard gates; Odysseus inspects the bow, then fires an arrow through the holes in the axe heads; Telemachus arms himself and moves to stand with his father.]

Bright-eyed Athena then placed inside the heart
of wise Penelope, Icarius's daughter,
the thought that she should set up in Odysseus' halls
the bow and gray iron axes for the suitors,
as a competition and prelude to their deaths.
She climbed the lofty staircase to her upper rooms,
picked up in her firm grip a curved key made of bronze—
it had an ivory handle fashioned with great skill.
With her attendants she went off to a storeroom
in a distant corner of the house, where they kept
her lord's possessions—bronze and gold and iron,
all finely crafted work. His well-sprung bow was there,
and quivers, too, with many death-dealing arrows,
presents he had received from Iphitus, his friend,
son of Eurytus, a man like the immortals,
when they met in Lacedaemon, in Messene,
at the home of wise Ortilochus. Odysseus
had gone there to collect a debt the people owed—
Messenian men had run off with three hundred sheep,
seizing the shepherds, too, and then left Ithaca
in their ships with many oars. In response to this,
Odysseus, who was just a young lad, had been sent
a long way by his father and other senior men,
part of an embassy. Iphitus was searching
for twelve mares he'd lost, along with some sturdy mules

10

[10]

20

[20]

still on the teat. In later years these animals
 brought him a fatal destiny, the day he met
 the mortal Hercules, Zeus's great-hearted son,
 who knew all there was to know about great exploits.
 Hercules slaughtered him, although he was a guest 30
 in his own home—a cruel man who did not care
 about gods' anger or the welcoming table
 he'd set before him. After their meal, Hercules
 killed Iphitus and kept the mares with him at home [30]
 for his own use.¹ While Iphitus was enquiring
 about these horses, he got to meet Odysseus
 and offered him the bow. Earlier this weapon
 belonged to mighty Eurytus, who, when he died,
 left it to his son living in his high-roofed home.
 Odysseus had given him a keen-edged sword 40
 and a powerful spear, as well. This was the start
 of their close friendship. Iphitus gave Odysseus
 that bow of his, but the two men never bonded
 as mutual guest friends—before that could take place
 Hercules had murdered Iphitus, Eurytus' son,
 a god-like man. Odysseus did not take the bow
 whenever he set off in his black ships to fight.
 It lay there in his home as a memorial [40]
 to a dear friend and for his use in Ithaca.
 When fair Penelope came to the storage room, 50
 she crossed the wooden threshold—a long time ago
 a skilful craftsman planed it, set it straight and true,
 then fitted doorposts and set shining doors in place.
 Penelope swiftly took the looped thong from its hook,
 put in the key, and with a push shoved back the bolt.²

¹Iphitus went to see Hercules, who was his friend, about some stolen cattle. But Hercules went insane (a fit brought on by Hera) and killed Iphitus by throwing him off the walls of Tiryns. Hercules had to be purified and suffer some punishment for this murder. It's not entirely clear how the horses mentioned in Homer's text brought about Hercules's violence, unless the idea is that Hercules killed him to obtain the horses. Hercules is called "mortal" because Iphitus met him when he was still a man, that is, before he became deified after his death. The reference to the "welcoming table" is a reminder of the special bond between a host and his guest once they had shared a meal together.

²Merry, Riddell, and Monro, in their *Commentary on the Odyssey* (1886) explain that the inside bolt was moved by a thong passing through a slit in the door. Once the door was bolted shut by pulling the thong (when a person was leaving), the thong was attached to a hook on the outside wall. To get into the room from the outside required a key which fit a hole of the appropriate shape. Once the thong was taken off its hook, the key was inserted in the hole, and it pushed the bolt back. The purpose of the thong, it seems, was to prevent someone from opening the door from the inside (where it would be impossible to remove the thong from its hook and thus to move the bolt).

Just as a bull grunts when it grazes in a field,
 that how the door creaked as she pushed it with the key, [50]
 and it quickly swung ajar. Then she clambered up
 onto the planking where they kept the storage trunks
 in which they stowed their fragrant clothing. There she stretched 60
 to take the bow in its bright case down from its peg.
 Then she sat down, placed the bow case across her knees
 and wept aloud, as she took out her husband's bow.
 When she had had enough of her laments and tears,
 she went down to the hall, to join the noble suitors,
 holding in her hands the well-sprung bow and quiver,
 with many pain-inflicting arrows. And with her [60]
 came some attendant slaves carrying in a chest
 lots of iron and bronze, her husband's battle gear.
 Once the lovely lady reached the suitors, she stood 70
 beside the doorpost of the well-constructed hall,
 with a bright veil covering her face. On either side
 stood loyal attendant women. Then Penelope
 addressed the suitors with these words:

"Listen to me,
 bold suitors, who've been ravaging this home
 with your incessant need for food and drink,
 now that my husband's been away so long. [70]
 The only story you could offer up
 as an excuse is that you all desire
 to marry me and take me as your wife. 80
 So come now, suitors, since I seem to be
 the prize you seek, I'll place this great bow here—
 a weapon that belonged to brave Odysseus.
 Whichever one of you can grip this bow
 and string it with the greatest ease, then shoot
 an arrow through twelve axes, all of them,
 I'll go with him, leaving my married home,
 this truly lovely house and all these goods
 one needs for living—things I'll remember,
 even in my dreams."

When she'd said this, 90 [80]
 she told Eumaeus, the good and faithful swineherd,
 to set the bow and iron axes for the suitors.
 With tears in his eyes, Eumaeus took the weapons
 and laid them out. Philoetius, the goatherd,
 was weeping, too, in another spot, once he saw

his master's bow. Then Antinous addressed them both with this reproach:

“You foolish bumpkins,
 who only think of what's going on today!
 What a wretched pair! Why start weeping now?
 Why stir the heart inside the lady's chest? 100
 Her spirit lies in pain, now that she's lost
 the man she loves. So sit and eat in silence,
 or go outside and weep. Leave the bow here. [90]
 The contest will decide among the suitors.
 I don't think it will be an easy feat
 to string that polished bow. Of all men here,
 no one is like Odysseus used to be.
 I saw him for myself, and I remember,
 though at the time I was a little child.”

Antinous spoke. In his chest his heart was hoping 110
 he would string the bow and with it shoot an arrow
 through the iron.¹ But, in fact, he would be the first
 to taste an arrow from brave Odysseus's hands—
 the very man he was disgracing shamefully,
 as he sat in the hall, inciting all his friends. [100]
 But then among them all Telemachus spoke out
 with royal authority:

“Well now, Zeus,
 son of Cronos, must have made me foolish—
 my dear mother, although quite sensible,
 says she'll be leaving with another man, 120
 abandoning this home, and I just laugh.
 My witless heart finds that enjoyable.
 So come, suitors, since your prize seems to be
 a woman who throughout Achaean land
 has no equal, not in sacred Pylos,
 Argos, Mycenae, or on the mainland,
 or in Ithaca itself. But you know this,
 so I do not need to praise my mother. [110]

¹As mentioned in the notes for Book Twenty, the challenge required the contestant to string the bow (i.e., bend it back so that the string could be attached at both tips) and then shoot an arrow through a series of holes in twelve ax heads set up in a straight line. This appears to take place inside the great hall, which, as Merry, Riddell, and Monro note, had a floor consisting of hard earth. However, the precise location of the contest (inside or outside) has long been a matter of dispute.

Come on now. Do not delay this contest
 with excuses or use up too much time
 diverting your attention from this bow. 130
 Then we'll see. I might try the bow myself.
 If I can string it and shoot an arrow
 through the iron, I won't get so upset
 when my royal mother has to leave here
 with another man. I'd be left behind,
 as someone capable of picking up
 my father's prizes in a competition."

As he said this, Telemachus quickly threw off
 the purple cloak covering his back, then jumped up, 140
 and removed the sharp sword hanging from his shoulders.
 He set up the axes by digging out a trench, [120]
 one lengthy ditch for all of them, in a straight line.
 Then his feet trampled the earth down flat around them.
 Amazement gripped the suitors as they looked at him
 and watched how he aligned those axes properly,
 though before then he had never even seen them.
 Then, going and standing in the threshold, he tried
 to test the bow. Three times he made it tremble,
 as he strove to bend it, and three times he relaxed, 150
 hoping in his heart he'd string that bow and shoot
 an arrow through the iron. On his fourth attempt,
 as his power bent the bow, he might have strung it,
 but Odysseus shook his head, signalling him to stop,
 for all his eagerness. Telemachus spoke out, [130]
 addressing them once more with royal authority:

"Well, I suppose I'll remain a coward,
 a weak man, too, in future days, or else
 I'm still too young and cannot yet rely
 on my own strength to guard me from a man 160
 who gets angry with me first. But come now,
 you men who are more powerful than me,
 test this bow. Let's end this competition."

Once he said this, Telemachus placed the bow
 down on the ground away from him, leaning it
 against the polished panels of the door, and set
 a swift arrow there beside the bow's fine tip,
 then sat down in the chair where he had been before.
 Then Antinous, Eupheithes' son, addressed them: [140]

“All you suitors, get up in order now,
from left to right, beginning from the place
where the steward pours the wine.” 170

Antinous spoke,
and what he had proposed they found agreeable.
The first to stand was Leiodes, son of Oenops,
their soothsayer. He always sat furthest away,
beside the lovely mixing bowl, the only man
who opposed their recklessness—it made him angry
at the entire crowd of suitors. That was the man
who first picked up the bow and the swift arrow.
After moving to the threshold and standing there, 180
he tried the bow, but he could not string it. His hands, [150]
which were quite delicate and feeble, grew weary,
before he could succeed in hooking up the string.
He then spoke out among the suitors:

“My friends,
I’m not the man to use this bow. So now,
let someone else take hold of it. This bow
will take away from many fine young men
their lives and spirits, since it’s far better
to die than live and fail in the attempt
to have what we are gathered here to get, 190
remaining here in hope day after day.
Now every man has feelings in his heart—
he desires and hopes to wed Penelope,
Odysseus’ wife. But when he’s tried this bow
and observed what happens, then let him woo
another of Achaea’s well-dressed women, [160]
seeking to win her with his bridal gifts,
and then Penelope can wed the man
who offers her the most, whose fate it is
to be her husband.”

When Leiodes had finished, 200
he set the bow beside him, leaning it
against the polished panels of the door
and placing with it a swift arrow by the tip.
Then he sat down again where he had been sitting.
But Antinous took issue with what he had said,
talking directly to him:

“Leiodes,
that speech that passed the barrier of your teeth,
what wretched, sorry words! As I listened,
it made me angry—as if this bow would, [170]
in fact, take away the lives and spirits 210
of the very finest men, just because
you could not string it. Your royal mother
did not produce in you the sort of man
who has sufficient strength to draw a bow
and shoot an arrow. But some other men
among these noble suitors will succeed.”

This said, Antinous called out to Melanthius,
the goatherd:

“Come now, Melanthius,
light a fire in the hall. Set a large chair
in front of it and spread a fleece across. 220
Then fetch a hefty piece of fat—there’s some
inside the house—so that these young men here
can warm the bow and rub grease into it,
then test the bow and end this competition.” [180]

Once Antinous said this, Melanthius soon lit
a tireless fire. Then he carried a large chair up,
draped a fleece on it, set it down beside the fire,
and from inside the house fetched a large piece of fat.
So then the young men warmed the bow and tested it.
But they could not string it—whatever strength they had 230
was far too little. Antinous and Eurymachus,
the suitors’ leaders, still remained—the two of them
with their abilities, were the best men by far.

The cattle herder and the keeper of the swine
belonging to godlike Odysseus had gone out,
both together, so lord Odysseus moved away, [190]
left the palace, walked through the yard, and followed them.
When they had passed beyond the courtyard and the gates,
Odysseus called to them with reassuring words:

“You there, cattleman and swineherd, shall I 240
tell you something or keep it to myself?
My spirit tells me I should speak to you.

If Odysseus were to come back suddenly,
brought from somewhere by a god, would you two
be the sort of men who would defend him?
Would you support the suitors or Odysseus?
Answer as your heart and spirit prompt you.”

Then the cattle herder answered him:

“O Father Zeus, [200]
would that you might fulfill this very wish—
may that man come, and led on by some god. 250
Then you would know the kind of strength I have
and how my hands can demonstrate my power.”

And then Eumaeus, too, made the same sort of prayer
to all the gods that wise Odysseus would come back
to his own home. Once Odysseus had clearly seen
how resolute they were, he spoke to them again,
saying these words:

“Well, here I am in person—
after suffering much distress, I’ve come home,
back in the twentieth year to my own land.
Of those who work for me, I recognize 260
that you’re the only two who want me back.
Among the rest, I’ve heard no one praying [210]
that my return would bring me home again.
I’ll tell you both how this is going to end—
and I’ll speak the truth—if, on my behalf
some god will overcome those noble suitors,
I’ll bring you each a wife, and I’ll provide
possessions and a house built near my own.
Then you’ll be my companions—and kinsmen
of Telemachus. Come, I’ll show you something, 270
a sign, so you will clearly know it’s me
and trust me in your hearts—here’s the old scar
I got from a boar’s white tusk, on a visit
to Parnassus with Autolycus’s sons.” [220]

As he said this, Odysseus pulled aside his rags,
exposing the great scar. Once those two had seen it
and noted every detail, they both threw their arms
around the wise Odysseus—bursting into tears,
they welcomed him, kissing his head and shoulders.

Odysseus did the same—he kissed their heads and hands. 280
 Those men would have kept on weeping until sunset,
 if Odysseus had not called a halt, saying to them:

“Stop these laments. Let’s have no more crying.
 Someone might come out from the hall, see us,
 and tell people in the house. Let’s go in,
 one by one, not all at once. I’ll go first. [230]
 You come later. And let’s make this our sign.
 All those other men, the noble suitors,
 will not allow the quiver and the bow
 to be given to me. But, Eumaeus, 290
 as you carry that bow around the hall,
 put it in my hands, and tell the women
 to lock their room—bolt the close-fitting doors.
 If any of them hears the noise of men
 groaning or being hit inside our walls,
 she’s to stay quiet, working where she is,
 and not run off outside. Now, as for you, [240]
 Philoetius, I want you to lock
 the courtyard gates. Bolt and lash them shut.
 Do it quickly.”

After he said this, 300
 Odysseus went back into the hall and sat down
 on the stool where he had been sitting. The two men,
 godlike Odysseus’ servants, went in after him.

Eurymachus already had the bow in hand,
 warming it here and there in light from the hot fire.
 But even doing that, he could not string the bow.
 Then his courageous heart gave out a mighty groan,
 and he spoke to them directly—he was angry.

“It’s too bad. I’m frustrated for myself
 and for you all. I’m not that unhappy 310 [250]
 about the marriage, though I am upset.
 There are many more Achaean women—
 some here in sea-girt Ithaca itself,
 others in various town. But if we are
 so weak compared to godlike Odysseus
 that we can’t string his bow, it’s a disgrace
 which men will learn about in years to come.”

Antinous, Eupeithes' son, answered him and said:

"Eurymachus, that's not going to happen.
 as you yourself well know. At this moment, 320
 in the country there's a feast day, sacred
 to the god. So who would bend the bow? No,
 set it aside without saying a thing.
 As for the axes, what if we let them [260]
 just remain there. I don't think anyone
 will come into the home of Odysseus,
 Laertes' son, and carry them away.
 Come now, let the steward begin to pour
 wine in the cups, so we can make libations.
 Put the curved bow down, and in the morning, 330
 tell goatherd Melanthius to bring in
 the finest goats by far from all the herds,
 so we can set out pieces of the thigh
 for the famous archer god, Apollo.
 Then we'll test the bow and end the contest."

Antinous finished. They were pleased with what he said.
 Heralds poured water on their hands, and young men [270]
 filled the mixing bowls up to the brim with drink
 and served them all, pouring a few drops in the cups
 to start the ritual. Once they'd poured libations 340
 and drunk wine to their heart's content, Odysseus,
 a crafty man who had a scheme in mind, spoke out:

"Suitors of the splendid queen, listen to me,
 so I can say what the heart here in my chest
 is prompting me to state. It's a request,
 a plea, especially to Eurymachus
 and godlike Antinous, since what he said
 was most appropriate—for the moment
 you should postpone this business with the bow
 and turn the matter over to the gods. 350
 In the morning a god will give the strength [280]
 to whoever he desires. But come now,
 give me the polished bow, so in this hall
 I can test these hands of mine and find out
 if my supple limbs still possess the strength
 they used to have, or if my wandering
 and my lack of food have quite destroyed it."

Odysseus finished. They were extremely angry,
 fearing that a beggar might string the polished bow.
 So lord Antinous, addressing him directly,
 took Odysseus to task:

360

“You wretched stranger,
 your mind lacks any sense—you’ve none at all.

Aren’t you content to share a feast with us,
 such noble men, without being disturbed
 or lacking any food, and to listen
 to the words we speak to one another?

[290]

No other beggar or stranger listens in
 on what we say. The wine, so honey sweet,
 has injured you, as it harms other men,
 who gulp it down and swallow far too much.

370

Wine befuddled even great Eurytion,
 the centaur, in brave Perithous’s house,
 when he’d gone to the Lapiths. Afterwards,
 when his heart was blinded by drinking wine,
 in a mad fit he committed evil acts
 in Perithous’s home. Grief seized the heroes.
 They all leapt up and hauled him out of doors,
 through the gate, then cut off his ears and nose
 with pitiless bronze. His wits were reckless,
 and he went on his way, bearing madness
 in his foolish heart. And that’s the reason
 the fight between centaurs and men began.

[300]

But he first discovered evil in himself,
 when loaded down with wine.¹ And so I say
 if you string the bow, you’ll face great trouble.

380

You’ll not get gentle treatment anywhere,
 not in this land. We’ll ship you off at once
 in a black ship over to king Echetus,
 who likes to kill and torture everyone.

You won’t escape from him. So drink your wine
 in peace, and don’t compete with younger men.”

390

[310]

Wise Penelope then answered him and said:

¹Eurytion, a Centaur, was a guest at Perithous’s wedding. A battle broke out between the centaurs and Perithous’s people, the Lapiths. This version blames the fight on Eurytion’s drinking. Eurytion was later killed by Hercules. It’s not clear here whether the Centaurs are pictured as normal human beings or, as they were later, creatures with the head and torso of a human being and the body and legs of a horse.

“Antinous, it’s neither good nor proper
 to deny guests of Telemachus a chance,
 no matter who it is comes to this house.
 And if, trusting in his strength and power,
 the stranger strings Odysseus’s great bow,
 do you believe this man will take me home
 and make me his wife? I’m sure he himself
 bears no such hope inside that chest of his. 400
 So none of you should be at dinner here
 with sorrow in your heart because of him.
 That would be undignified.”

Then Eurymachus, [320]
 son of Polybus, answered her:

“Wise Penelope,
 daughter of Icarius, we do not think
 this man will take you home. That would be wrong.
 But we would be ashamed by public gossip
 from both men and women if later on
 some base Achaean spoke of us like this:

“Those men wooing the wife of that fine man 410
 are far worse than him—they can’t even string
 his polished bow, and yet another man,
 a beggar who came here on his travels,
 did so with ease and then shot through the iron.’

That’s what men will say, and those words would be
 a slur on us.”

Then wise Penelope replied: [330]

“Eurymachus, there is no way at all
 there will be in this district good reports
 of those dishonouring and eating up
 a noble’s home. Why turn the matter now 420
 into a slur? This stranger’s very large
 and strongly built. Furthermore, he maintains
 that by birth he comes from a good father.
 So come now, offer him the polished bow,
 and let us see. I will say this to you—
 and it will happen—if he strings the bow
 and Apollo grants him glory, I’ll dress him

in some lovely clothes, a cloak and tunic,
 and give him a sharp spear, as a defence [340]
 from dogs and men, as well as a fine sword, 430
 and sandals for his feet. Then I'll send him
 wherever his heart and spirit prompt him."

Shrewd Telemachus then answered her:

"Mother,
 among Achaeans, no man has a right
 stronger than my own to offer this bow
 to anyone I wish or to withhold it—
 none of those who rule in rocky Ithaca
 or in the islands neighbouring Elis,
 where horses graze. Among these men, no one
 will deny my will by force, if I wish 440
 to give the bow, even to this stranger
 as an outright gift to take away with him.
 But, mother, you should go to your own rooms [350]
 and keep busy with your proper duties,
 the loom and spindle, and tell your women
 to go about their tasks. The bow will be
 a matter for the men, especially me,
 since power in this house is justly mine."

Penelope, astonished, went back to her chamber,
 taking to heart the prudent words her son had said. 450
 With her servant women she walked up to her room
 and there wept for Odysseus, her dear husband,
 till bright-eyed Athena cast sweet sleep on her eyes.

The worthy swineherd had picked up the curving bow
 and was carrying it. But the suitors in the hall [360]
 started shouting. One of those arrogant young men
 then said something like:

"What are you doing,
 you wretched swineherd, carrying that bow,
 you idiot? You'll soon be with the swine
 all alone, no one there, being eaten 460
 by those swift dogs you yourself have raised,
 if lord Apollo and the other gods
 act with graciousness to us."

That's what they said.
 So, though the bow was in his hands, he put it down.
 He was afraid—so many men inside the hall
 were yelling at him. But then from across the room
 Telemachus shouted out a threat:

“Old man,
 keep on moving up here with that bow or else
 you may regret it. I'm younger than you, [370]
 but I might force you out into the fields 470
 and throw rocks at you. I'm the stronger man.
 I wish my hands had that strength and power
 over all the suitors here. I would force
 some of them soon enough to leave this house
 and go back home. They would not be happy.
 The schemes they keep concocting are unjust.”

Telemachus finished speaking. But the suitors
 all had a hearty laugh at his expense. This eased
 their bitter anger at Telemachus. Meanwhile,
 the swineherd had kept on moving through the hall, 480
 carrying the bow. He came to shrewd Odysseus
 and placed it in his hands. Then he summoned the nurse, [380]
 Eurycleia, and said to her:

“Wise Eurycleia,
 Telemachus is telling you to lock up
 the closely fitted doorway to this hall.
 If anyone hears groans inside this room
 or any noise from men within these walls,
 she's not to run outside, but stay in there,
 busy with her work and saying nothing.”¹

After he had said this, her words could find no wings. 490
 She bolted all the doors to that well-furnished hall.
 And Philoetius, without a word, slipped out
 and locked the courtyard gates inside the sturdy walls.
 A cable from a curving ship was lying there, [390]
 by the portico, made of papyrus fibres.
 With that he lashed the gates tight shut and went inside,
 moved to the chair where he had been before, sat down,

¹The doorway in question is the entrance to the women's quarters. They are to be locked in so that they don't interrupt the revenge killings or run off to raise a general alarm.

and watched Odysseus, who already had the bow.
 He was turning it this way and that, testing it
 in different ways to see if, while its lord was gone,
 worms had nibbled on the horns. One of the suitors,
 with a glance beside him, would say something like:

500

“This man knows bows—he must be an expert.
 Either he has bows like this stored at home
 or else he wants to make one. That is why
 he’s turning it around in all directions.
 That beggar’s really skilled in devious tricks.”

[400]

And then another of those arrogant young men
 would make some further comment:

“Well, I hope
 the chance that this brings him some benefit
 matches his ability to string this bow.”

510

That is how the suitors talked. But shrewd Odysseus,
 once he had raised the weapon and looked it over
 from every angle, then—just as someone really skilled
 at playing the lyre and singing has no trouble
 when he loops a taut string around a brand-new peg,
 tying the twisted sheep’s gut down at either end—
 that’s how easily lord Odysseus strung that bow.
 Holding it in his right hand, he tested the string.
 It sang out, resonating like a swallow’s song,
 beneath his touch. Grief overwhelmed the suitors.
 The skin on all of them changed colour. And then Zeus
 gave out an ominous sign, a peal of thunder.

[410]

520

Lord Odysseus, who had endured so much, rejoiced—
 crooked-minded Cronos’ son had sent an omen.
 Then he picked up a swift arrow lying by itself
 on the table there beside him—the other ones,
 which those Achaeans soon would be familiar with—
 were stored inside the hollow quiver. He set it
 against the bow, on the bridge, pulled the notched arrow
 and the bowstring back—still sitting in his seat—
 and with a sure aim let it fly. It did not miss,
 not even a single hole in all the axe heads.
 The arrow, weighted with bronze, sped straight on through
 and out the other end. And at that point, Odysseus
 called out to his son:

530

[420]

“Telemachus, the stranger
 sitting in your halls has not disgraced you.
 I did not miss my aim or work too long
 to string that bow. My strength is still intact,
 in spite of all the suitors’ scornful gibes. 540
 Now it’s time to get a dinner ready
 for these Achaeans, while there’s still some light,
 then entertain ourselves in different ways,
 with singing and the lyre. For these are things [430]
 which should accompany a dinner feast.”

As he spoke, he gave a signal with his eyebrows.
 Telemachus, godlike Odysseus’s dear son,
 cinched his sword belt tight, closed his fist around a spear,
 moved in close beside his father, next to his seat,
 and stood there by him, fully armed with gleaming bronze. 550

BOOK TWENTY-TWO
THE KILLING OF THE SUITORS

[Odysseus stands in the doorway and shoots arrows at the suitors; he first kills Antinous; Eurymachus offers compensation for what the suitors have done; Odysseus kills him; Telemachus kills Amphinomus, then goes to fetch weapons from the storeroom; Melanthius reveals where the weapons are stored and gets some for the suitors; Eumaeus and Philoetius catch Melanthius and string him up to the rafters; Athena appears in the guise of Mentor to encourage Odysseus; Agelaus tries to rally the suitors; Odysseus, Telemachus, Eumaeus and Philoetius keep killing suitors until Athena makes the suitors panic; Leiodes seeks mercy from Odysseus but is killed; Odysseus spares Phemius and Medon; Odysseus questions Eurycleia about the women servants who have dishonoured him; he gets them to haul the bodies outside and clean up the hall; Telemachus hangs all the unfaithful female slaves; Melanthius is cut up and castrated; Odysseus purifies the house and yard; Odysseus is reunited with the faithful women servants]

Resourceful Odysseus stripped off his rags, grabbed up the bow and quiver full of arrows, and sprang up, moving to the doorway. He dumped his swift arrows beside his feet and then shouted at the suitors:

“This contest to determine who is best
is over. But there’s another target—
one no man has ever struck—I’ll find out
if I can hit it. May Apollo grant
I get the glory.”

As Odysseus spoke,

he aimed a bitter arrow straight at Antinous, 10
who was just about to raise up to his lips
a fine double-handled goblet he was holding [10]
in his hands, so he could drink some wine. In his heart
there was no thought of slaughter. Among those feasting,
who would ever think, in such a crowd of people,
that one man, even if his strength was truly great,
would risk confronting evil death, his own black fate?
Odysseus took aim and hit him with an arrow
right in the neck—its point passed through his tender throat.
He slumped over on his side, and, as he was hit, 20
the goblet fell to the ground, and thick spurts of blood
came flowing quickly from his nose. Then, suddenly
he pushed the table from him with his foot, spilling [20]
food onto the floor—the bread and roasted meat

were ruined. When the suitors saw Antinous fall,
they raised an uproar in the house, leaping from their seats,
scurrying in panic through the hall, looking round,
searching in every corner of the well-built walls,
but there were no weapons anywhere, no strong spear
or shield for them to seize. They all began to shout,
yelling words of anger at Odysseus:

30

“Stranger,
you’ll pay for shooting arrows at this man.
For you there’ll be no contests any more.
It’s certain you’ll be killed once and for all.
You’ve killed a man, by far the finest youth
in all of Ithaca. And now vultures
are going to feast on you.”

[30]

Each of them
shouted out words like these. They did not realize
he had killed the man on purpose. In their folly,
they did not understand that they were now enmeshed
in destruction’s net. Shrewd Odysseus scowled at them
and gave his answer:

40

“You dogs, because you thought
I’d not come back from Troy to my own home,
you’ve been ravaging my house, raping women,
and, in devious ways, wooing my wife,
while I was still alive, with no fear of gods
who hold wide heaven, or of any man
who might take his revenge in days to come.
And now a fatal snare has caught you all.”

[40]

As Odysseus said this, pale fear seized the suitors.
Each man looked around to see how he might flee
complete destruction. Only Eurymachus spoke—
he answered him and said:

50

“If, in fact, it’s true
that you’re Odysseus of Ithaca,
back home again, you’re right in what you say
about the actions of Achaeans here,
their frequent reckless conduct in your home,
their many foolish actions in the fields.
But the man who is responsible for this

now lies dead—I mean Antinous, the one
 who started all this business, not because
 he was all that eager to get married—
 that’s not what he desired. No. For he had
 another plan in mind, which Cronos’ son
 did not bring to fulfillment. He wanted
 to become the king of fertile Ithaca,
 by ambushing your son and killing him.
 Now he himself is dead, as he deserved.
 At this point, then, you should spare your people.
 Later on we’ll collect throughout the land
 payment for what we’ve had to eat and drink
 inside your halls, and every man will bring
 compensation on his own, in an amount
 worth twenty oxen, paying you in gold
 and bronze until your heart is mollified.
 Until that time, no one is blaming you
 for being so angry.”

60
 [50]

Shrewd Odysseus glared at him
 and then replied:

[60]

“Eurymachus, if you gave me
 all the goods you got from your own fathers,
 everything which you now own, and added
 other assets you could obtain elsewhere,
 not even then would I hold back my hands
 from slaughter, not until the suitors pay
 for all their arrogance. Now you’ve a choice—
 to fight here face to face or, if someone
 wishes to evade his death and lethal fate,
 to run away. But I don’t think there’s one
 who will escape being utterly destroyed.”

80

As Odysseus said this, their knees and hearts went slack
 right where they stood. Then Eurymachus spoke once more,
 calling out to them:

90

“Friends, this man won’t check
 those all-conquering hands of his. Instead,
 now he’s got the polished bow and quiver,
 from that threshold he’ll just keep on shooting,
 until he’s killed us all. So let’s think now
 about how we should fight. Pull out your swords,

[70]

and set tables up to block those arrows—
 they bring on death so fast—and then let's charge,
 go at him all together in a group,
 so we can dislodge him from the threshold, 100
 clear the door, get down into the city,
 and sound the alarm as swiftly as we can.
 Then this man should soon take his final shot."

Once he said this, Eurymachus pulled out his sword,
 a sharp two-edged blade of bronze, and then charged out, [80]
 rushing at Odysseus with a blood-curdling shout.
 As he did so, lord Odysseus shot an arrow.
 It hit him in the chest, striking near his nipple—
 and the swift shaft sped on, straight into his liver.
 Eurymachus's sword slipped down onto the ground. 110
 He bent double, writing on the table, and collapsed,
 knocking food and two-handled cups onto the floor.
 His forehead kept hammering the earth, his heart
 in agony, as both his feet kicked at the chair
 and made it shake. A mist fell over both his eyes.

Then Amphinomus went at glorious Odysseus,
 charging straight for him, his sharp sword drawn and ready, [90]
 to see if he would somehow yield the door to him.
 But Telemachus moved in too quickly for him—
 he threw a bronze-tipped spear and hit him from behind, 120
 between the shoulder blades. He drove it through his chest.
 With a crash, Amphinomus fell, and his forehead
 struck hard against the ground. Telemachus jumped back,
 leaving his spear in Amphinomus, afraid that,
 if he tried recovering the long-shadowed spear,
 some Achaean might attack and stab him with a sword
 or lunge at him as he was dealing with the corpse.
 So he backed off quickly and made his way across
 to his dear father. Standing close to him, he spoke— [100]
 his words had wings:

"Father, now I'll bring you 130
 a shield, two spears, a helmet made of bronze,
 one that fits your temples. When I get back,
 I'll arm myself and hand out other weapons
 to the swineherd and keeper of the goats.
 It's better if we fully arm ourselves."

Quick-witted Odysseus answered him and said:

“Get them here fast, while still I have arrows
to protect myself, in case they push me
from the doors, since I’m here by myself.”

Odysseus spoke. Telemachus obeyed the orders
of his dear father. He hurried to the storeroom
where they kept their splendid weapons. From there he took
four shields, eight spears, and four helmets made of bronze
with thick horsehair plumes. He went out carrying these
and made his way back quickly to his dear father.
First, he armed himself with bronze around his body,
and the two servants did the same, dressing themselves
in dazzling armour. Then they went to take their place
in the doorway beside skilled and shrewd Odysseus,
who, as long as he had arrows to protect him,
continued shooting at the suitors in his home,
killing them one by one. As his arrows hit them,
they fell down in heaps. But once he’d used his arrows,
the king could shoot no more. So he then propped the bow
against the doorpost of the well-constructed wall,
and let it lean beside the shining entrance way.
Standing there alone, he set across his shoulders
his four-layered shield, and on his powerful head
he put a beautifully crafted helmet
with horsehair plumes nodding ominously on top.
Then in his fists he grabbed two heavy bronze-tipped spears.

In that well built wall there was a narrow doorway
and, close to the upper level of the threshold
into the great hall, the entrance to a passage,
blocked off by a close-fitting door.¹ So Odysseus
told the worthy swineherd to stand beside this door
and watch, for there was just one way of reaching it.
Then Agelaus cried, calling all the suitors:

“Friends, can someone climb up to that side door
and tell the men to raise a quick alarm?
Then this man won’t be shooting anymore.”

But Melanthius, the goatherd, answered him and said:

¹To understand the architectural details of the palace, please consult the diagram on p. 440 below.

“It can’t be done, god-raised Agelaus.
The main gate to the yard is really near,
and the entrance very hard to get through.¹
One man could block the way for everyone,
if he were brave. But come, let me bring you
armour from the storeroom. You could use it.
It’s in the house, I think—there’s nowhere else
Odysseus and his noble son could stash
their weapons.”

[140]

180

Once goatherd Melanthius said this,
he climbed up a flight of stairs inside the palace,
up to Odysseus’ storerooms. There he took twelve shields,
as many spears, and twelve helmets made of bronze
with bushy horsehair plumes. Once he made it back,
carrying the weapons as quickly as he could,
he gave them to the suitors. Odysseus saw them
putting that armour on and their hands brandishing
long spears, and felt his knees and his fond heart go slack.
His task appeared enormous. He quickly called out
to Telemachus—his words had wings:

190 [150]

“Telemachus,
it seems one of the women in the house
has stirred up a nasty fight against us,
or perhaps Melanthius is the one.”

Prudent Telemachus then said in his reply:

“Father, I bear the blame for this myself.
It’s no one else’s fault. I left it open—
the close-fitting door of that storage room.
One of them has keener eyes than I do.
Come, good Eumaeus, shut the storeroom door.
Try to find out if it was a woman
who did this, or if it was Melanthius,
Dolius’s son—I suspect it’s him.”

200

¹Agelaus wants someone to get through the side door by the entrance to the main hall, go out through passage into the yard, and raise the alarm. Melanthius objects, saying that the passage leading from the side door, which is guarded by Eumaeus, is very narrow and the courtyard gate is still close enough for Odysseus to reach with an arrow from the main doorway.

While they were saying these things to one another, [160]
 Melanthius the goatherd went back once again,
 to carry back more armour from the storage room.
 But the diligent swineherd saw him and spoke out,
 saying a quick word to Odysseus, who was close by:

“Resourceful Odysseus, Laertes’ son,
 raised from Zeus, I can see that man again, 210
 the wretch we think is going to the storeroom.
 Give me clear instructions—Should I kill him,
 if I prove the stronger man, or should I
 bring him to you here? He can pay you back
 for the many insolent acts he’s done,
 those devious schemes he’s thought up in your home.”

Resourceful Odysseus then answered him and said: [170]

“These proud suitors Telemachus and I
 will keep penned up in here, inside the hall,
 no matter how ferociously they fight. 220
 You two twist Melanthius’ feet and arms
 behind him, then throw him in the storeroom,
 with boards lashed against his back. Tie the man
 to a twisted rope and then hoist him up
 the lofty pillar till he’s near the beams.
 Let him stay alive a while and suffer
 in agonizing pain.”

As Odysseus spoke,
 they listened eagerly and did what he advised.
 They moved off to the storeroom, without being seen
 by the man inside. He was, as it turned out, searching 230 [180]
 in a corner of the room for more bronze weapons.
 As Melanthius, the goatherd, made his way out
 across the threshold, holding a lovely helmet
 in one hand and in the other an old broad shield
 covered in mould—one belonging to Laertes,
 which he used to carry as a youthful warrior,
 but which now was lying in storage, with its seams
 unravelling on the straps—the two men jumped out,
 grabbed him, hauled him by the hair back inside the room,
 and threw him on the ground—the man was terrified. 240
 They tied up his feet and hands with heart-wrenching bonds
 and lashed them tight behind his back, as Odysseus, [190]

BOOK TWENTY-TWO

Laertes' royal son, who had endured so much,
had ordered. They tied him up with a twisted rope,
yanked him up the lofty pillar, and raised him high,
up near the roof beams. And then, swineherd Eumaeus,
you taunted him and said:

“Now, Melanthius,
you can truly remain on watch all night,
stretched out on a warm bed, as you deserve.
You won’t miss early Dawn on her gold throne,
as she rises from the streams of Ocean—
the very hour you’ve been bringing goats here,
so the suitors can prepare their banquets
in these halls.”

They left Melanthius there, [200]
roped up and dangling in bonds which would destroy him.
The two picked up their weapons, closed the shining door,
and made their way to wise and crafty Odysseus.
Filled with fighting spirit, they stood there, four of them
on the threshold, facing many brave men in the hall.

Then Athena, Zeus's daughter, came up to them, 260
looking just like Mentor and with his voice, as well.
Odysseus saw her and rejoiced. He cried:

“Mentor,
help fight off disaster. Remember me,
your dear comrade. I’ve done good things for you.
You’re my companion, someone my own age.”

Odysseus said this, thinking Mentor was, in fact, [210]
Athena, who incites armed warriors to fight.
From across the hall the suitors yelled:

“Mentor,
don’t let what Odysseus says convince you
to fight the suitors and to stand by him.
For this is how it will end up, I think,
when our will prevails. Once we’ve killed these men,
father and son, then you’ll be slaughtered, too.
You may be eager to win glory now,
here in the hall, but you will have to pay
with your own head. Once our swords slice away

that strength of yours, we'll put your property, [220]
 all the fine things you have inside your home
 and in the fields, with what Odysseus owns
 and refuse to let your sons and daughters 280
 live in your house or your beloved wife
 remain in Ithaca, not in the city."

After they made this threat, Athena in her heart
 grew very angry, and she rebuked Odysseus
 with heated words:

"Odysseus, you no longer have
 that firm spirit and force you once possessed
 when for nine years you fought against the Trojans
 over white-armed Helen, who was nobly born.
 You never stopped. You slaughtered many men
 in fearful combat. Through your stratagems 290
 Priam's city of broad streets was taken. [230]
 So how come now, when you are in your home
 with your own possessions, you are moaning
 about acting bravely with these suitors?
 Come on now, my friend, stand here beside me,
 see what I do, so you can understand
 the quality of Mentor, Alcimus' son—
 he may be surrounded by his enemies,
 but he repays those who have honoured him."

Athena spoke. But she did not give him the strength 300
 to win that fight decisively. She was still testing
 the power and resolution of Odysseus
 and his splendid son. So she flew up to the roof
 inside the smoky hall, and sat there, taking on [240]
 the appearance of a swallow.

Meanwhile, the suitors
 were being urged to action by Agelaus,
 Damastor's son, by Eurynomus, Amphimedon,
 Demoptolemus, Peisander, Polyctor's son,
 and shrewd Polybus. Among the suitors still alive
 these were the finest men by far. Odysseus' bow 310
 and his swift arrows had brought down all the others.
 Agelaus spoke out, addressing all the suitors:

“Friends, this man’s hands have been invincible,
 but now they’ll stop. Mentor has moved away,
 once he uttered some empty boast. And now,
 they’re left alone before the outer gates. [250]
 So don’t throw those long spears of yours at them,
 not all at once. Come, you six men throw first,
 to see if Zeus will let us strike Odysseus
 and win glory. Those others over there 320
 will be no trouble after he’s collapsed.”

Agelaus spoke these words, and in their eagerness
 to follow what he said, the suitors hurled their spears.
 But Athena made sure their spear throws missed the mark.
 One suitor hit a doorpost in the well-built hall.
 Another struck the closely fitted door. One ash spear,
 weighted down with its bronze tip, fell against the wall.
 When they’d escaped the suitor’s spears, lord Odysseus, [260]
 who had suffered so much pain, was the first to speak:

“Friends, now I’ll give the word—let’s hurl our spears 330
 into all those suitors trying to kill us
 and adding to the harm they did before.”

Once Odysseus said this, they all took steady aim
 and threw their pointed spears. Odysseus struck down
 Demoptolemus, Telemachus hit Euryades,
 the swineherd struck Elatus, and the cattle herder
 killed Peisander. As these three men lay dying,
 their teeth chewed up the dirt. The suitors then pulled back [270]
 to the inner section of the hall. The others
 rushed up quickly to pull the spears out of the dead. 340
 The suitors kept on throwing spears with frantic haste,
 but, though there were a lot, Athena made them miss.
 One suitor struck the doorpost of the well-built hall.
 Another hit the closely fitted door. One ash spear,
 weighted down with its bronze tip, was hurled into the wall.
 But Amphimedon did hit Telemachus’s hand
 a glancing blow across the wrist. The bronze spear point
 sliced the surface of his skin. And with his long spear
 Ctessipus grazed the swineherd’s shoulder above his shield,
 but the spear veered off and fell down onto the ground. 350 [280]
 Then the group surrounding sly and shrewd Odysseus
 once more threw sharp spears into the crowd of suitors,
 and once again Odysseus, sacker of cities,

hit a man—Eurydamas—while Telemachus
struck Amphimedon, and the swineherd Eumaeus
hit Polybus. The cattle herder Philoetius
struck Ctesippus in the chest and then cried these words,
shouting above the body:

“Son of Polythereses,
you love to jeer—but don’t yield anymore
to your stupidity and boast so much. 360
Leave that sort of bragging to the gods,
for they are far more powerful than you.
This is your guest gift—something to pay back [290]
the ox hoof you gave godlike Odysseus
back when he was a beggar in his house.”

That’s what the herder of the bent-horned cattle said.
At close range Odysseus wounded Damastor’s son
with his long spear, and Telemachus managed to hit
Leocritus, son of Evenor—he struck him
with his spear right in the groin and drove the bronze point 370
right through the body. Leocritus fell forward,
his entire face and forehead hammering the ground.
Athena held up her man-destroying aegis
from high up in the roof.¹ The suitors’ minds panicked,
and they fled through the hall, like a herd of cattle
when a vicious gadfly goads them to stampede, [300]
once spring season starts and days begin to lengthen.
Just as falcons with hooked talons and curving beaks
fly down from the mountains, chasing birds, driving them
well below the clouds, as they swoop along the plain, 380
then pounce on them and kill, for there is no defence,
no flying away, while men get pleasure from the chase,
that’s how Odysseus and his men pursued the suitors
and struck them down, one by one, all through the hall.
As their heads were smashed in, horrific cries arose,
and the whole floor in the hall was awash with blood.

Then Leiodes ran out, grabbed Odysseus’s knee, [310]
and begged him—his words had wings:

¹The aegis is a divine shield which, when held up in battle, has the power of terrifying human beings and making them run away.

“Odysseus,
 I implore you at your knee—respect me
 and have pity. I tell you I’ve never
 injured a single woman in these halls
 by saying or doing something reckless.
 Instead I tried to stop the other suitors
 when they did those things. They did not listen
 or restrain their hands from acting badly.
 So their own wickedness now brings about
 their wretched fate. Among them I’m a prophet
 who has done no wrong, and yet I will lie dead,
 since there’s no future thanks for one’s good deeds.”

390

Shrewd Odysseus glared at him and answered: [320]

“If, in fact,
 you claim to be a prophet with these men,
 no doubt here in these halls you’ve often prayed
 that my goal of a sweet return would stay
 unrealized, so my dear wife could go
 back to your own home and bear you children.
 That’s why you won’t escape a bitter death.”

400

As he said this, Odysseus picked up in his fist
 a sword that lay nearby—Agelaus had dropped it
 and left it on the ground when he was killed—with it
 Odysseus struck Leiodes right across his neck.
 His head was rolling in the dust as he was speaking.

410

And then the minstrel Phemius, son of Terpes,
 who had been compelled to sing before the suitors,
 attempted to evade his own disastrous fate.
 He stood holding his clear-toned lyre by the side door,
 his mind divided—should he slip out from the hall
 and take a seat close to the altar of great Zeus,
 god of the courtyard, where Laertes and Odysseus
 had burned many thighs from sacrificial oxen,
 or should he rush up to Odysseus’s knee
 and beg him for his life. As his mind thought it through,
 the latter course of action seemed the better choice,
 to clasp the knee of Laertes’ son, Odysseus.
 He set down the hollow lyre, left it on the ground,
 between the mixing bowl and silver-studded chair,

420

[340]

rushed out in person to clasp Odysseus's knee,
and addressed him with this plea—his words had wings:

“I implore you, Odysseus, show respect
and pity. There'll be sorrow for you later,
if you kill me, a minstrel, for I sing 430
to gods and men. I am self-taught. The god
has planted in my heart all kinds of songs,
and I'm good enough to sing before you,
as to a god. Don't be too eager then
to cut my throat. Your son Telemachus [350]
could tell you that it wasn't my desire
nor did I need to spend time at your house,
singing for the suitors at their banquets.
But their greater power and their numbers
brought me here by force.”

As Phemius said this, 440
royal Telemachus, who was standing near him,
heard his words and spoke up, calling to his father:

“Hold on. Don't let your sword injure this man.
He's innocent. We should save Medon, too,
the herald, who always looked out for me
inside the house when I was still a child,
unless Philoetius has killed him,
or the swineherd, or he ran into you
when you were on a rampage in the hall.” [360]

Telemachus spoke. Medon, whose mind was clever, 450
heard him, for he was cowering beneath a chair,
his skin covered by a new-flayed ox-hide, trying
to escape his own black fate. He quickly jumped out
from underneath the chair, threw aside the ox-hide,
rushed up to clasp Telemachus's knee, and begged—
his words had wings:

“Here I am, my friend.
Stop! Tell your father to restrain himself,
in case, as he exults in his great strength,
he slaughters me with that sharp bronze of his,
in his fury with the suitors, those men 460
who consumed his goods here in his own hall, [370]
those fools who did not honour you at all.”

Resourceful Odysseus then smiled at him and said:

“Don’t worry! This man here has saved your life.
He’s rescued you, so you know in your heart
and can tell someone else how doing good
is preferable by far to acting badly.
But move out of the hall and sit outside,
in the yard, some distance from the killing,
you and the minstrel with so many songs, 470
until I finish all I need to do.”

After Odysseus spoke, the two men went away,
outside the hall, and sat down there, by the altar
of great Zeus, peering around in all directions, [380]
always thinking that they might be killed.

Odysseus then
began to search the house to check if anyone
was hiding there, still alive, trying to escape
his own murky fate. But every man he looked at—
and there were many—had fallen in blood and dust,
like fish which, in the meshes of a net, sailors 480
have pulled from the gray sea up on the curving beach,
lying piled up on the sand, longing for sea waves,
while the bright sun drains away their life—that is how
the suitors were heaped up, piled on one another.

Resourceful Odysseus then said to Telemachus: [390]

“Telemachus, go and call the nurse here,
Eurycleia, so I can speak to her.
Something’s on my mind—I want to tell her.”

After Odysseus spoke, Telemachus obeyed
what his dear father said. He shook the door and called 490
to Eurycleia, saying:¹

“Get up, old woman,
born many years ago—the one in charge
of female household servants in our home.

¹The doorway here is the entrance to the women’s quarters. At the start of the slaughter Eurycleia had locked it to prevent any of the women coming into the great hall.

Come on out. My father's calling for you.
He has something in mind and wants to talk."

He spoke. But Eurycleia's words could find no wings.
She opened up the door of the well-furnished hall
and came out. Telemachus went first and led the way. [400]
There she found Odysseus with the bodies of the dead,
spattered with gore and blood, like a lion moving on 500
from gorging on a farmyard ox, his entire chest
and both sides of his muzzle caked with fresh-spilt blood,
a terrifying sight, that's how Odysseus looked,
with bloodstained feet and upper arms. Eurycleia,
once she saw the bodies and huge amounts of blood,
was ready to cry out for joy now that she'd seen
such a mighty act. But Odysseus held her back
and checked her eagerness. He challenged her and said— [410]
his words had wings:

"Old woman, you can rejoice
in your own heart—but don't cry out aloud. 510
Restrain yourself. For it's a sacrilege
to boast above the bodies of the slain.
Divine Fate and their own reckless actions
have killed these men, who failed to honour
any man on earth who came among them,
bad or good. And so through their depravity
they've met an evil fate. But come now,
tell me about the women in these halls,
the ones who disrespect me and the ones
who bear no blame."

His dear nurse Eurycleia 520
then answered him and said:

"All right my child, [420]
I'll tell you the truth. In these halls of yours,
there are fifty female servants, women
we have taught to carry out their duties,
to comb out wool and bear their slavery.
Of these, twelve women in all have acted
without a sense of shame and no respect
for me or even for Penelope.
Telemachus has only just grown up.
His mother hasn't yet let him control 530

our female servants. But come, let's go now
to that bright upstairs room and tell your wife.
Some god has made her sleep."

Resourceful Odysseus [430]
then answered her and said:

"Don't wake her up.
Not yet. Those women who before all this
behaved so badly, tell them to come here."

Once he said this, the old woman went through the house
to tell the slaves the news and urge them to appear.
Odysseus then summoned Telemachus to him,
together with Eumaeus and Philoetius. 540
He spoke to them—his words had wings:

"You three men,
start carrying these corpses outside now,
then punish those shameless servant women.
Have them clean these splendid chairs and tables,
and wipe them with sponges soaked in water.
Once you've put the entire house in order, [440]
then take those servants from the well-built hall
to a spot outside between the roundhouse
and the sturdy courtyard wall and kill them.¹
Slash them with long swords, until life is gone 550
from all of them, and they cannot recall
Aphrodite and how they loved the suitors
when they enjoyed sex with them in secret."

Odysseus spoke. The crowd of women servants came,
wailing plaintively and shedding many tears.
First they gathered up the bodies of the dead
and laid the corpses out beneath the portico,
leaning them on one another in the well-fenced yard. [450]
Odysseus himself told them what they had to do
and hurried on the work. The women were compelled 560
to carry out the dead. Once that was done, they cleaned
the splendid chairs and tables, wiping off the gore
with porous sponges soaked in water. Telemachus,
along with Philoetius and Eumaeus,

¹The roundhouse is in one corner of the courtyard.

with shovels scraped the floor inside the well-built hall,
and women took the dirt and threw it in the yard.
Once they had restored due order in the hall,
they led the servant women from the sturdy home
to a place between the courtyard wall and roundhouse,
herding those household slaves into a narrow space
where there was no way to escape. Shrewd Telemachus
began by speaking to the others:

570 [460]

“I don’t want
to take these women’s lives with a clean death.
They poured insults on my head, on my mother,
and were always sleeping with the suitors.”

He spoke, then tied the cable of a dark-prowed ship
to a large pillar, threw one end above the roundhouse,
then pulled it taut and high, so that no woman’s foot
could reach the ground. Just as doves or long-winged thrushes
charge into a snare set in a thicket, as they seek
their roosting place, only to find they have been welcomed
by a dreadful bed, that is how those women stood
all in a row, with nooses fixed around their necks,
so they might have a pitiful death. For some time,
their feet kept twitching, but that did not last long.

580 [470]

Then they brought Melanthius out through the doorway
into the yard. With pitiless bronze they sliced off
his nose and ears, then ripped off his cock and balls
as raw meat for dogs to eat, and in their fury
hacked off his hands and feet. After they’d done that,
they washed their hands and feet and went inside the house,
returning to Odysseus. Their work was finished.
But he called Eurycleia, his dear nurse:

590 [480]

“Old woman,
bring sulphur here to purify the house.
And fetch me fire so I can purge the hall.
Ask Penelope to come here with her slaves,
and get the women in the house, as well.”

His dear nurse Eurycleia answered him:

“My child,
what you say is all well and good, but come,

BOOK TWENTY-TWO

I'll fetch you clothing, a cloak and tunic, 600
so you don't stand like this in your own hall
with nothing but rags on your wide shoulders.
That would be the cause of some dishonour."

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said: [490]

"Yes, but first make me a fire in the hall."

Dear nurse Eurycleia then followed what he said.
She brought fire and sulphur, so lord Odysseus
purged the house and yard completely. Eurycleia
went back through Odysseus's splendid home to tell 610
the women what had happened and to order them
to reappear. They all came out, holding torches,
and gathered around Odysseus, embracing him.
They clasped and kissed his head, his hands, his shoulders,
in loving welcome. A joyful longing seized him [500]
to sigh and weep, for in his heart he knew them all.

BOOK TWENTY-THREE
ODYSSEUS AND PENELOPE

[Eurycleia wakes up Penelope to tell her Odysseus has returned and killed the Suitors; Penelope refuses to believe the news; Penelope comes down and sits in the same room as Odysseus but does not recognize him; Telemachus criticizes his mother; Odysseus invites her to test him and discusses with Telemachus what their next step will be to deal with the aftermath of the killings; they organize a fake wedding dance to deceive anyone passing the house; Odysseus is given a bath, and Athena transforms his appearance; Penelope tells Eurycleia to set his old bed up for him outside the bedroom; Odysseus tells the story of the bed; Penelope acknowledges Odysseus and embraces him; Odysseus tells her of the ordeals yet to come, according to the prophecy of Teiresias; Penelope and Odysseus go to bed, make love, and then she hears the story of his adventures; in the morning Odysseus gets up, tells Penelope to stay in her upper rooms, puts on his armour, instructs Eumaeus and Philoetius to arm themselves; Athena leads them out of the city.]

Old Eurycleia climbed up to an upstairs room,
laughing to herself, so she could tell her mistress
that Odysseus, her dear husband, was in the house.
Her old knees moved swiftly as her feet hurried on.
She stood beside her lady's head and spoke to her:

“Wake up now, Penelope, my dear child,
so you yourself can see with your own eyes
what you've been wanting each and every day.
Odysseus has arrived. He may be late,
but he's back in the house. And he's just killed
those haughty suitors who upset this home,
used up his goods, and victimized his son.”

10

Wise Penelope then answered her:

[10]

“Dear nurse,
the gods have made you mad. They can do that—
turn even someone really sensible
into a fool and bring a feeble mind
to a path of fuller understanding.
They've injured you—your mind was sound before.
Why mock me, when my heart is full of grief,
telling this mad tale, rousing me from sleep,
a sweet sleep binding me, shrouding my eyes?
I've not had a sleep like that since Odysseus
went off to look at wicked Ilion,

20

a place whose name no one should ever speak.
 Come now, go back down to the women's hall. [20]
 If another of the slaves that serve this house
 had come to tell me this, woken me up
 when I was sleeping, I'd have sent her back
 at once to the woman's quarters in disgrace.
 But I'll be good to you because you're old." 30

The dear nurse Eurycleia answered her and said:

"But I'm not making fun of you, dear child.
 It's true. Odysseus has returned. He's back,
 here in the house, exactly as I said.
 He's that stranger all the men dishonoured
 in the hall. For some time Telemachus
 knew he was at home, but he was careful [30]
 to hide his father's plans, until the time
 he could pay back those overbearing men
 for their brutality."

Eurycleia spoke. 40

Penelope rejoiced. She jumped up out of bed,
 hugged the old woman, tears falling from her eyelids,
 and spoke to Eurycleia—her words had wings:

"Come now,
 dear nurse, tell the truth. If he's truly here,
 back home as you maintain, then how could he
 turn his hands against those shameless suitors?
 He was alone, and in this house those men
 are always in a group."

Her dear nurse Eurycleia
 then answered her:

"I didn't see or hear about it. [40]
 I only heard the groans of men being killed. 50
 We sat in our well-built women's quarters,
 in a corner, terrified. Close-fitting doors
 kept us in there, until Telemachus,
 your son, called me from the room. His father
 had sent him there to ask me to appear.
 I found Odysseus standing with the bodies—
 dead men on the hard earth all around him,

heaped up together, a heart-warming sight—
 and he was there, covered with blood and gore,
 just like a lion. Now all those bodies 60
 have been piled up beside the courtyard gates,
 and he's purging his fair home with sulphur. [50]
 He's kindled a great fire. He sent me out
 to summon you. Now, come along with me,
 so you two can be happy in your hearts.
 You've been through so much misfortune, and now
 what you've been looking forward to so long
 has finally happened. He's come himself,
 to his own hearth while still alive—he's found
 you and your son inside these halls and taken 70
 revenge on all the suitors in his home,
 whose actions have inflicted so much harm."

Wise Penelope then answered Eurycleia:

"Dear nurse, don't laugh at them and boast too much.
 You know how his appearance in the hall 60
 would please everyone, especially me
 and the dear son born to the two of us.
 But this story can't be true, not the way
 you've told it. One of the immortal gods
 has killed the noble suitors out of rage 80
 at their heart-rending pride and shameless deeds.
 They did not honour any man on earth,
 bad or good, when he came into their group.
 They've met disaster through their foolishness.
 But in some place far away Odysseus
 has given up his journey to Achaea,
 and he himself is lost."

Dear nurse Eurycleia
 then answered her:

"My child, what words have slipped 70
 the barrier of your teeth, when you declared
 your husband won't get home—he's in the house, 90
 at his own hearth. Your heart just has no trust.
 But come on, I will tell you something else—
 it's a clear proof—that scar from a white-tusked boar
 that he got years ago—well, I saw it.
 I washed it clean. I was going to tell you,

but his hand gripped me by the throat—his heart
 had other plans and would not let me speak.
 But come with me. I'll stake my life on it.
 If I've deceived you, then you can kill me
 and choose a painful death."

Wise Penelope

100 [80]

then answered her:

"Dear nurse, you find it hard
 to grasp the plans of the eternal gods,
 even though you're truly shrewd. But let's go
 to my son, so I can see the suitors
 now they're all dead—and the man who killed them."

Penelope spoke and went down from the upper room,
 her heart preoccupied with many things—Should she
 keep her distance and ask her dear husband questions,
 or should she come up to him, hold his head and hands,
 and kiss them? Crossing the stone threshold, she went in
 and sat down by the fire opposite Odysseus,
 beside the further wall. He was just sitting there
 by a tall pillar, looking at the ground, waiting
 to find out if his noble wife would speak to him
 when she saw him with her own eyes. But she sat down
 and stayed silent a long time, wonder in her heart.
 Sometimes her eyes looked straight at him, full in the face,
 but at other times she failed to recognize him,
 he had such shabby clothing covering his limbs.
 Telemachus spoke up, addressing a rebuke
 directly at her:

110

[90]

120

"Mother, you're a cruel woman,
 with an unfeeling heart. Why turn aside
 from my father in this way? Why not sit
 over there, close to him, ask him questions?
 No other woman's heart would be so hard
 to make her this distant from a husband
 who's come home to her in his native land
 in the twentieth year, after surviving
 so many harsh ordeals. That heart of yours
 is always harder than a stone."

[100]

Wise Penelope

130

then answered him:

“My child, inside my chest
my heart is quite amazed. I cannot speak
or ask questions, or look him in the eye.
If indeed it’s true he is Odysseus
and is home again, surely the two of us
have more certain ways to know each other.
We have signs only we two understand,
and other people will not recognize.”

[110]

As she spoke, lord Odysseus, who had borne so much,
smiled and immediately spoke to Telemachus—
his words had wings:

140

“Telemachus, let your mother
test me in these halls. She will soon possess
more certain knowledge. Right now I’m filthy,
with disgusting clothing on my body.
That’s why she rejects me and will not say
I am Odysseus. But we need to think
how this matter can best resolve itself.
Anyone who murders just one person
in the district, even when the dead man
does not have many to avenge his death,
goes into exile, leaving his relatives
and his native land. But we have slaughtered
the city’s main defence, the best by far
of the young men in Ithaca. I think
you should consider what that act could mean.”

150

[120]

Shrewd Telemachus then answered him and said:

“Surely you must look into this yourself,
dear father. For among all men, they say,
your planning is the best—of mortal men
no one can rival you. And as for us,
we’re keen to follow you, and I don’t think
we’ll lack the bravery to match our strength.”

160

Resourceful Odysseus said this in reply:

“All right, I’ll say what seems to me the best. [130]
 First of all, take a bath. Put tunics on.
 Next, tell the female servants in the hall
 to change their clothing. After that, we’ll let
 the holy minstrel, with his clear-toned lyre,
 lead us in playful dancing, so anyone
 who hears us from outside—someone walking 170
 along the road or those who live close by—
 will say it is a wedding. In that way,
 the wide rumour of the suitors’ murder
 will not spread too soon down in the city,
 before we go out to our forest lands.
 Then later on we’ll think of our next move,
 whatever the Olympian god suggests.” [140]

They listened eagerly to what Odysseus said
 and were persuaded. So, to start with, they all bathed,
 put on tunics, and women dressed in finer clothes. 180
 Then the godlike singer picked up his hollow lyre
 and encouraged their desire for beautiful songs
 and noble dancing. The whole great house resounded
 to the sounds of men enjoying a celebration
 with women wearing lovely gowns. So any man
 who listened in as he walked past outside the house
 might offer a remark like this:

“It seems that someone
 has married the queen with all those suitors.
 A heartless woman. She lacked the courage [150]
 to keep her wedded husband’s home intact 190
 and persevere till he arrived back home.”

Someone might have said these words, in his ignorance
 of what was going on. Meanwhile, Eurynome,
 the housekeeper, gave brave Odysseus a bath,
 rubbed him with rich oil, and put a tunic on him,
 with a gorgeous cloak. Athena poured beauty on him—
 her abundance made him taller and more robust
 to look at. Then on his head she transformed his hair,
 so it flowed in curls like fresh hyacinths in bloom.
 Just as a man sets a layer of gold on silver, 200
 a skilful artisan whom Pallas Athena [160]
 and Hephaestus have taught all sorts of crafts,
 so he produces splendid work, that’s how Athena

poured grace onto his head and shoulders, as he came out of his bath, looking like the immortal gods. He settled back in the chair where he was sitting, opposite his wife, and said to her:

“Strange lady,
to you those who live on Mount Olympus
have given, more than to any other wives,
an unfeeling heart. No other woman
would harden herself and keep her distance,
if her husband, in the twentieth year,
came back to her in his own native land,
after going through so much misfortune.
So come now, nurse, spread out a bed for me,
so I can lie down by myself. The heart
inside her breast must be made of iron.”

210
[170]

Wise Penelope then answered him:

“Strange man,
I am not making too much of myself,
or ignoring you. Nor is it the case
that you’ve offended me in any way.
I understand the sort of man you were
when you left Ithaca in your long-oared ship.
So come, Eurycleia, set up for him
outside the well-built bedroom that strong bed
he made himself. Put that sturdy bedstead
out there for him and throw some bedding on,
fleeces and cloaks and shining coverlets.”

220
[180]

Penelope said these words to test her husband.
But Odysseus, upset at his true-hearted wife,
replied and said:

230

“Woman, those words you uttered
are very painful. Who’s shifted my bed
to somewhere else? That would be difficult,
even for someone truly skilled, unless
a god came down in person—for he could,
if he so wished, set it elsewhere with ease.
But among men there is no one living,
no matter how much energy he has,
who would find it easy to shift that bed.

For built into the well-constructed bedstead 240
 is a great symbol which I made myself
 with no one else. A long-leaved olive bush [190]
 was growing in the yard. It was in bloom
 and flourishing—it looked like a pillar.
 I built my bedroom round this olive bush,
 till I had finished it with well-set stones.
 I put a fine roof on it and added
 closely fitted jointed doors. After that,
 I cut back the foliage, removing
 the branches from the long-leaved olive bush. 250
 I trimmed the trunk off, upward from the root,
 cutting it skillfully and true with bronze,
 so it followed a straight line. Once I'd made
 the bedpost, with an augur I bored out
 the entire piece. That was how I started.
 Then I carved out my bed, till I was done.
 In it I set an inlay made of gold, [200]
 silver, and ivory, and across it
 I stretched a bright purple thong of ox-hide.
 And that's the symbol I describe for you. 260
 Lady, I don't know if that bed of mine
 is still in place or if some other man
 has cut that olive tree down at its base
 and set the bed up in a different spot."

Odysseus spoke, and sitting there, Penelope
 felt a weakness in her knees, and her heart grew soft.
 For she recognized that it was true—that symbol
 Odysseus had described to her. Eyes full of tears,
 she ran across to him, threw her arms around his neck,
 kissed his head, and said:

"Don't be angry, Odysseus, 270
 not with me. In every other matter
 you've been the cleverest of men. The gods [210]
 have brought us sorrows—they were not willing
 that we two should stay beside each other
 to enjoy our youth and reach together
 the threshold of old age. Now's not the time
 to rage at me, resenting what I've done
 because I did not welcome you this way
 when I first saw you. But in my dear breast
 my heart was always fearful, just in case 280

some other man would arrive and trick me
 with his stories. For there are many men
 who dream up wicked schemes. Argive Helen,
 a child of Zeus, would never have had sex
 with a man who came from somewhere foreign
 if she had known Achaea's warrior sons [220]
 would bring her back to her dear native land.
 And some god drove her to that shameful act.
 Not till that time did she start harbouring
 within her heart the disastrous folly 290
 which filled our lives with misery as well.
 But now you have described that clear symbol,
 our bed, which no one else has ever seen,
 other than the two of us, you and me,
 and a single servant girl, Actoris,
 a gift my father gave when I came here.
 For both of us she kept watch at the doors
 of our securest room. You've won my heart, [230]
 though it's been truly stubborn."

Penelope spoke,
 and stirred in him an even more intense desire 300
 to weep—as he held his loyal and loving wife,
 he shed tears. Just as swimmers are overjoyed
 to catch a glimpse of land, sailors whose sturdy ship
 Poseidon has demolished out at sea, as winds
 and surging waves were driving it, and a few men
 have escaped the grey sea by swimming to the shore,
 their bodies thickly caked with brine, and they are glad
 to clamber up on land, evading a disaster,
 that how Penelope rejoiced to see her husband.
 She simply could not stop her white arms holding him 310 [240]
 around his neck. And then rose-fingered early Dawn
 would have appeared with both of them still weeping there,
 if goddess Athena with the glittering eyes
 had not come up with something else—for she prolonged
 the lengthy night as it came to an end, keeping
 Dawn and her golden throne delayed at Ocean's stream—
 she would not let the goddess harness her swift horses,
 who carry her light to men, Lampros and Phaeton,
 the colts who bring on Dawn.

Resourceful Odysseus
 then said to his wife:

“Lady, we’ve not yet come
 to the end of all our trials. Countless tasks
 must still be carried out in days to come,
 plenty of hard work I have to finish. [250]
 That’s what the spirit of Teiresias
 prophesied to me when I descended
 to the home of Hades to ask questions
 concerning our return, my companions
 and myself. But come, wife, let’s go to bed,
 so we can lie down and enjoy sweet sleep.”

Wise Penelope then answered:

“You’ll have a bed
 whenever your heart desires, for the gods
 have seen to it that you’ve returned back here
 to your own well-built home and native land.
 But since you have thought of it and some god [260]
 has set it in your heart, come and tell me
 of this trial. For I think I’ll hear of it
 in future, so to learn of it right now
 won’t make things any worse.”

Resourceful Odysseus
 then answered her and said:

“Strange lady,
 why urge me so eagerly to tell you? 340
 All right, I’ll say it, and I’ll hide nothing.
 But what I tell you will not please your heart.
 I myself get no enjoyment from it.
 Teiresias ordered me to journey out
 to many human cities, carrying
 in my hands a well-made oar, till I reached
 a people who know nothing of the sea,
 who don’t put salt on any food they eat, [270]
 and have no knowledge of ships painted red
 or well-made oars that serve those ships as wings. 350
 He told me a sure sign I won’t conceal—
 when someone else runs into me and says
 I’ve got a shovel used for winnowing
 on my shoulders, he told me to set it
 in the ground there, make a rich sacrifice

to lord Poseidon with a ram, a bull,
 and a boar that breeds with sows—and then leave,
 go back home, and make sacred offerings
 to immortal gods who hold wide heaven, [280]
 all of them in order. My death, he said, 360
 will come from the sea, a gentle passing,
 when I am bowed down with a ripe old age,
 with my people prospering around me.
 He foretold that this is what would happen.”

Wise Penelope then said to him:

“If it’s true that gods
 are bringing you a more serene old age,
 there’s hope you’ll find relief from these ordeals.”

While they kept talking to each other in this way,
 Eurynome and the old nurse prepared the bed
 with soft coverlets, by light from flaming torches. 370 [290]
 Once they had hurriedly arranged the sturdy bed,
 Eurycleia returned to her own room to rest,
 and the bedroom servant, Eurynome, led them
 on their way to bed, with a torch gripped in her hand.
 Once she brought them there, Eurynome went away.
 Odysseus and Penelope approached with joy
 the place where their bed still stood from earlier days.

Telemachus, Philoetius, and Eumaeus
 rested their dancing feet and made the women stop.
 Then they lay down in the shadowy hall to sleep. 380

When Odysseus and Penelope had enjoyed [300]
 making love together, they entertained themselves
 telling stories, in mutual conversation.
 The lovely lady talked of all she had to bear
 in her own house, dealing with that destructive group,
 the suitors, who, because of her, kept butchering
 so many cattle and fat sheep and draining jars
 of so much wine. Odysseus, born from Zeus, told her
 all the troubles he had brought on men, all the grief
 he had endured all on his own. Penelope 390
 was happy listening, and Sleep did not swoop down
 and close her eyes until his story had been told.

He began by telling her how he first destroyed [310]
 the Cicones, and then came to the fertile land
 of Lotus-eating men, and what the Cyclops did—
 how he compelled the beast pay a penalty
 for the brave companions he had killed and eaten—
 then how he came to Aeolus, who welcomed him
 with hospitality and sent him on his way.
 But that was not the destined time he was to reach 400
 his dear native soil. Instead, stormy winds once more
 caught up with him, drove him across the fish-filled seas,
 for all his weary groans. He told how he came
 to Telepylos where the Laestrygonians live,
 huge men who destroyed his ships and all his comrades,
 and how Odysseus and his crew were the only ones [320]
 to escape in his black ship. He went on to talk
 of Circe's devious magical skill and how
 in his ship with many oars he had then gone down
 to the shadowy house of Hades to consult 410
 the spirit of Teiresias of Thebes and seen
 all his companions and his mother, who bore him
 and raised him as a child, and how he listened to
 the Sirens' voices, in their never-ending song,
 and then reached the Wandering Rocks, dread Charybdis,
 and Scylla, whom no man had ever yet escaped
 without being harmed, how his companions slaughtered
 the oxen of sun god Helios, how his ship
 was shattered by a flaming lightning bolt thrown down [330]
 from high-thundering Zeus, how his fine comrades died, 420
 all together, while he alone escaped from fate,
 how he reached the nymph Calypso on her island,
 Ogygia, how she kept him in her hollow cave,
 longing for him to be her husband, nurturing him,
 and telling him she would make him an immortal
 who through all his days would not get any older,
 but she could not convince the heart within his chest,
 how, after suffering a great deal, he had come
 to the Phaeacians, who had greatly honoured him,
 as if he were a god, and sent him in a ship 430 [340]
 to his dear native land, after offering gifts
 of bronze and gold and rich supplies of clothing.
 He stopped his story at that point, when sweet sleep,
 which eases tension in men's limbs, came over him,
 and calmed the anxious worries he had in his heart.

Then Athena, goddess with the glittering eyes,
 came up with something else. When she thought Odysseus
 and his wife had satisfied their hearts with pleasure
 and with sleep, she stirred up Dawn, enthroned in gold,
 to move from Ocean's stream and bring her light to men. 440
 Odysseus rose from his soft bed and told his wife:

“Lady, the two of us by now have had [350]
 enough of trouble—you here lamenting
 my hazardous return, while, in my case,
 Zeus and the other gods kept me tied up
 far from my native land, in great distress,
 for all my eagerness to get back home.
 Now that we are here, in the bed we love,
 you should tend to our wealth inside the house.
 As for the flocks those haughty suitors stole, 450
 I'll seize many beasts as plunder on my own,
 and Achaeans will give more—they'll fill up
 each and every pen. Now I'm going out
 to check my forest lands, and there I'll see
 my noble father, who on my behalf [360]
 has suffered so much worry. So, dear wife,
 since I know how intelligent you are,
 I'm asking you to follow my advice—
 once sunrise comes, the story will be out
 about the suitors slaughtered in our home. 460
 So you should go now to your upstairs room
 with your female attendants and stay there.
 Do not visit or question anyone.”

Once he said this, he put his splendid armour on,
 around his shoulders, and summoned Telemachus,
 Philoetius, and Eumaeus, and told them all
 to get weapons in their hands ready for a fight.
 They did not disobey, but dressed themselves in bronze,
 opened the doors, and went outside, with Odysseus [370]
 in the lead. By now light was shining on the ground, 470
 but Athena kept their group hidden by the night,
 and quickly escorted them outside the city.

BOOK TWENTY-FOUR
ZEUS AND ATHENA END THE FIGHTING

[Hermes conducts the shades of the dead suitors down to Hades, where they meet Achilles, Patroclus, Antilochus, and Agamemnon; Agamemnon and Achilles talk; Agamemnon gives details of Achilles's burial; Amphimedon complains to Agamemnon about his death at Odysseus's hands; Agamemnon pays tribute to Odysseus and Penelope; Odysseus goes out to find his father; Laertes and Odysseus talk in the vineyard, and Odysseus tests his father with a false story and then reveals his identity; the two men return to Laertes's house, where Eumaeus, Philoetius, and Telemachus have prepared dinner; Laertes's appearance is transformed; Dolius and his sons arrive; the men in Ithaca hear about the slaughter and collect their dead; Eupheithes urges action against Odysseus; Medon and Halitherses advise against such action; the majority decide to follow Eupheithes; Athena questions Zeus about his intentions regarding Odysseus; Zeus tells her to deal with the situation; Odysseus and his followers arm themselves and go out to meet the Ithacan army; Athena urges Laertes to throw a spear; Laertes kills Eupheithes; Athena stops the Ithacan army and sends it back to the city; a thunderbolt from Zeus stops Odysseus; Athena, in the guise of Mentor, establishes a lasting oath between both sides.]

Meanwhile, divine Hermes of Cyllene summoned up
the spirits of the suitors. In his hand he held
the beautiful gold staff he uses to enchant
the eyes of anyone he wishes or to wake
some other man from sleep. With it he roused and led
these spirits, who kept squeaking as they followed him.
Just as inside the corners of a monstrous cave
bats flit around and cry when one of them falls down
out of the cluster on the rock face where they cling
to one another, that is how these spirits shrieked
as they moved on together. Hermes the Deliverer
conducted them along the murky passageway.¹
They went past the streams of Ocean, past Leucas,
past the gates of the Sun and past the land of Dreams,
and very soon came to the field of asphodel,
where spirits live, the shades of those whose work is done.²

10

[10]

¹Hermes, in addition to his other roles as messenger of the gods, traditionally escorted the souls of the dead down into Hades, hence the epithet "Deliverer."

²Leucas is the "White Rock" at the entrance to Hades. These details of the approach to the underworld are not entirely consistent with the details given in Book Eleven, where Odysseus communicates with the spirits of the dead.

Here they met the shade of Peleus' son Achilles,
 and of Patroclus, too, of brave Antilochus,
 and of Ajax, who had the finest form and shape
 of all Danaans, after the son of Peleus, 20
 who had no equal. These dead shades were gathered there,
 in a group around Achilles. Then to them came [20]
 the spirit of Agamemnon, son of Atreus,
 full of sorrow. Around him were assembled shades
 of all those who had died with him and met their fate
 in Aegisthus' house. The shade of dead Achilles
 was the first to speak to him:

“Son of Atreus,
 we thought of you as one well loved by Zeus,
 who hurls the thunderbolt, for all your days,
 more so than every other human warrior, 30
 because on Trojan soil you were the king
 of many fighting men where we Achaeans
 went through so much distress. And now it seems
 destructive Fate was destined to reach you,
 as well, and far too soon, the mortal doom
 that no man born escapes. O how I wish [30]
 you'd met your fatal end in Trojan lands,
 still in full possession of those honours
 you were master of. Then all Achaeans
 would have made a tomb for you—for your son 40
 you would have won great fame in future days.
 But as it is, your fate was to be caught
 in a death more pitiful than any.”

The shade of Atreus' son then answered him:

“Noble Achilles, great son of Peleus,
 killed in the land of Troy, far from Argos.
 Other men fell round you, the finest sons
 of Trojans and Achaeans, in the fight
 above your corpse. You lay in swirling dust,
 a great man in your full magnificence, 50 [40]
 with your skill in horsemanship forgotten.
 As for us, all day long we battled on—
 we never would have pulled back from the fight,
 if Zeus had not brought on a storm to end it.
 We took you from the battle to the ships,
 laid you on a bier, and wiped down your skin,

washing your corpse with water and warm oil.
 The Danaans stood and wept around you,
 shedding many tears, and cut off their hair.
 Your mother heard about your death and came 60
 with her immortal nymphs up from the sea.¹
 A wondrous cry rose above the water—
 all Achaeans there were seized with trembling.
 The men would have jumped up and run away [50]
 to the hollow ships, if one man, well versed
 in ancient wisdom, had not held them back.
 I mean Nestor, whose earlier advice
 had seemed the best. Using his wise judgment,
 he addressed them all and said:

‘Hold on, Argives.
 You young Achaean men, don’t rush away. 70
 This is his mother coming from the sea
 with her immortal sea nymphs to look on
 the face of her dead son.’

Nestor said these words,
 and the flight of all those warriors ceased.
 The daughters of the Old Man of the Sea
 stood round you in a piteous lament,
 as they put immortal clothing on you.²
 And Muses, nine in all, sang out a dirge, [60]
 their lovely voices answering each other.
 You’d not have seen a single Argive there 80
 who was not weeping, his heart deeply moved
 by the Muses’ clear-toned song. We mourned you
 for seventeen days and nights together,
 both mortal humans and immortal gods.
 On the eighteenth we gave you to the fire.
 Around you we killed many well-fed sheep
 and bent-horned cattle. You were cremated
 in clothing of the gods, with sweet honey
 and much oil. Many Achaean warriors
 moved round the funeral pyre in armour, 90

¹Achilles’s mother is Thetis, a minor deity of the sea.

²Homer uses the phrase Old Man of the Sea to refer to different minor sea gods. The father of the sea nymphs is Nereus, who is not the same god as Proteus, the Old Man of the Sea whom Menelaus talks about in his adventures in Egypt in Book Four. Homer also calls Phorcys the Old Man of the Sea in Book 13.

as you lay there in the flames, foot soldiers [70]
 and charioteers, making a huge noise.
 Then, Achilles, once Hephaestus's fire
 was finished with you, we set your white bones
 in unmixed wine and oil. Your mother gave
 a two-handled jar of gold. She claimed it was
 a gift from Dionysus, something made
 by glorious Hephaestus. In this jar,
 illustrious Achilles, lie your bones,
 mixed in with the bones of dead Patroclus, 100
 son of Menoetius.¹ Apart from these
 lie Antilochus' bones—you valued him
 above all the rest of your companions
 except Patroclus.² Then, over these bones,
 we—the sacred host of Argive spearmen— [80]
 raised a huge and noble burial mound
 on a promontory projecting out
 into the wide Hellespont, so that men,
 those now alive and those in future days,
 can view it from a long way out at sea. 110
 Your mother asked the gods for worthy prizes
 and set them out among the best Achaeans
 for a competition. In former days
 you attended many funeral games
 for warriors, when, once a king has died,
 the younger men prepare for competition
 and steel themselves to win. But if you'd seen [90]
 that spectacle you would have truly marvelled—
 the goddess, silver-footed Thetis, gave
 magnificent prizes in your honour. 120
 The gods had that much special love for you.
 So even in death, your name did not die.
 Your glorious fame, Achilles, will endure
 among all men forever. As for me,
 I finished off the war, but what pleasure
 does that give me now? When I got back home,

¹Patroclus is Achilles's closest companion in the *Iliad*. In that poem, his dying request to Achilles is to have their bones placed together in a funeral urn when Achilles is killed.

²Antilochus is a son of Nestor. He was killed in the fighting around Troy. His name is mentioned in Book 3 when Telemachus visits Nestor in Pylos.

Zeus organized a dreadful fate for me,
thanks to Aegisthus and my accursed wife.”¹

As they talked this way to one another, Hermes,
killer of Argus, came close to them, escorting 130
the shades of those dead suitors Odysseus had killed. [100]
When they observed this, the two, in their amazement,
went straight up to them. The shade of Agamemnon,
son of Atreus, recognized the well-loved son
of Melaneus, glorious Amphimedon,
a guest-friend of his from Ithaca, his home.
The shade of Agamemnon spoke to him first and said:

“Amphimedon, what has happened to you,
all excellent young men of the same age,
to come down here beneath the gloomy earth? 140
If one had to choose the city’s finest men,
one could not wish for any group but these.
Did Poseidon overwhelm you in your ships
by rousing savage winds and giant waves? [110]
Or did hostile forces on the mainland
kill you off, while you were taking cattle
or rich flocks of sheep, or were they fighting
to protect their city and their women?
Answer what I’m asking. For I can claim
I am your guest-friend. Do you not recall 150
the time I made a visit to your home
with Menelaus—to urge Odysseus
to voyage with us in our well-benched ships
to Ilion? It took us a whole month
to cross that open sea, and it was hard
to win Odysseus, sacker of cities,
over to our side.”

Amphimedon’s shade [120]
then answered him and said:

¹This is the second fairly direct accusation in the *Odyssey* that Clytaemnestra was complicit in the actual murder of Agamemnon. Most other references place the blame squarely on Aegisthus or else are ambiguous about Clytaemnestra’s role in the killing. The shade of Agamemnon in 11.509 says she butchered Cassandra and insulted him as he lay dying. Further on, he states she slaughtered him (11.573). There’s another fairly explicit accusation from Agamemnon later in this book, at line 263.

“Noble son of Atreus,
 Agamemnon, Zeus-fostered king of men,
 I do remember all these things you say, 160
 and I’ll describe for you every detail,
 the truth of how we died, an evil fate,
 and how it came about. Since Odysseus
 had been away from home for many years,
 we wooed his wife. She was not unwilling
 to think about a marriage she detested,
 but she would not go through with it. Instead,
 she organized our deaths, our murky fate.
 In her heart she also devised a trick.
 She had a huge loom set up in her rooms 170
 then on it wove a delicate wide cloth. [130]
 When she began, she told us this:

‘Young men,
 my suitors, since lord Odysseus is dead,
 you’re keen for me to marry. You must wait
 until I’m finished with this robe, so I
 don’t waste this woven yarn in useless work.
 It’s a burial shroud for lord Laertes,
 for when the lethal fate of his sad death
 will seize him, so no Achaean woman
 in the district will get angry with me, 180
 because a man who won such rich estates
 should have to lie in death without a shroud.’

That’s what she said, and our proud hearts agreed.
 So day by day she’d weave at that great loom.
 At night she’d have torches placed beside her 140
 and unravel it. She tricked Achaeans
 for three years with this scheme—they believed her.
 But as the seasons changed and months rolled on,
 and many days passed by, the fourth year came.
 Then one of her women, who knew the plan, 190
 informed us, and we came in and caught her
 undoing the lovely yarn. So after that
 we made her finish it against her will.
 Once she’d woven it and washed the fabric,
 she displayed the robe—it shone like the sun
 or like the moon. Then a malignant god
 brought Odysseus back home from overseas,
 to pastures bordering where the swineherd [150]

has his house. And Odysseus's dear son
 went to that house, as well, once he returned
 in his black ship, back from sandy Pylos.¹ 200
 The two hatched a plan against the suitors,
 to bring them to a nasty end, then left
 for the well-known city. Telemachus
 went there before his father—Odysseus
 got there later. The swineherd led his master,
 who wore shabby clothing on his body—
 just like an ancient worn-out vagabond
 leaning on a staff, rags covering his skin.
 So none of us could recognize the man 210
 when he suddenly showed up, not even
 older men. We pelted him with insults,
 hurled things at him, but for a little while
 his firm heart kept enduring what we threw
 and how we taunted him in his own home.
 But when aegis-bearing Zeus aroused him,
 with Telemachus' help he took away
 his fine weapons, put them in a storeroom,
 and locked the bolt. Then, with his great cunning,
 he told his wife to place before the suitors 220
 his bow and iron axes, a contest
 for those of us who bore an evil fate,
 the prelude to our death. No suitor there
 could bend that great bow enough to string it. [160]
 We simply did not have sufficient strength.
 When the bow was handed to Odysseus,
 we all called out to say we should not give
 that bow to him, no matter what he said.
 Telemachus alone kept urging him
 and told him he could try. Once Odysseus, 230
 who had endured so much, picked up the bow,
 he strung it with ease and shot an arrow
 through the iron axes. He went and stood
 inside the doorway with a fearful glare
 and kept shooting volleys of swift arrows.
 He hit Antinous and went on shooting, [170]
 aiming at other men across the room,
 letting lethal arrows fly. Men collapsed, [180]

¹It's not clear just how Amphimedon, who was one of the suitors in Odysseus's home, could know all these details about what went on between Odysseus, Eumaeus, and Telemachus. Death in Homer's world does not usually convey such knowledge.

falling thick and fast. Then we realized
 some god was helping them, when all at once
 they charged out in a frenzy through the house, 240
 butchering men everywhere. The screaming
 was horrific, as heads were smashed apart.
 The whole floor swam with blood. That's how we died,
 lord Agamemnon, and now our bodies
 lie in Odysseus' yard, still untended.
 Our families back home don't know we're dead,
 the ones who'd wash the black blood from our wounds,
 then lay our bodies out and weep for us, [190]
 the necessary rites for those who've died." 250

The shade of Atreus's son then answered him:

"O happy Odysseus, Laertes' son,
 an enterprising man, who won himself
 a wife whose virtue was beyond reproach.
 How fine the heart in such a faultless wife!
 Penelope kept Odysseus in her heart,
 her husband, true to the man she married.
 The story of her excellence will not die—
 immortal gods will make a pleasing song
 for men on earth about Penelope. 260
 Tyndareus's child was not like her—
 she planned to carry out an evil act
 and slaughter the husband she had married.¹ [200]
 Men's songs about her will be filled with hate.
 She gives all women evil reputations,
 even those whose acts incur no shame."

So these two talked to one another, as they stood
 in the house of Hades, deep underneath the earth.

Once Odysseus and his men had left the city,
 they soon reached his father's fertile, well-managed farm, 270
 which Laertes had once won by his own efforts,
 after much hard labour. His house was there, with sheds
 surrounding it on every side, where his servants,
 bonded slaves, who worked to carry out his wishes, [210]
 ate and sat and slept. An ancient Sicilian woman
 lived inside his house, looking after the old man,

¹This is a reference to Agamemnon's wife, Clytaemnestra, a daughter of Tyndareus, king of Sparta.

caring for him at the farm, far from the city.
Odysseus then spoke to his servants and his son:

“You men should now go in the well-built home
and quickly kill the finest pig they have, 280
so we can eat. I’ll sound out my father,
to find out if he recognizes me,
sees who I am, once he’s laid eyes on me,
or if he doesn’t know me anymore,
since I’ve been away so long.”

Odysseus spoke,
then handed his battle weapons to his servants.
They quickly went inside the house. Then Odysseus, [220]
walking out to test his father, made his way down
to the fruitful vineyard and then continued on
to the extensive orchard, where he failed to find 290
Dolius or any children of his father’s slaves.
They had gone away to gather large rocks for the wall
around the vineyard, with the old man in the lead.
In the well-tended vineyard he found his father.
He was digging around a plant, all by himself,
dressed in a disgusting, shabby, patched-up tunic,
with laced-up shin pads on his legs, stitched from ox-hide,
to protect himself from scratches, and on his hands [230]
he wore gloves, for in that ground many thistles grew.
On his head he had a goatskin cap. In these clothes 300
he was dealing with his grief. When lord Odysseus,
who had endured so much, saw him worn down with age
and bearing such a load of sorrow in his heart,
he stood beneath a tall pear tree and shed a tear,
debating in his mind and heart whether he should
embrace and kiss his father and describe for him
in detail how he got back to his native land
or start by asking questions, to test Laertes
on every point. As he thought about his options,
the best decision seemed to be to test him first, 310 [240]
using words which might provoke him. With this in mind,
lord Odysseus walked directly to his father,
who was rooting around a plant with his head down.
His splendid son stood there beside him and spoke out:

“Old man, from the way you tend this orchard
you’ve no lack of skill. No. Your care is good.

There's nothing here—no plant, fig tree, or vine,
 or olive, pear, or plot in all this field—
 that needs attention. I'll tell you something else—
 don't let this make you angry in your heart— 320
 you yourself are not being well looked after.
 You are very old, but covered in muck, [250]
 and badly dressed in those disgusting clothes.
 You master cannot be denying you care
 because you're lazy—that just can't be true.
 At first glance, you don't seem to be a slave,
 not when one sees your stature and your shape.
 You're like a king, the kind of man who bathes
 and eats and goes to sleep in a soft bed,
 as old men should. So come now, tell me this, 330
 and speak out candidly. Whose slave are you?
 Whose orchard are you tending? And tell me
 the truth about this, so I understand—
 Is this place we've reached truly Ithaca,
 as some man I just met on my way here [260]
 informed me. His mind was not too clever—
 for he could not give me any details
 or listen to my words when I asked him
 whether a friend of mine is still alive
 or is now in Hades, already dead. 340
 I'll explain it to you. Listen to me,
 and hear me out. In my dear native land,
 I once welcomed a man who had arrived
 at my own home. No other mortal man
 from far away has visited my house
 as a more pleasing guest. He said he came
 from Ithaca. He told me his father [270]
 was Laertes, son of Arcesius.
 I took him to the house, entertained him
 with lavish hospitality, and gave him 350
 a kind reception with the many things
 I had inside my home, providing him
 appropriate friendship gifts. I gave him
 seven talents of finely crafted gold,
 a silver mixing bowl etched with flowers,
 twelve cloaks with single folds, twelve coverlets,
 as many splendid cloaks, and, besides these,
 as many tunics and four women slaves
 skilled in fine handicrafts and beautiful,
 the very ones he wished to choose himself.” 360

Then his father shed a tear, answered him, and said:

[280]

“Stranger, yes indeed, you’ve reached the country
 you asked about. But it’s been taken over
 by arrogant, reckless men. Those presents,
 the countless gifts you freely gave, are useless.
 If you’d come across him still living here,
 in Ithaca, he’d have sent you on your way
 after paying you back with splendid gifts
 and hospitality—that is the right
 of him who offers kindness first. But come,
 tell me this, and make sure you speak the truth.
 How long ago did you welcome this man,
 this unlucky guest, my son, if, indeed,
 such an ill-fated man ever was alive?
 Somewhere far from his native land and friends
 the fish have eaten him down in the sea,
 or savage beasts and birds have eaten him
 somewhere on land. His mother and father,
 those who gave him life, could not lay him out
 for burial or lament his passing.
 The wife he courted with so many gifts,
 faithful Penelope, could not shed tears
 over his corpse or close his eyes in death,
 as is appropriate, though that’s a rite
 we owe the dead. And tell me this, as well—
 speaking the truth so I can understand—
 Among men who are you? Where are you from?
 What is your city? Who are your parents?
 Where did you and your god-like companions
 anchor the swift ship that carried you here?
 Or did you come on someone else’s ship
 as passenger, men who let you disembark
 and then set off again?”

370

[290]

380

390

[300]

Resourceful Odysseus

then answered him:

“All right, I’ll tell you everything
 quite truthfully. I come from Alybas,
 where I have a lovely home. I’m the son
 of Apheidas, lord Polypemon’s son.
 My name’s Eperitus. But then some god

made me go off course from Sicania,
 so I've come here against my will. My ship
 is anchored over there, close to the fields 400
 far from the city. As for Odysseus,
 this is the fifth year since he went away [310]
 and left my country. That unlucky man!
 There were auspicious omens from some birds
 flying on the right, when he departed.
 So when I sent him off, I was happy,
 and so was he. The hearts in both of us
 hoped we would meet again as host and guest,
 and exchange fine gifts with one another." 410

As Odysseus said these words, a black cloud of grief
 swallowed up Laertes. With both hands he scooped up
 some grimy dust and dumped it over his gray hair,
 moaning all the time. He stirred Odysseus's heart.
 As Odysseus gazed at his dear father, he could feel
 sharp pain shooting up his nostrils. He jumped over,
 embraced Laertes, kissed him, and then said: [320]

"Father,
 I'm here—the very man you asked about.
 I've returned here in the twentieth year,
 back to my native land. Stop your grieving, 420
 these tearful sighs. I'll tell you everything,
 although we have to move with all due speed.
 I've killed the suitors in our home, avenged
 their evil and heart-rending insolence."

Laertes then answered him and said:

"If that's true,
 if you are indeed my son Odysseus
 and have come back, show me some evidence,
 something clear so I can be quite certain."

Resourceful Odysseus replied to him and said: [330]

"First, let your eyes inspect this scar—a boar 430
 inflicted that on me with its white tusk,
 when I visited Parnassus, sent there
 by you and by my honourable mother,
 to her cherished father, Autolycus,

so I could get the gifts he'd promised me,
 what he'd agreed to give when he was here.
 Come, I'll tell you the trees you gave me once
 in this well-cultivated vineyard—back then
 I was a child following behind you,
 and I asked about each one. It was here— 440
 we walked by these very trees—you named them
 and described them to me. You offered me
 as a gift thirteen pear trees, ten apple trees [340]
 and forty fig trees. And in addition,
 you said you'd give me fifty rows of vines,
 bearing all sorts of different types of grapes,
 when Zeus's seasons load their stems with fruit."

As Odysseus spoke, his father's fond heart and knees
 gave way—he clearly recognized the evidence
 Odysseus had presented. He threw both his arms 450
 around the son he loved and struggled hard to breathe.
 Lord Odysseus, who had endured so much, held him.
 After he'd revived and the spirit was restored
 inside his chest, Laertes spoke again and said: [350]

"Father Zeus, it appears you gods are still
 on high Olympus, if it's true those suitors
 have paid the price of their proud arrogance.
 But now my heart contains a dreadful fear—
 all the men of Ithaca will rush here
 against us, and they'll send out messengers 460
 to every town in Cephallenia."¹

Resourceful Odysseus then answered him and said:

"Take courage, and do not allow these things
 to weigh down your heart. Let's go to the house,
 the one close by the orchard, where I sent
 Telemachus, together with the swineherd
 and the keeper of the goats, telling them
 to prepare a meal as quickly as they could." [360]

¹Cephallenia is a large island neighbouring Ithaca, named after Cephalus, grandfather of Laertes and great-grandfather of Odysseus. The term Cephallenians is sometimes used to designate all of Odysseus's people.

After they talked like this, they went to the fine house.
 Once they reached his father's well-furnished home, they found 470
 Telemachus with the goatkeeper and swineherd
 carving large cuts of meat and mixing gleaming wine.

Inside the home, the Sicilian servant woman
 gave great-hearted Laertes a bath, then rubbed him
 with rich oil and threw a lovely cloak around him.
 Athena then approached them and fleshed out the limbs
 on that shepherd of his people. The goddess made him
 taller than before and sturdier to the eye.
 When he left the bath, his dear son was astonished— [370]
 as he looked at him he seemed like the immortals. 480
 Odysseus spoke to him—his words had wings:

“Father,
 surely one of the gods who live forever
 has made you look more handsome than before—
 both your form and stature.”

Wise Laertes
 then answered him and said:

“By Father Zeus,
 Athena, and Apollo, I wish I were
 just like I was when I took Nericus
 on the mainland coast, that well-built fortress,
 when I was the Cephallenian king.
 With strength like that, I could have stood with you 490
 yesterday, my armour on my shoulders, [380]
 and driven off the suitors in our home.
 I'd have made many of their knees go slack
 inside the hall—your heart would have been pleased.”

In this way, the two men conversed with one another.

Meanwhile, the other servants had finished working,
 and dinner was prepared. They sat down one by one
 on stools and chairs. As they were reaching for the food,
 old Dolius appeared. He had his sons with him,
 exhausted from their work. The old Sicilian woman, 500
 their mother, had gone out and told them to return.
 She fed them and took good care of old man Laertes, [390]
 now that his age had laid its grip on him. These men,

saw Odysseus there, and their hearts took note of him.
They stood in the house astonished. Then Odysseus
talked to them all with reassuring words and said:

“Old man, sit down here. Have something to eat.
Forget being so amazed. For some time now
we’ve been keen to turn our hands to dinner,
but we kept expecting you’d be coming, 510
so we’ve been waiting in the house.”

Odysseus spoke.

Dolius went straight up to him, both arms outstretched,
grabbed Odysseus’s hand and kissed it on the wrist.
Then he spoke to him—his words had wings:

“My friend, [400]

you’re back with us, who longed for your return
but never thought to see it! Gods themselves
must have been leading you. Joyful greetings!
May gods grant you success! Be frank with me
and tell me so I fully understand—
Does wise Penelope now know for certain 520
you have come back, or should we send someone
to let her know?”

Resourceful Odysseus answered him

and said:

“Old man, she already knows.
Why should you be so concerned about her?”

Odysseus said these words, and Dolius sat down
on his polished stool. Then the sons of Dolius
also came up around glorious Odysseus,
clasping both his hands with joyful words of welcome. [410]
Then they sat down in a row beside their father.
So these men spent the time finishing their dinner 530
inside the hut.

Meanwhile, Rumour the Messenger
sped swiftly through the entire city, spreading news
of the suitors’ appalling deaths, their destiny.¹

¹Rumour the Messenger is the goddess PHEME, who was responsible for gossip, fame, and scandal.

People heard about it all at once and came in
 from all directions, gathering with mournful sighs
 before Odysseus's home. Each one brought his dead
 outside the house and buried them, and all the men
 from other cities they sent home, carrying them
 aboard swift ships to be taken back by sailors.
 Then, with sorrowful hearts, they all went in person
 to meet in an assembly, and, once they met there
 together in a group, Eupeithes rose to speak.
 Constant grief weighed down his heart for his own son,
 Antinous, the first man killed by lord Odysseus.
 As he wept for him, he spoke to the assembly:

540 [420]

“My friends, this man has planned and carried out
 dreadful acts against Achaeans. He took
 many courageous men when he embarked,
 then lost his hollow ships, with all men dead.
 Now he's returned and killed the best men by far
 among the Cephallenians. So come,
 before he can hurry off to Pylos
 or holy Elis, where Epeians rule,
 let's get started. If not, in future days
 we'll be eternally disgraced, since men
 yet to be born will learn about our shame,
 if we don't act to take out our revenge
 on those killers of our sons and brothers.
 As far as I'm concerned, the life we'd live
 would not be sweet. I rather die right now
 and live among the dead. So we should act,
 in case those men have a head start on us
 and get across the sea.”

550

[430]

560

As Eupeithes said this,
 he wept, and all Achaeans were seized with pity.
 Then Medon and the godlike singer, just released
 from sleep, approached them from Odysseus's house,
 and stood up in their midst. The crowd there was amazed.
 Then Medon, a shrewd man, spoke out.

[440]

“Men of Ithaca,
 listen. Odysseus did not plan these acts
 without the gods' consent. I myself observed
 an immortal god who stood beside him,
 looking in every detail just like Mentor.

570

The deathless god appeared before Odysseus
 at that time to spur him on to action,
 and, at another time, charged through the hall,
 panicking the suitors. They collapsed in droves."

As Medon spoke, pale fear gripped each of them. And then, [450]
 old Halitherses, son of Mastor, rose to speak.
 He was the only man who could see past and future.
 Bearing in the mind their common good, he spoke out, 580
 saying these words:

"You men of Ithaca,
 listen to me. Hear what I have to say.
 What's happened now, my friends, has come about
 because you've all been acting stupidly.
 You refused follow my instructions
 or Mentor's, that shepherd of his people,
 and make your sons cease their reckless conduct,
 their monstrous acts of wanton foolishness,
 squandering a worthy man's possessions,
 dishonouring his wife, claiming the man 590 [460]
 never would come back. So now, let that be,
 and follow what I say in how you act—
 we should not move out, in case some men here
 run into trouble they've brought on themselves."

He ended. Some men stayed together in their seats,
 but others, more than half, jumped up with noisy shouts.
 Their hearts had not responded to what he just said,
 for many had been persuaded by Eupeithes
 and quickly hurried away to get their weapons.

After they put gleaming bronze around their bodies, 600
 they gathered in a large group on the spacious grounds
 before the city. Eupeithes was the leader
 in this foolishness. He believed he could avenge [470]
 the killing of his son, but he would not return,
 for he was marching out to meet a lethal fate.

Then Athena spoke to Zeus, son of Cronos, saying:

"Father of us all and son of Cronos,
 highest of all those who rule, answer me
 when I ask this—What are you concealing

in that mind of yours? Will you now foster
further savage war and fearful battle,
or bring both sides together here as friends?" 610

Cloud-gatherer Zeus then answered her and said:

"My child, why are you asking this of me?
Why these questions? Were you not the one
who put this plan in motion by yourself,
so Odysseus could take out his revenge [480]
against these suitors, after he got back?
Do as you wish. But I'll lay out for you
what I think is right. Since lord Odysseus 620
has now paid the suitors back, let them swear
a binding oath that he'll remain their king
for life, and let us make them all forget
the way their brothers and their sons were killed
and love each other as they did before.
And let there be wealth and peace in plenty."

His words roused Athena, who was already keen.
She left, swooping down from lofty Mount Olympus.

Meanwhile, after his men had satisfied their hearts
with a meal as sweet as honey, lord Odysseus, 630 [490]
who had borne so much, was the first of them to speak:

"Someone should go outside and look around,
to see if they are getting close to us."

Once he said this, a son of Dolius got up,
as Odysseus had ordered, walked to the doorway,
and saw a crowd of armed men moving to the hut.
He called out to Odysseus—his swift words had wings:

"They're here—and closing in! Let's get weapons—
we'd better hurry!"

At these words, they leapt up
and put on their armour. Odysseus and his men 640
were four, the sons of Dolius six, and with them
Dolius and Laertes, though they had gray hair,
were dressed in armour, too, forced to be warriors.
Once they put glittering bronze around their bodies, [500]

they opened up the doors and went outside. Odysseus led them out. But then Athena, Zeus's daughter, with the shape and voice of Mentor, came up to them. When Odysseus, who had endured so much, saw her, he was glad and spoke some swift words to Telemachus, his dear son:

“Telemachus, now you’ve reached
the field of battle, where the finest men
are put to the test. Soon enough you’ll learn
not to disgrace your father’s family—
for we have always been preeminent
for strength and courage everywhere on earth.”

650

Shrewd Telemachus then answered him and said: [510]

“Dear father, if that’s what you want, you’ll see
that I, with my heart as it is right now,
will not shame us. For I’ll do what you say.”

When he said this, Laertes felt great joy and said: 660

“You dear gods, what a day this is for me!
I’m truly happy when my son and grandson
compete for excellence with one another.”

Then Athena with the glittering eyes came up,
stood by Laertes, and said:

“Child of Arcesius,
by far the dearest of those I cherish,
pray to the young girl with the flashing eyes
and to Father Zeus. Then without delay
brandish that long spear of yours and hurl it.”

Pallas Athena spoke and then breathed into him enormous power. Laertes said a prayer 670 [520]
to great Zeus’s daughter, and quickly lifting up
his long-shadowed spear, he threw it. It hit home,
piercing the cheek piece on Eupeithes’s helmet,
which did not stop the spear—its point continued on.
Eupeithes collapsed, falling with a thud, his armour
crashing round him. Odysseus and his splendid son
charged at the fighters in the front, attacking them

with swords and two-edged spears. They would have killed them all, 680
 cut them down so not one of them returned, had not
 Athena, born from aegis-bearing Zeus, cried out—
 her voice made men on both sides pause: [530]

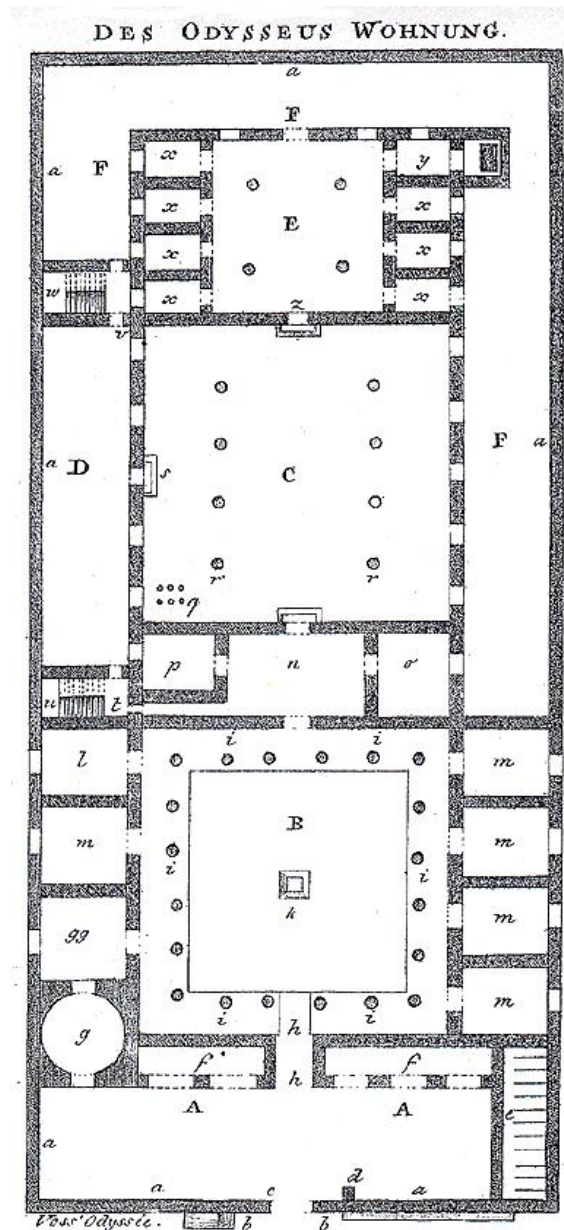
“Men of Ithaca,
 you must stop this disastrous war right here,
 so you can quickly go your separate ways
 without spilling any blood.”

Athena spoke,
 and pale fear gripped the men. They were so terrified
 they let go their weapons, which all fell on the ground,
 at the sound of her ear-splitting voice. They turned around,
 back towards the city, eager to save their lives.
 Then much-enduring lord Odysseus gave out 690
 a blood-curdling shout, gathered himself, and swooped down
 like an eagle from on high. But at that moment,
 Zeus, son of Cronos, shot a fiery thunderbolt.
 It struck between the feet of the bright-eyed daughter [540]
 of almighty father Zeus. And then Athena,
 goddess with the glittering eyes, said to Odysseus:

“Resourceful Odysseus, Laertes’ son,
 and child of Zeus, hold back. Stop the fighting,
 this all-embracing war, in case thundering Zeus,
 who sees far and wide, grows angry with you.” 700

When he heard Athena’s words, Odysseus obeyed,
 joy in his heart. And then Pallas Athena,
 daughter of aegis-bearing Zeus, in shape and form
 appearing just like Mentor, had both parties swear
 a solemn treaty designed to last forever.

POSSIBLE FLOOR PLAN OF ODYSSEUS HOUSE (VOSS 1820)



When Odysseus kills the Suitors he is standing with his bow at the lower entrance to the main hall, C. The doors to the women's quarters (at v and z) have been locked. The only way out for the Suitors is a small door at s, which leads to the passageway D. Odysseus places Eumaeus at the end of the passage (at point t) to prevent any Suitor getting out into the courtyard B.

EXPLANATION OF DIAGRAM

- a. the outer wall
- b. the entrance
- c. the gates
- d. location of the dog Argus
- e. standing place for mules
- f. two halls
- g. the dome
- h. the entrance to the court
- i. the hall
- k. Zeus' altar in the court
- l. Telemachus' room
- a. the outer wall
- b. the entrance
- c. the gates
- d. location of the dog Argus
- e. standing place for mules
- f. two halls
- g. the dome
- h. the entrance to the court
- i. the hall
- k. Zeus' altar in the court
- l. Telemachus' room, various rooms
- n. vestibule
- o. room for bathing
- p. activity room
- q. wine preparation room
- r. pillars
- s. simple doors
- t. door from vestibule
- u. stair to Odysseus' rooms
- v. door to women's rooms
- w. stairs to Penelope's room
- x. ground floor rooms
- y. Penelope's bedroom
- z. door
- A. courtyard and fence
- B. level middle court
- C. the hall
- D. passage by-passing the hall
- E. Penelope's work room
- F. rear courtyard.

(Diagram and explanation courtesy of Carlos Parada, The Greek Mythology Link, with permission)

GLOSSARY

The following glossary includes the names of the main characters and places in the *Odyssey* and a few others. Guides to pronunciation are provided in square brackets. Note that the syllables in capital letters in the pronunciation guide indicate where the stress falls.¹

ACHAEANS: [*ah-KAY-ans*] a collective name of the Greeks (used interchangeably with Danaans [*DAN-eh-ans*] and Argives [*ARE-gyves*]).

ACHILLES: [*ah-KILL-ease*] son of Peleus, greatest of the Achaean warriors at Troy, where he died and was buried.

AEGISTHUS: [*eh-GISTH-us*] son of Thyestes, lover of Clytaemnestra and murderer of Agamemnon.

AEOLUS: [*EH-oh-luss*] son of Hippotas, god of the winds, living on the island Aeolia.

AGAMEMNON: [*ah-ga-MEM-non*] son of Atreus, king of Argos, leader of the Achaean forces which attacked and destroyed Troy.

AGELAUUS: [*ah-gel-AH-us*] son of Damastor, one of the Suitors.

AJAX: [*EH-jacks*] son of Telamon, greatest Achaean warrior after Achilles at Troy, where he died and was buried.

¹ One of the main sources of concern in the pronunciation of classical Greek names involves ones which end with the letters *-aus* or *-eus* or *-ius* or *-ium*. These endings are in almost all cases two syllables: e.g. *Menelaus* (four syllables), *Atreus* (three syllables), *Agelaus* (four syllables), *Dolius* (three syllables). The ending *-ous* is, however, commonly (though not always) one syllable: *Antinous* (three syllables) and *Alcinous* (three syllables). A double vowel combination in the final letters of a name is usually pronounced as two syllables: e.g. *Cephalenia* (five syllables), *Dulicium* (four syllables), *Nausicaa* (four syllables), *Ogygia* (four syllables), *Aeaea* (three syllables), and so on. With polysyllabic names it is not always clear nor is there always agreement about where the stress should fall. In many cases, the stress comes on the penultimate syllable (the second one from the end): *ag-a-MEM-non*, *men-eh-LAY-us*, *pol-iff-EE-mus*). However, there is also a tendency to move the stress to the antepenultimate syllable (the third one from the end). Hence, there is uncertainty: Should we pronounce *Demodocus* *de-MOD-ok-us* or *de-mo-DOKE-us*, *Eurylochus* *you-RIL-oh-kuss* or *you-ri-LOH-kuss*, *Amphinomus* *am-PHI-no-moos* or *am-phi-NO-moos*, and so on. My own tendency when in doubt is to stress the antepenultimate syllable.

The name *Odysseus*, like a number of others, is a special case, because, following the usual practice with a familiar English word, people generally pronounce it with three syllables, although if we adhere to the first convention mentioned above, the classical Greek name should be pronounced with four (the final *-eus* forming two syllables). However, it is a common (though not universal) practice in English translations of Homer to render names that are familiar to readers of English literature in their English form and to pronounce them as we do the English word: e.g., *Achilles* (Greek: *Akhilleus*), *Ajax* (Greek: *Aias*), *Circe* (Greek: *Kirke*), *Hercules* (Greek: *Herakles*), *Ocean* (Greek: *Okeanus*), *Sirens* (Greek: *Sirenes*), *Troy* (Greek: *Troia*), *Zeus* (one syllable, not two), and *Phaeacians* (three syllables not four). One name for which there does not seem to be general agreement is *Nausicaa* (this translation treats the name as a four-syllable word).

GLOSSARY

ALCINOUS: [*al-KIN-oo-us* or, more commonly, *AL-kin-oose*] son of Nausithous, husband of Arete, king of the Phaeacians.

AMPHIMEDON: [*am-fee-MED-on*] son of Melaneus, one of the Suitors.

AMPHINOMUS: [*am-fee-NO-moos*] son of Nisus, one of the Suitors from Dulichium.

ANTICLEIA: [*an-ti-CLAY-ah*] daughter of Autolycus, mother of Odysseus.

ANTINOUS: [*an-TIN-oh-us* or, more commonly, *AN-tea-nous*] son of Eupheithes, one of the leaders of the Suitors.

ANTIPHATES: [*an-TIFF-a-teez*] king of the Laestrygonians.

APHRODITE: [*aff-roe-DYE-tee*] divine daughter of Zeus and Hera, goddess of erotic love.

APOLLO: [*ah-POLL-o*] divine son of Zeus and Leto, often called Phoebus or Phoebus Apollo.

ARES: [*AIR-ease*] divine son of Zeus and Hera, god of war.

ARETE: [*ah-REE-tea*] wife of Alcinous, queen of the Phaeacians.

ARGIVES: [*ARE-gyves*] see ACHAEANS.

ARTEMIS: [*ART-em-iss*] divine daughter of Zeus and Leto, goddess of the hunt.

ATHENA: [*ath-EE-na*] divine daughter of Zeus, goddess of wisdom.

CALYPSO: [*kal-IP-so*] daughter of Atlas, goddess living on the island of Ogygia.

CEPHALLENIA: [*keff-ah-LEN-ee-ah*] an island close to Ithaca, part of Odysseus's kingdom, often applied to that kingdom and its people generally.

CHARYBDIS: [*ka-RIB-dis*] a divine sea monster who acts as a whirlpool and water spout.

CICONES: [*SICK-oh-neeze* or *KICK-oh-neeze*] inhabitants of Ismarus, a city close to Troy.

CIRCE: [*SIR-see*] a goddess living on the island of Aeaea.

CLYTAEMNESTRA: [*kly-tem-NEST-ra*] daughter of Tyndareus, wife of Agememnon.

CYCLOPES [*SIGH-klop-es*] (singular CYCLOPS [*SIGH-klops*): monstrous creatures with one eye.

CRONOS: [*KRON-oss*] father of Zeus, overthrown by his son and imprisoned deep in the earth.

DEMODOCUS: [*de-MOD-ok-us* or, less commonly, *de-mo-DOKE-us*] the blind minstrel in the court of Alcinous in Phaeacia.

DOLIUS: [*DOLL-ee-us*] an old servant of Laertes and Penelope.

DULICHIIUM: [*doo-LICK-ee-um*] an island close to Ithaca, part of Odysseus's kingdom.

EUMAEUS: [*you-MAY-us*] a servant of Odysseus, keeper of pigs.

EUPEITHES: [*you-PEITH-eeze*] father of Antinous (one of the Suitors).

GLOSSARY

EURYCLEIA: [*you-RICK-lay-a*] daughter of Ops, elderly family servant to Odysseus, Penelope, and Telemachus.

EURYLOCHUS: [*you-RILL-oh-kuss*] one of Odysseus's companions, related to him by marriage.

EURYMACHUS: [*you-RIM-ah-kuss*] son of Polybus, one of the leading Suitors.

EURYNOME: [*you-RIN-o-mee*] housekeeper in Odysseus's and Penelope's home.

HEPHAESTUS: [*heff-EYE-stuss*] divine son of Zeus and Hera, god of the forge, divine artisan.

HERCULES: [*HER-cue-lees*] mortal son of Zeus, made into a god after his death.

HERMES: [*HER-meez*] divine son of Zeus and the nymph Maia, messenger god, often called "killer of Argus."

HYPERION: [*high-PEER-ee-on*] god of the sun (also called HELIOS [*HE-lee-os*]).

ILION: [*ILL-ee-on*] another name for TROY.

ITHACA: [*ITH-ack-ah*] island off the west coast of mainland Greece, kingdom ruled by Odysseus.

LAERTES: [*lay-AIR-tees*] son of Arcesius, father of Odysseus.

LAESTRYGONIANS: [*lay-stri-GON-ee-ans*] race of giants living in Telpylus.

LEIODES [*LIE-od-es*] son of Oenops, one of the Suitors, a soothsayer.

LEOCRITUS: [*lay-OCK-ri-tus*] son of Euenor, one of the Suitors.

MEDON: [*MEH-don*] a herald in Odysseus's palace.

MELANTHIUS: [*meh-LANTH-ee-us*] son of Dolius, a goatherd friendly to the Suitors.

MENELAUS: [*men-eh-LAY-us*] son of Atreus, brother of Agamemnon, husband of Helen, king of Sparta.

MENTOR: [*MEN-tor*] son of Alcimus, steward of Odysseus's place, an old companion of Odysseus.

NAUSICAA: [*now-SICK-ah-ah* often also *now-SICK-ah* or *now-SICK-ee-ah*] daughter of Arete, princess of the Phaeacians.

NESTOR: [*NES-tor*] son of Neleus, king of Pylos.

OCEANUS: [*oh-SAY-an-us*; or *oh-KAY-an-us*] the river running around the outer rim of the world; the name is often written OCEAN and pronounced like the English word.

ODYSSEUS: [*oh-DISS-eh-uss*; more commonly in English *oh-DISS-yus*] king of Ithaca, son of Laertes, husband of Penelope, father of Telemachus.

OLYMPUS: [*oh-LIM-puss*] mountain in northern Greece where the major deities live (the Olympians).

OGYGIA: [*oh-GIDGE-ee-ah*] island where Calypso lives and where she detains Odysseus.

ORESTES: [*or-ESS-tees*] son of Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra, killer of Aegisthus.

GLOSSARY

- PENELOPE: [*pe-NEL-oh-pee*] daughter of Icarius, wife of Odysseus, mother of Telemachus.
- PERSEPHONE: [*per-SEFF-oh-nee*] wife of Hades, goddess of the underworld.
- PHAEACIANS: [*fay-AH-kee-ans* or, more commonly in English, *fay-EE-shuns*] inhabitants of Scheria, master sailors.
- PHEMIUS: [*FEE-me-uhs*] son of Terpes, the professional minstrel in Odysseus's palace.
- PHILOETIUS: [*fill-oh-EE-tee-uhs* or *phil-oh-ea-shus*] a goat and cattle herder on Ithaca friendly to Odysseus.
- POLYPHEMUS: [*poll-iff-EE-mus*] a cyclops, son of Poseidon.
- PONTONOUS: [*PON-toe-nous*] a herald in the court of Alcinous in Phaeacia.
- POSEIDON: [*po-SIGH-don*] god of the sea, brother of Zeus, often called "encircler of the earth" or "Earthshaker."
- PRIAM: [*PRY-am*] king of Troy, killed when the city was captured by Achaeans.
- PYLOS: [*PIE-loss*] city state in the south Peloponnese ruled by Nestor.
- PYTHO: [*PIE-tho*] the location of the shrine of Apollo.
- SAME: [*SA-mee*] an island close to Ithaca, part of Odysseus's kingdom.
- SCHERIA: [*scare-EE-ah* or *share-EE-ah*] distant land where the Phaeacians live.
- SCYLLA: [*SILL-ah* or *SKILL-ah*] a monster with many heads.
- SIRENS: [*SIGH-rens*] two singers who lure sailors to their destruction.
- SPARTA: city in the central Peloponnese ruled by Menelaus.
- STYX: [*STICKS*] river in Hades by which the gods swear their most solemn oaths.
- SUITORS: aristocratic young men courting Penelope in hopes of marrying her.
- TEIRESIAS: [*tie-REE-see-ass*] a blind prophet from Thebes.
- TELEMACHUS: [*te-LEM-ah-kuss*] son of Odysseus and Penelope.
- TROY: city in Asia Minor, near the Hellespont, besieged by the Achaean (Greek) forces for ten years.
- ZACYNTHUS: [*za-KIN-thuhs*] an island close to Ithaca, part of Odysseus's kingdom.
- ZEUS: [*ZOOSE*] major divine presence on Olympus, often called "son of Cronos."

A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATOR

Ian Johnston is an Emeritus Professor at Vancouver Island University, Nanaimo, British Columbia. He is the author of *The Ironies of War: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad* and of *Essays and Arguments: A Handbook for Writing Student Essays*. He also translated a number of works, including the following:

Aeschylus, *Oresteia* (*Agamemnon, Libation Bearers, Eumenides*)
Aeschylus, *Persians*
Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*
Aeschylus, *Seven Against Thebes*
Aeschylus, *Suppliant Women*
Aristophanes, *Birds*
Aristophanes, *Clouds*
Aristophanes, *Frogs*
Aristophanes, *Knights*
Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*
Aristophanes, *Peace*
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Abridged)
Cuvier, *Discourse on the Revolutionary Upheavals on the Surface of the Earth*
Descartes, *Discourse on Method*
Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*
Diderot, *A Conversation Between D'Alembert and Diderot*
Diderot, *D'Alembert's Dream*
Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew*
Euripides, *Bacchae*
Euripides, *Electra*
Euripides, *Hippolytus*
Euripides, *Medea*
Euripides, *Orestes*
Homer, *Iliad* (Complete and Abridged)
Homer, *Odyssey* (Complete and Abridged)
Kafka, *Metamorphosis*
Kafka, *Selected Shorter Writings*
Kant, *Universal History of Nature and Theory of Heaven*
Kant, *On Perpetual Peace*
Lamarck, *Zoological Philosophy*, Volume I
Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*
Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*
Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*
Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*
Nietzsche, *On the Uses and Abuses of History for Life*
Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men*
Rousseau, *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*
Rousseau, *Social Contract*
Sophocles, *Antigone*
Sophocles, *Ajax*
Sophocles, *Electra*
Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*
Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*
Sophocles, *Philoctetes*
Wedekind, *Castle Wetterstein*
Wedekind, *Marquis of Keith*

Most of these translations have been published as books or audiobooks (or both)—by Richer Resources Publications, Broadview Press, Naxos, Audible, and others.

Ian Johnston maintains a web site where texts of these translations are freely available to students, teachers, artists, and the general public. The site includes a number of Ian Johnston's lectures on these (and other) works, handbooks, curricular materials, and essays, all freely available at [johnstoniatexts](http://johnstoniatexts.com).

