# The Odyssey

Homer

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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 Mentes, 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; Eurycleia 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. 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—that's why he snatched away their chance
of getting home someday. So now, daughter of Zeus,
tell us his story, starting anywhere you wish.

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 wished to make Odysseus 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 Ithaca, his home—
not that he would be free from troubles even there,
among his family. 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.

But at that moment,
Poseidon was among the Ethiopians,
a long way off, those same Ethiopians,
the most remote of people, who live divided
in two different groups, one where Hyperion goes down,
the other where he rises. Poseidon went there
to receive a sacrificial offering to him—
bulls and rams—and was 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 first to speak.
In his heart he was remembering royal Aegisthus,
whom Orestes, Agamemnon's famous son,
had killed. With him in mind, Zeus addressed the gods:

"It's disgraceful how these 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 murdered him, once the man came home.
None of that was set by Fate. Aegisthus knew
his acts would bring on his total ruin.
We'd sent Hermes earlier to speak to him.
The keen-eyed killer of Argus told him
not to slay the man or seduce his wife,
for Orestes would avenge the son of Atreus,
once he grew up and longed for his own land.
That's what Hermes said, but his fine words
did not persuade Aegisthus in his heart.
So he has paid for everything in full."

Athena, goddess with the gleaming eyes, answered Zeus:

"Son of Cronos and father to us all,

[60] you who rule on high, yes indeed, Aegisthus
now lies dead, something he well deserved.
May any other man who does what he did
also be destroyed! But my heart is torn
for skillful Odysseus, ill-fated man,
who has had to suffer such misfortune
for so many years, a long way from friends.
He's on an island, surrounded by the sea,
the one that forms the ocean's navel stone.
In the forests of that island lives a goddess,
[70] daughter of tough-minded Atlas, who knows
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.
With soft seductive speech she keeps tempting him,
urging him to forget his Ithaca.
But Odysseus yearns to see even the smoke
rising from his native land and longs
for death. And yet, Olympian Zeus, your heart
[80] does not respond to him. Did not Odysseus
offer you delightful sacrifices
on Troy's far-reaching plain beside the ships?
Why then, Zeus, are you so angry with him?"

Cloud-gatherer Zeus then answered her and said:

"My child,
what a speech has passed the barrier of your 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?
[90] But Earthshaker Poseidon is a stubborn god,
constantly enraged about the Cyclops,
the one whose eye Odysseus destroyed,
godlike Polyphemus, the mightiest

of all the Cyclopes. Thoosa bore him,
a nymph, a daughter of that Phorcys
who commands the restless sea. Poseidon,
down in those hollow caves, had sex with her.
That's the reason Earthshaker Poseidon
makes Odysseus wander from his country.
Still, he has no plans to kill him. But come,
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 opposing him."

Goddess Athena with the gleaming eyes replied to Zeus:

"Son of Cronos and father to us all,
ruling high above, if the immortal gods
now find it pleasing for the 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.
I'll go to Ithaca and urge his son
to be more active, put courage in his heart,
so he will call those long-haired Achaeans
to assembly, and there address the suitors,
who keep on slaughtering his flocks of sheep
and shambling bent-horned cattle. I'll send him
on a trip to Sparta and sandy Pylos,
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—
immense and sturdy, with a point of sharpened bronze—
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, gripping the bronze spear in her fist.
She looked like Mentes, a foreigner, the chief
who ruled the Taphians. There she met the suitors,
those arrogant men, who were enjoying themselves
playing checkers right outside the door, sitting down
on hides of cattle they themselves had butchered.
Some heralds and attendants were keeping busy
blending wine and water in the mixing bowls.
Some were wiping tables down with porous sponges
and setting them in place, while others passed around
huge amounts 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
might get back, scatter the suitors from his home,
win honour for himself, and regain control
of his own household. As he thought about all this,
sitting there among the suitors, he saw Athena.
He immediately walked over to the outer gate,
for in his heart he considered it disgraceful
that a stranger should remain a long time at his door.
He moved up near Athena, grasped her right hand
and took her bronze-tipped spear. Then he spoke to her—
his words had wings:

"Welcome to you stranger.
You must enjoy our hospitality.
Then, after you have had some food to eat,

you can tell us what you need."

Saying this,
Telemachus led Pallas Athena into his home.
She followed. Once they'd come 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 crafted work. Under it
he rolled out a linen mat and then arranged
a footstool for her feet. Beside her he drew up
a lovely decorated chair for him to sit in.
They were some distance 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 wanted to discuss his absent father.
A female servant carried in a fine gold jug
and poured water out into a silver basin,
so they could wash their hands. Beside them she set down
a polished table. Then the worthy housekeeper
brought in the bread and set it down before them.
Next, she laid out a wide variety of food,
drawing freely on supplies she had in store.
A carver sliced up many different cuts of meat
and served them. He set out goblets made of gold,
as a herald went back and forth pouring their wine.

Then, one after another, the proud suitors came.
They sat down on reclining seats and high-backed chairs.
Heralds poured water out for them to wash their hands,
and women servants piled some baskets full of bread,
while young lads filled their bowls up to the brim with drink.
The suitors reached out with their hands to grab
the tasty food prepared and placed in front of them.
When each and every man had satisfied his need

for food and drink, their hearts craved 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.
On the strings he plucked the prelude to a lovely song.
But then Telemachus, leaning his head over
close to Athena, so no one else could listen,
murmured to her:

"Dear stranger, my guest,
if I tell you something, will I upset you?
These men here, they spend all their time like this,
with songs and music—it's so easy for them,
because they gorge themselves on what belongs
to someone else, and with impunity,
a man whose white bones now may well be lying
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 clothes.
But by now some evil fate has killed him,
and for us there is no consolation,
not even if some earthbound mortal man
should say that he will come. The day has passed
when he might have reached home. But tell me,
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? And the sailors,
by what route did they bring you to Ithaca?
Who do they say they come from? For I know
there's no way you could reach me here 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
a guest-friend of my father's? Many men

have come here to our home as strangers,
since he became a roaming wanderer
among all sorts of people."

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

"To you I will indeed speak openly.
I can tell you that my name is Mentes,
son of wise Anchialus, and king
of the oar-loving Taphians. I've come,
as you surmise, with comrades on a ship,
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 city,
close to the fields, in Reithron's harbour,
below Mount Neion's woods. We can both claim
that we are guest-friends, the two of us,
just as our fathers were so long ago.
If you want, go up and ask Laertes,
that old warrior, who, men say, no longer comes
down to the city, but who bears his troubles
in fields far out of town. But he has with him
an old attendant woman, who prepares
his food and drink, once his legs grow weary
hobbling up and down his vineyard hills.
I've come now because some people claim
your father has apparently come home.
But the gods are still preventing him
from returning home. For there is no chance
that brave Odysseus has died somewhere.
No. He's still alive but being detained
on an island, surrounded by the sea,
with wild and dangerous men restraining him,
holding him back against his will. But now,

let me tell you about a prophecy
the gods have set right here inside my heart,
which, I think, will happen—even though
I am no prophet and have no sure skills
in reading omens from the birds. I say
Odysseus will not stay away much longer
from his dear native land, not even if
he's chained in iron fetters. He'll devise
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."

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."

Goddess Athena with the gleaming eyes answered him:

"Then at least the gods have given you
a family which, in days to come, will have
a celebrated 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.
It strikes me that these men are acting here
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."

Noble Telemachus
then said to Athena in reply:

"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—
they've not done this to anyone before.
I would not show such grief if he were dead,
not if he'd died among his comrades
in the land of Troy, or if he'd perished
in his friends' arms, after finishing the war.
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
where people cannot see or hear him,
abandoning me to tears and sorrow.
But it's not him alone who makes me sad

and cry out in distress. For now the gods
have brought me other grievous troubles.
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.
She won't turn down a marriage she detests,
but can't bring herself to make the final choice.
Meanwhile, these men are feasting on my home
and soon will be the death of me as well."

This made Pallas Athena angry—she said to him:

"It's bad Odysseus has wandered off
when you need him here so much! He could lay
his hands upon these shameless 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
he was when I first saw him in our house,
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,
seeking a man-killing poison, something
he could smear on his bronze arrow points.
However, Ilus did not give him any,
for he revered the gods who live forever.
But my father did, because he felt
a very strong affection for Odysseus.
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,
to rid your halls of them. So hear me out.
Listen now to what I'm going to tell you.
Tomorrow you must call Achaea's warriors
to an assembly and address them all,
appealing to the gods as witnesses.
Tell the suitors to return to their own 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 power with great capabilities.
He'll organize the marriage and arrange
the wedding gifts, as many as befit
a well-loved daughter. Now, as for yourself,
if you'll listen, I have some wise advice.
Get yourself a crew of twenty rowers
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
may tell you something, or you may hear
a voice from Zeus, which often brings men news.
Sail first to Pylos—speak to noble Nestor.
After you've been there, proceed to Sparta
and fair-haired Menelaus, the last one
of all bronze-clad Achaeans to get home.
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 here,
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
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
his father's murderer, sly Aegisthus,
because he had killed his famous father?
You are fine and strong, I see, and you, too,
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 as a friend,
thinking as a father would for his own son—
and what you've said I never will forget.
But come now, though you're eager to be off,
stay here a while. Once you've had a bath
and your fond heart is fully satisfied,
then go back to your ship with your spirit
full of joy, carrying a costly present,
something really beautiful, which will be
my gift to you, an heirloom of the sort
dear guest-friends give to those who are their friends."

Goddess Athena with the gleaming eyes then said to him:

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

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,
even more so than before. In his mind, Telemachus
[440] pictured her, and his heart was full of wonder.
He thought she was a god. So he moved away.
And then the noble youth rejoined the suitors.
Celebrated Phemius was performing for them,
as they sat in silence, listening. He was singing
of the return of the Achaeans, that bitter trip
Athena made them take sailing home from Troy.

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,
[450] 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,
with a small bright veil across her face. On either side
her two attendants stood. With tears streaming down,
Penelope addressed the famous singer:

"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
[460] 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
with ceaseless grief which I cannot forget.
I always remember 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
[470] may prompt him? One cannot blame the singers.
It seems to me it's Zeus' fault. He hands out
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
of the Danaans, for men praise the most
the song which they have heard most recently.
Your heart and spirit should endure his song.
For Odysseus was not the only man
at Troy who lost his chance to see the day
[480] he would come back. Many men were killed.
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 a man's concern, every man's,
but especially mine, since in this house
I'm the one in charge."

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

In the shadowy halls
the suitors 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 all have
such insolent arrogance, let us for now
enjoy our banquet. But no more shouting,
for it's grand to listen to a singer

as fine as this one—his voice is like a god's.
Then in the morning let us all assemble,
sit down for a meeting, so I can speak
and tell you firmly to depart my home.
Make yourself some different meals which eat up
your own possessions, moving house to house.
But if you think it's preferable and better
for one man's livelihood to be consumed
without paying anything, I'll call upon
the immortal gods to see if Zeus
will bring about an act of retribution.
And if you are destroyed inside my home,
you will not be avenged."

Telemachus finished.
They all bit their lips, astonished at the boldness
in his words. Then, Antinous, son of Eupeithes,
declared:

"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 sea island Ithaca, even though
it is your father's legacy to you."

Shrewd Telemachus then answered him and said:

"Antinous, will you be angry with me,
if I say something? I would be happy
to accept that, if Zeus gave it to me.
Are you claiming that becoming king
is the very worst of trials for 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,

many of them here in sea-girt Ithaca,
young and old, one of whom could well be king,
since lord Odysseus is dead, but I
will rule our home and slaves, battle spoils
which brave Odysseus won for me."

Then Eurymachus, son of Polybus, replied:

"Telemachus, these matters surely lie
in the gods' laps—which of the Achaeans
will rule sea-girt Ithaca. But you can keep
all your possessions for yourself as king
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!
He did not stay to let himself get known.
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 stranger
is a guest-friend of my father's. He says

that he's from Taphos. His name is Mentes,
son of wise Anchialus. He rules as king
over oar-loving Taphians."

He said this,
but in his heart Telemachus had recognized
the immortal goddess. At that point, the suitors
switched to dancing and to singing lovely songs.
They amused themselves until dark evening came.
Then each man went to his own house to sleep.
Telemachus moved up to where his room was built,
high in the splendid courtyard, with a spacious view,
his mind much preoccupied on his way to bed.
Accompanying him, quick-minded Eurycleia
held two flaming torches. She was Ops's daughter,
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.
In his home he honoured 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.
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 on the bed, and pulled off his soft tunic,
handed 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,
pulling the door shut by its silver handle.
She pulled the bolt across, using its leather thong.
Telemachus lay there all night long, wrapped up
in sheep's wool, his mind thinking of the journey
which Athena had earlier proposed to him.

## BOOK FOUR
### Telemachus Visits Menelaus in Sparta

[Telemachus and Peisistratus arrive at Menelaus' 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' 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 Spartan plain and its surrounding hills,
they went straight to splendid Menelaus' palace.1
They found him inside his house, at a marriage feast
he was providing for his many relatives,
in honour of 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'd pledged his word, and now the gods were making sure
the marriage would take place. He was seeing her off
with chariots and horses for her journey
to the famous 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 massive 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
here and there, through the middle of the crowd.

As the two visitors, heroic Telemachus
and Nestor's noble son, stood at the palace gate
with their two horses, lord Eteoneus came out,
a diligent attendant to splendid Menelaus.
When he noticed them, he went back inside the house,
to tell the shepherd of his people what he'd 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 fast horses out of harness,
or send them off to find some other host
who'll welcome them as friends."

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

"Before today,
Eteoneus, son of Boethous,
you haven't 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 suffering. So unhitch those horses
the strangers brought, and bring the men inside,
so they may dine."

Menelaus finished.
Then Eteoneus left, rushing from the hall

and calling out to other diligent attendants
to follow him. They took the sweating horses
from the harness and hitched them in the stables,
scattering wheat for them, mixed with white barley grains,
leaned the chariot against the luminescent wall,
and led the men into the godlike building.
Telemachus and Peisistratus were amazed
by what they noticed in the regal palace—
for the high-roofed home of splendid Menelaus,
a man raised by Zeus, shimmered in the light,
as if illuminated by the sun or moon.
When their eyes had gazed on it with great delight,
they went in well-polished bathing tubs to wash.
After women servants had given them a bath,
rubbed them down with oil, and helped them put on
thick cloaks and tunics, they sat down on chairs
right by Menelaus, son of Atreus. A serving woman
carried in a lovely pitcher made of gold
containing water for them to rinse their hands.
She poured it out into a silver basin,
so they could wash. Then beside them she pulled up
a polished table. A valued female servant
brought in bread and set it down before them,
and added many tasty delicacies as well,
taking freely from the food she had in store.
A carver lifted platters with all sorts of meat
and served them, then set down in front of the two men
goblets made of gold. Fair-haired Menelaus
welcomed both of them and said:

"Help yourselves.
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'd placed in front of him,
a mark of honour. So the two men helped themselves,
eating the fine meal prepared and set before them.
When they'd had their heart's content of food and drink,
Telemachus leaned his head close to Nestor's son,
so no one else could hear, and spoke to him:

"Son of Nestor, who brings my heart such joy,
look at how, throughout this echoing hall,
there's so much sparkling bronze and gold,
electrum, silver, ivory—to me
it's the interior of Zeus' home
on Mount Olympus, so much untold wealth—
I'm amazed just looking at it."2

As he said this,
fair-haired Menelaus heard his words 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
endure forever. But among human beings,
someone else might challenge me or not
about our wealth. I carried riches back
inside my ships, after we'd endured so much
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 Erembi—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.
While I was wandering around these lands,
gathering all sorts of goods, another man
slaughtered my own brother unexpectedly,
in secret, thanks to the duplicity
of his murderous wife. So you can understand
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
with many noble riches, to collapse.
I wish I could live with one third my wealth
here in my home, if those men could be safe,
the ones who died in the wide land of Troy,
far from horse-breeding Argos. And yet,
although I often sit here in my house
feeling sorry and in mourning for them all,
sometimes groaning to relieve my spirit
and sometimes calling for a end to moaning,
for one can quickly get too much of sorrow,
still, for all my grieving, 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 man Laertes,
I would think, is in mourning for him,
and so is sensible Penelope,
and Telemachus, as well, whom he left
a new-born child at home."

Menelaus spoke.
His words stirred up a desire in Telemachus
to lament his father. So from his eyelids
he shed a tear onto the ground, as he heard
what Menelaus said about Odysseus.
With both his hands he pulled up the purple cloak
to hide his eyes. Noticing this, Menelaus
debated in his mind and heart: Should he allow
Telemachus to speak about his father,
or should he first question him and sound him out
on each and every detail? As he thought of this
in his mind and heart, Helen came into the room,
emerging from her fragrant high-roofed chamber.
She looked like golden-arrowed goddess Artemis.
Adreste came in, too. She set in place for her
a finely crafted chair. Alcippe carried in
a soft wool rug. Phylo brought a silver basket,
which Helen had been given by Alcandre,
wife to Polybus, who lived in Thebes in Egypt,
where the most massive hoards of rich possessions
lie in people's homes. He'd given Menelaus
a pair of tripods and two silver bathing tubs,
as well as ten gold talents. In addition,
his wife presented Helen with some lovely gifts—
a golden spinning staff and silver basket,
with wheels below and rims of plated gold.
The servant woman Phylo brought this basket in
and placed it by her side, filled with fine-spun yarn.
On it lay the spinning rod full of purple wool.
Helen sat down on the chair, a stool beneath her feet.
At once she started speaking to her husband,
asking detailed questions.

"Do we know,
my divinely cherished Menelaus,
who these 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,
whom he left at home a new-born child,
when, because I'd acted so disgracefully,
you Achaeans all marched off to Troy,
your hearts intent on brutal warfare."

Fair-haired Menelaus then said in reply:

"This likeness you've just noticed, my dear wife,
I've observed, 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 eyelids."

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

"Menelaus, son of Atreus,
Zeus-fostered leader of your people,
this man here is indeed, as you have said,
Odysseus' son. But he's a prudent man—
in his heart he's too ashamed to come
on his first visit here and put on a show
with some assertive speech in front of you,
whose voice we listen to with great delight,
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,
a child has many troubles in his home,
and there is no one there to help him.
That is what's happened with Telemachus.
His father's vanished, and there's no one else
to protect 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.
If he'd returned, I thought I'd welcome him
above all other Argives, should far-seeing Zeus
on Mount Olympus let the two of us
make it home by sea in our swift ships.
I would have given him an Argive city
and built a home for him, where he could live,
bringing 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,
and nothing would have separated us.
We could have often entertained each other,
getting joy from one another's company,
until Death's black cloud came to embrace us.
But god himself must have been envious,
to make that unlucky man the only one
who didn't get back home."

Menelaus finished.
What he'd just said made them all feel like weeping.
Argive Helen, daughter of Zeus, began to cry,
as did Telemachus and Menelaus, too,

son of Atreus. Nestor's son could not keep the tears
out of his eyes. In his heart he was remembering
valiant Antilochus, killed by Dawn's courageous son.3
With him in mind, Peisistratus spoke—his words had wings:

"Son of Atreus, old warrior Nestor
used to say, when we conversed together
and your name was mentioned in our home,
that, as far as sound thinking was concerned,
you were preeminent among all men.
So, if it seems somehow appropriate,
you should listen to me now. 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.
I never met him, never even saw him,
but they say Antilochus surpassed all men
in running fast and fighting well."

Fair-haired Menelaus
then answered Peisistratus, saying:

"My friend,
you have truly mentioned everything
a right-thinking man might say or do,
even someone older than yourself.
The kind of father you were born from
enables you to speak so sensibly.
To recognize someone's inheritance
is easy, when the son of Cronos spins
good fortune's threads at marriage and at birth,

the way he now has done for Nestor,
granting him for all his days continually
to reach a ripe old age in his own home,
with sons who are, in turn, intelligent
and great spear fighters, too. But we must stop
and let that earlier weeping cease. Let's have
water poured upon our hands, then once again
[290] 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."

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

Then Helen, Zeus' daughter, thought of something else.
She quickly dropped into the wine they were enjoying
a drug which eased men's pains and irritations,
making them forget their troubles. A drink of this,
[300] once mixed in with wine, would guarantee no man
would let a tear fall on his cheek for one whole day,
not even if his mother and his father died,
or if, in his own presence, men armed with swords
hacked down his brother or his son, as he looked on.
Zeus' daughter had effective healing potions,
like that drug, which she'd obtained from Polydamna,
wife of Thon, who came from Egypt, where the fields,
so rich in grain, produce the greatest crop of drugs,
many of which, once mixed, are beneficial,
[310] and many poisonous.4 Every person there
is a physician whose knowledge of these things
surpasses that of every other human group,
for through their ancestry they stem from Paeeon.5
When Helen had stirred in the drug and told them
to serve the wine, she rejoined the conversation
and spoke up once again:

"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.
I'll tell you one I think is suitable.
I will not speak of, nor could I recite,
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,
threw a ragged garment on his shoulders,
so he looked like a slave, and then sneaked in,
along the broad streets of that hostile city.
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 Trojans' city. None of them
suspected anything. I was the only one
who recognized him, in spite of his disguise.
I questioned him, but his skill in deception
made him evasive. Still, when I had bathed him,
rubbed him with oil, and was helping him get dressed—
once I'd sworn a mighty oath not to reveal
among the Trojans that he was Odysseus
until he'd 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,
lots of information. Other Trojan women
began to cry aloud, but I was glad.
My heart by then had changed—it now desired
to go back. I was sorry for that blindness

Aphrodite brought, when she'd 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've said
is true. Before now, I've come to understand
the minds and plans of many warriors.
I've roamed through many lands. But my eyes
have never seen a man to match Odysseus.
How I loved his steadfast heart! What about
the things that forceful man endured and did
in the wooden horse? Achaea's finest men—
all of us—were sitting in it, carrying
a lethal fate to Trojans. Then you came there,
perhaps instructed by some god who wished
to give great glory to the Trojans.
And, where you walked, noble Deïphobus
followed, too.6 Three times you circled round,
feeling that hollow trap. Your voice called out,
naming the best warriors among Danaans,
and you made it sound just like the voice
of each man's Argive wife. Now, I was there,
sitting with lord Odysseus in the middle,
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 were,
inside the horse. But Odysseus stopped us—
we were really keen, but he held us in check.
Then all the other sons of the Achaeans
kept their mouths shut, except for Anticlus,
the only one still keen to cry aloud
and answer you. Odysseus clapped his hand
firmly on Anticlus' mouth and held him,

thus rescuing all Achaeans. He kept
his grip on Anticlus until Athena
led you away."

[390] Then prudent Telemachus replied:

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

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

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

"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 and 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 story of his wandering. For his mother
delivered him into a life of sorrow,
more so than other men. And do not speak
from pity, or give me words of consolation,
but tell me truly how you chanced to see him.
I'm begging you, if ever in word or deed
my father, brave Odysseus, over there,
on Trojan soil, where you Achaean men
endured so much, made you a promise
and then kept his word, speak to me now,
and give me the truth."

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

"It's disgraceful
how such wretched 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 mighty 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 come 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 quickly find their bitter courtship
ends in a swift death. But these things you ask,
what you've begged me about, 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'll not hide from you.
I won't conceal a single word.

"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 orders.
Now, just in front of Egypt there's an island,
right in the crashing sea—it's called Pharos—
as far off shore as a hollow ship can sail
in one whole day, when a fine stiff breeze
blows up behind her. 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.
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 felt pity for me
and rescued us—the goddess Eidothea,
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,
I was by myself, for I'd 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 up close to me and said:

'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 any sign of help,
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. But tell me this—
for gods know all things—which immortal one
keeps my feet shackled here and blocks my way?
Tell me how I find my way back home,
how I sail across the fish-filled seas.'

"I finished speaking. The lovely goddess
immediately gave me her answer:

'All right, stranger, I'll be truthful with you.
The Old Man of the Sea comes here from Egypt,
I mean infallible, eternal 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.
Now, if somehow you could set an ambush
and catch hold of him, he'd show you your way.
He'd chart the course for your return and map
how you could sail across the fish-filled seas.
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'd told me this, I replied and said:

'Could you yourself produce a strategy
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'd said this,
the lovely goddess answered right away:

'Stranger, I'll be frank—tell you the truth
in everything. When the sun has made its way
up into the middle of the heavens,
that infallible Old Man of the Sea
emerges from the brine, where he's concealed
by dark waves stirred up by the West Wind's breath.
Once he gets here, he lies down to rest
in these hollow caves, and around him sleeps
a herd of seals—they are the offspring
of the lovely 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 daybreak,
I'll take you there and organize an ambush.
You must carefully select three comrades,
[550] the best men in those well-decked ships of yours.
Now I'll describe for you all the sly tricks
that old man has. First, he'll inspect the seals.
He'll count them, numbering them off by fives.
Once he's looked them over, he'll 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
[560] to change himself into all sorts of shapes
of everything that crawls over 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,
[570] charting a course across the fish-filled seas.'

"Saying this, she plunged into the crashing sea.
I went to where my ships were on the beach—
my dark heart thinking, as I walked, of many things.
Once I'd reached the ships along the shore,
we prepared and ate our evening meal.
When immortal night arrived, we lay down
beside the breaking surf. Then, as the streaks
of rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
I walked along the shores of that wide sea
[580] praying in earnest to the gods. Then I took
three comrades, 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
would 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 out by thinking up
a useful 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.
Crowds of seals emerged and then lay down
in rows along the seashore. At noon,
the old man came up out of the water,
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,
he turned himself into a hairy lion,
and then into a serpent and a leopard,
then a huge wild boar. He changed himself
to flowing water and a towering tree.
We didn't flinch but kept our grip on him.
Our hearts were resolute. When the old man,
for all his devious skills, got tired out,
he spoke up, asking me some questions:

'Son of Atreus, which god helped your plan
and forged a scheme so you could lie in wait
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 me.
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
about my journey back, how I may sail
across the fish-filled seas.'

"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,
until you've gone back once more to Egypt,
to the waters of that Zeus-fed river,
and made holy 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 broke apart 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 Achaeans in those 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?
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 of those warriors were destroyed,
and many men survived. Among Achaeans,
armed in bronze, only two leading warriors
were killed on their way home. As for the fights,
you were there yourself. There is one leader
held back by the sea somewhere, but still alive.
Ajax perished among his long-oared ships—
at Gyrae Poseidon first propelled his boat
against huge rocks, then saved him from the sea.7
Though Athena hated him, he'd have been saved,
if he'd not grown 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.
One piece stayed in place—the other one
sheared off and fell into the sea, the part
where Ajax sat when his mind first became
so utterly deluded. He fell down
into the endless surging waves and died
by swallowing salt water. But your brother
escaped that fate—he and his hollow ships
survived, for queen Hera rescued him.
And then, when he was just about to reach
the steep height at Malea, storm winds caught him.
As he groaned in distress, they carried him
across the fish-filled seas to the remotest part
of where Thyestes used to live, now the home
of Thyestes' son Aegisthus.8 But then,
once the gods had changed the wind's direction,
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 so delighted
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,
on watch, for one whole year, just in case
Agamemnon should succeed in getting back
without being noticed and remind them all
of his ferocious power. The watchman went
straight to the palace to report the news
to the shepherd of the people. So then,
Aegisthus came up with a treacherous plan.
He picked out twenty men, the best there were
in the whole state, 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 escort back
Agamemnon, shepherd of his people,
all the while intending to destroy him.
Aegisthus then accompanied him home—
he suspected nothing of the murder—
and then, after the feast, he butchered him,
just as one might slay an ox in its own stall.
Of those companions of the son of Atreus
who followed him, not one was left alive.
Nor were any of Aegisthus' comrades—
they were all 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
or gaze upon the light of day. But then,
when I'd had my fill of rolling in the sand
and weeping, the Old Man of the Sea
spoke frankly to me, saying,

'Son of Atreus,
you must not spend so much time like this,
in constant weeping. That's no help to us.
You must strive, as quickly as you can,
to get back to your native land. 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
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—
my words had wings:

'Now I understand
what's 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, and he at once replied, saying,

'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 and 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 life for human beings is really easy—
there's no snow or heavy storms or even rain,
and Oceanus sends a steady breeze,
as West Wind blows to keep men cool and fresh.
Helen is your wife—that's why they'll do this,
because they see you as the man who married
Zeus daughter.'9

"With these words,
the old man plunged back in the surging sea.
I went to my ships and godlike ship mates.
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
came down, and we slept there on the shore."

"As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
we dragged our boats into the sacred sea,
then fitted masts and sails on our trim ships.
The men climbed in, went to their rowing seats,
and, sitting well in order, raised their oars
and struck the grey salt sea. So I sailed back
to Egypt's heaven-fed river once again,
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
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,
a gorgeous cup, so you can pour libations
to eternal gods and remember me
for all your days to come."

Shrewd Telemachus
then said to Menelaus in reply:

"Son of Atreus,
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 your stories.
But my companions are already restless

back in sacred Pylos, and time has passed
while you've detained me here. As for gifts,
give me whatever you wish, just let it be
something you treasure. But I'll not take
those horses back with me to Ithaca—
I'll leave them here to bring you pleasure.
For you are king of an extensive plain
in which huge quantities of lotus grow,
with sedge, broad-eared white barley, wheat, and rye.
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
has meadows fit for raising horses,
and that's especially true of Ithaca."

Then the great war-shouter Menelaus smiled,
patted Telemachus with his hand, and said:

"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.
It's all silver, with rims of hammered gold.
Hephaestus made it. Warrior Phaedimus,
the Sidonians' king, presented it to me
when I went there and his home sheltered me.
Now I'd like to give that mixing bowl to you."

So these men kept conversing with each other.

Meanwhile, back in Telemachus' Ithaca,
the banqueters had reached the royal palace,
driving sheep there and carrying strong wine.
Their well-dressed wives were sending bread for them.

As these men were in the hall preparing dinner,
the suitors were outside Odysseus' palace,
enjoying themselves by throwing spears and discus
on level ground in front—with all the arrogance
they usually displayed. Their two leaders,
Antinous and handsome Eurymachus,
were sitting there—by far the best of all the suitors.
Then Noemon, Phronius' son, came up
to question Antinous. He said:

"Antinous,
in our hearts do we truly know or not
when Telemachus will be coming back
from sandy Pylos? He went away
taking a ship of mine which I now need
to make the trip across to spacious Elis,
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 idea Telemachus had gone
to Pylos, land of Neleus, and still believed
he was somewhere with the flocks on his estates
or with the swineherd. So in answer to Noemon,
Antinous, Eupeithes' son, spoke up:

"Tell me the truth—
when did he leave? What young men went with him?
Did he take citizens of Ithaca,
or were those men 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,
because he begged you to?"

Noemon, son of Phronius,
then answered Antinous:

"I agreed to give it to him.
Would anyone have acted otherwise,
when a man like him, with a grief-stricken heart,
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,
[880] Mentor, or some god who looks just like him.
I'm surprised at that—at dawn yesterday
I saw lord 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, Eupeithes' son, then spoke to them.
[890] He was annoyed, his black heart filled with rage,
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'd 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
[900] 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."

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

Now, Penelope was not ignorant for long
of what those suitors were scheming 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. He proceeded through the house
to tell Penelope the news. As he came out
just across the threshold, Penelope called him:

"Herald, why have these noble 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 they never
get together somewhere else. And today,
may they make the banquet in this house
their latest and their last, all those of you
who by gathering here consume so much,
the wealth of wise Telemachus. It seems,
when you were children all that time ago,
you didn't pay attention to your fathers,
as they talked about the kind of man
Odysseus was among their generation—
in Ithaca he never did or said
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."

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

"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,
as he comes home. He's sailed off to Pylos
and then to sacred Sparta, seeking news
about his father."

As Medon spoke, Penelope
[950] felt her heart and knees give way where she was standing.
For some time she couldn't 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?"

Wise Medon then answered Penelope and said:

[960] "I don't know if some god was urging him
or if his own heart prompted him to sail
for Pylos, to learn about his father—
whether he was coming home again
or had met his fate."

After saying this,
Medon went away, down through Odysseus' home.
A cloud of heart-destroying grief fell on Penelope.
She lacked the strength to sit down on a chair—
and there were many in the room. She collapsed,
crouching on the threshold of that splendid room,
moaning in distress. Around her, all her servants
cried out, too, all those inside the house, young and old.
Still weeping with that group, Penelope spoke out:

"Friends, listen. For Zeus has given me
more sorrows than any other woman
born and raised with me. Some time ago
I lost my noble husband—a 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
throughout all Greece and middle Argos.
And now, without a word, storm winds sweep
my son, whom I so love, away from home,
and I don't even hear about his journey.
You are too cruel. In your minds, not one of you
thought to rouse me from my bed, though you knew,
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 here. He really would,
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
all these things. Perhaps Laertes then
in his mind can somehow weave a plan,
then go and weep his case before those men
intent on wiping out his family,
the 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. For I knew all this.
I gave him everything he asked for,
bread and sweet wine, too. He made me swear
a mighty oath I would not tell you,
not until he'd been away eleven days
or you yourself should miss him and find out
he'd left—in case you harmed your lovely skin
with weeping. But you should have a bath,
put clean clothing on your body, then go—
take your servants 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
that old man with still more troubles.
I don't think the family of Arcesius
is so completely hated by the gods,
that one of them cannot still somehow
protect this high-roofed home and its estates,
so rich and far away."

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.
She placed 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 burned a sacrifice to you—
plump cattle thighs or sheep—recall that now,
I pray. Save my dear son and guard him well
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 in those shadowy halls.
One overbearing youth would say something like this:

"Ah ha, our queen with many suitors
is really getting ready for the marriage,
knowing nothing of the preparations
for the killing of her son."

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 talk like that. Someone may report it,
especially to those inside the house.
Come now, let's get up quietly and work
to carry out that plan which all our hearts
responded to with such delight."

After saying this, Antinous picked out his men,
twenty of the best. They went down to the shore

and dragged a swift black ship into deep water.
They set the mast in place, carried sails on board,
and fitted oars into their leather rowing loops,
all in due order, then spread the white sail out.
Their proud attendants brought up weapons for them.
They moored the ship quite near the shore, then disembarked
and ate a meal there, waiting until evening fell.

Wise Penelope lay there in her upstairs room,
taking no food—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
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.
Athena sent this shape to lord Odysseus' home,
while Penelope was in distress and grieving,
to tell her she should end her tears and sorrow.
The phantom passed through the thong which held the bolt
and went into Penelope's room. Standing there
above her head, it spoke to her, saying:

"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 in her sweet sleep
[1090] beside the gate of dreams. But she replied and said:

"Sister, why have you come here? Up to now
you haven't visited—your home's so far away.
You tell me to end my cries and suffering,
all the pains which grieve 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 courageous warrior,
whose fame is widely known throughout wide Greece
[1100] and middle Argos. And now the son I love
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 my husband.
He makes me tremble—I am so afraid
he'll run into troubles with those people
in the land he's visiting or at sea.
Many enemies are now devising schemes
to hurt him, in their eagerness to kill him
[1110] before he gets back to his native land."

The dim phantom 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
then spoke out in reply:

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

The faint image then answered Penelope and said:

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

Once it said this, the phantom slipped away,
through the door bolt out into a breath of wind.
The daughter of Icarius woke from her sleep,
her heart encouraged that so clear a dream
had raced towards her in the dead of night.

The suitors then embarked and sailed away
on their trip across the water, minds fully bent
on slaughtering Telemachus. Out at sea,
half way between Ithaca and rugged Samos,
there's the rocky island Asteris. It's small,
but ships can moor there in a place with openings
in both directions. The Achaeans waited there
and set up their ambush for Telemachus.

## 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' 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 gives one more delight
than when joy grips entire groups of men
who sit in proper order in a hall
feasting and listening to a singer,
with tables standing there beside them
laden with bread and meat, as the steward
draws wine out of the mixing bowl, moves round,
and fills the cups. To my mind this seems
the finest thing there is. But 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,
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 extends all the way to heaven.
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,
forested Zacynthus. Ithaca itself,
low in the sea, furthest from the mainland,
lies to the west—while those other islands
are a separate group, closer to the Dawn
and rising Sun. It's a rugged island,
but 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 caves,
longing for me to be her husband,
or when, in the same way, the cunning witch
Aeaean Circe held me in her home
filled with 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 home,
but in a foreign land away from those
who gave him life. But come, I'll tell you
of the miserable journey back which Zeus
arranged for me when I returned from Troy.1

"I was carried by the wind from Troy
to Ismarus, land of the Cicones.
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 all men got an equal share.
Then I gave orders we should leave on foot—
and with all speed. But the men were fools.
They didn't listen. They drank too much wine
and on the shoreline slaughtered many sheep,

as well as shambling cows with twisted horns.
Meanwhile the Cicones set off and gathered up
their neighbours, tribesmen 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,
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
Achaeans. Of my well-armed companions,
six from every ship were killed. The rest of us
made our escape, avoiding Death and Fate.

"We sailed away from there, hearts full of grief
at losing loyal companions, 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 comrades slaughtered on that plain,
killed by the Cicones. Cloud-gatherer Zeus
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 off course, our sails
ripped to shreds by the power of that wind.
We lowered the masts into the holds and then,
fearing for our lives, quickly rowed the ships
toward the land. For two whole days and nights
we lay there, hearts consumed with sorrow

and exhaustion. But when fair-haired Dawn
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 the waves
pushed me off course, as I was doubling back
around Malea, driving me past Cythera.2

"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,
people who feed upon its flowering fruit.3
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
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,
but gave them lotus plants to eat, whose fruit,
sweet as honey, made any man who tried it
lose his desire ever to journey home
or bring back word to us—they wished to stay,
to remain 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
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 raced on board, went to their places,

and, sitting in good order in their rows,
struck the grey sea with their oar blades.

"We sailed away from there with heavy hearts
and reached the country of the Cyclopes,
a crude and lawless people.4 They don't grow
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,
every kind of crop springs up for them—
wheat and barley and rich grape-bearing vines,
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
makes laws for his own wives and children,
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. They have no need
to stay away from any human trails.
Hunters never venture there, not even those
who endure great hardships in the forest,
as they roam across the mountain peaks.
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
of other people, the way men cross the sea
to visit one another in their ships—

or men who might have turned their island
into a well-constructed settlement.
The island is not poor. All things grow there
in season. It has soft, well-watered meadows
by the shore of the grey sea, where grape vines
could flourish all the time, and level farm land,
where they could always reap fine harvests,
year after year—the sub-soil is so rich.
It has a harbour, too, with good anchorage,
no need for any mooring cable there,
or setting anchor stones, or tying up
with cables on 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—
a bright stream flows out underneath a cave.
Around it poplars grow. We sailed in there.
Some god led us in through the murky night—
we couldn't see a thing, and all our ships
were swallowed up in fog. Clouds hid the moon,
so there was no light coming from the sky.
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 hauled up our ships, took down all the sails,
went up along the shore, and fell asleep,
remaining there until the light of Dawn.

"When rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
we moved across the island quite amazed.
Some nymphs, daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus,
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 by lot. I was the only one
to be allotted ten. So all day long
until the sunset, we sat there and ate,
feasting on that rich supply of meat,
with sweet wine, too—we'd not yet 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
toward the country of the Cyclopes,
which was nearby. We observed their smoke,
heard their talk and sounds of sheep and goats.
Then the sun went down, and darkness fell.
So on the seashore we lay down to sleep.

"As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
I called a meeting and spoke to all the men:

'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,
whether they are rough and violent,
with no sense of law, or kind to strangers,
with hearts that fear the gods.'

"I said these words,
then went down to my ship and told my crew
to loose the cables lashed onto the stern
and come onboard. They embarked with speed,
and, seated at the oarlocks in their rows,
struck the grey sea with their oars. And then,
when we'd made the short trip round the island,
on the coast there, right beside the sea,
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
and towering oaks. At night a giant slept there,
one 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
to be a thing of wonder, not like man
who lives by eating bread, no, more like
a lofty wooded mountain crag, standing there
to view in isolation from the rest.

"I told the rest of my trustworthy crew
to stay there by 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 piece of ground
sacred to Apollo. He'd offered me fine gifts—
seven finely crafted golden talents,
a pure silver mixing bowl, and wine as well,
a total of twelve jars poured out unmixed,
drink fit for gods. None of his servants,
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
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 some of this wine in a large goatskin,
a pouch of food, as well. My soldier's heart

was warning me a man might soon attack,
someone invested with enormous power,
a savage with no sense of law and justice.

"We soon reached his 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 astonishing—crates full of cheese,
pens crammed with livestock—lambs and kids
sorted into separate groups, with yearlings,
older lambs, and newborns, each in different pens.
All 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 been much 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 turned out,
he proved no joy to my companions.

"We lit a fire and offered sacrifice.
Then we helped ourselves to cheese and ate it.
We stayed inside the cave and waited there,
until he led his flocks back home. He came,
bearing an enormous pile of dried-out wood
to cook his dinner. He hurled his load
inside the cave with a huge crash. In our fear,
we moved back to the far end of the cave,
into the deepest corner. He then drove
his fat flock right 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,
good ones, too, could not have shifted it
along the ground—that's how immense it was,
the rock he planted right in his doorway.
He sat down with his bleating goats and ewes
and milked them all, each in turn, setting
beside each one its young. Next, 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 dinner.
Once he'd finished working at these tasks,
he lit a fire. Then he spied us and said:

'Strangers,
who are you? What sea route brought you here?
Are you trading men, 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 by saying:

'We are Achaeans
coming back from Troy and blown off course
by various winds across vast tracts of sea.
Attempting to get home, we had to take
a different route and chart another course,
a scheme, 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 hope that you
will make us welcome or provide some gift,
the proper thing one does for strangers.

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.'

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

'What fools you are,
you strangers, or else you come from far away—
telling me to fear the gods and shun their rage.
The Cyclopes care nothing about Zeus,
who bears the aegis, or the blessed gods.
We are much more powerful than them.
I wouldn't spare you or your comrades
to escape the wrath of Zeus, not unless
my own heart prompted 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 know that.'

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

'Earthshaker Poseidon broke my ship apart—
driving it against the border of your island,
on the rocks there. He brought us close to land,
hard by the headland, then winds pushed us
inshore from the sea. But we escaped—
me and these men here. We weren't destroyed.'

"That's what I said. But his ruthless heart
gave me no reply. Instead, he jumped up,
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.

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
with human flesh and washed it down with milk,
he lay down in the cave, stretched out there
among his flocks. Then, in my courageous heart
I formed a plan to move up close beside him,
draw the sharp sword I carried on my thigh,
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.
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 bright Dawn.

"As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
he lit 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
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 there,
plotting a nasty scheme deep in my heart,
some way of gaining my revenge against him,
if Athena would grant me that glory.
My heart came up with what appeared to me
the best thing I could do. An enormous club

belonging to Cyclops was lying there
beside a stall, a section of green olive wood
he'd cut to carry with him once it dried.
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, 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 blazing fire to harden.
That done, I placed it carefully to one side,
concealing it beneath some of the dung
which lay throughout the cave in massive piles.
Then I told my comrades to draw lots
to see which men would risk their lives with me—
when sweet sleep came upon the Cyclops,
we'd lift that stake and twist it in his eye.
The crew drew lots and picked the very men
I would have chosen for myself, four of them,
with me included as 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, setting beside each mother
one of her young. When this task was over,
he quickly seized two men and wolfed them down.
Then I moved up and stood at Cyclops' side,

holding in my hands a bowl of ivy wood
full of my dark wine. I said:

'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 I was carrying for 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
ever visit you in future? How you act
is so against all human law.'

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

'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' rain increases, but this drink—
it's a stream of nectar and ambrosia.'

"He spoke. So I handed him more fiery wine.
Three times I poured some out and gave it to him,
and, like a fool, he swilled it down. So then,
once the 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. My name is Nobody.

My father and mother, all my other friends—
they call me Nobody.'

"That's what I said.
His pitiless heart replied:

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

"As he said this,
he collapsed and toppled over on his back,
lying with his thick neck twisted to one side.
All-conquering sleep then 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,
would hesitate. When that stake of olive wood,
though green, was glowing hot, its sharp point
ready to catch fire, I walked across to it
and with my companions standing round me
pulled 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
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
and twisted it inside the socket of his eye.
Blood poured out through the heat—around his eye,
lids and brows were singed, as his eyeball burned—

its roots were crackling in fire. When a blacksmith
plunges a great axe or adze in frigid water
with a loud hissing sound, to temper it
and make the iron strong—that's how his eye
sizzled around the stake of olive wood.
His horrific screams 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 started yelling out to near-by Cyclopes,
who lived in caves up on the windy heights,
his neighbours. They heard him shouting out
and came crowding round from all directions.
Standing at the cave mouth, they questioned him,
asking what was wrong:

'Polyphemus,
what's so bad with you that you keep shouting
through the immortal night and wake us up?
Is some mortal human driving off 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,
if nobody is hurting you and you're alone,
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,
attempting to catch anyone who tried
to get out 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 crewmen and myself
could escape 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:
in Cyclops' flocks the rams were really fat—
fine, large creatures, with thick fleecy coats
of deep black wool. I picked three at a time
and, keeping quiet, tied them up together,
with twisted willow shoots, part of the mat
on which the lawless monster Polyphemus
used to sleep. The middle ram carried a man.
The two on either side were for protection.
So for every man there were three sheep.
I, too, had my own ram, the finest one
in the whole flock by far. I grabbed its back
then swung myself under 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,
ran his hands across the backs of all his sheep

as they moved past him, but was such a fool,
he didn't notice how my men were tied
to their bellies underneath. Of that flock
my ram was the last to move out through the door,
weighed down by its thick fleece and my sly thoughts.
Mighty Polyphemus, as he stroked its back,
spoke to the animal:

'My lovely ram,
why are you the last one in the flock
to come out of the cave? Not once before
have you ever lagged behind the sheep.
No. You've always been well out in front,
striding off to graze on tender shoots of grass
and be the first to reach the river's stream.
You're the one who longs to get back home,
once evening comes, before the others.
But now you're last of all. You must be sad,
grieving for your master's eye, now blinded
by that evil fellow with his hateful crew.
That Nobody destroyed my wits with wine.
But, I tell you, he's not escaped being killed.
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 every corner of this cave,
and then my heart would ease the agonies
this worthless Nobody has brought on me.'

"With these words, he pushed the ram away from him,
out through the door. After the ram had moved
a short distance from the cave and courtyard,
first I got out from underneath its gut
and then untied by comrades. 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 crewmen—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 told everyone to stop.
I ordered them quickly to fling on board
the many fine-fleeced sheep and then set sail
across the salty sea. They climbed aboard
at once, took their places on the rowing bench,
and, sitting in good order in their rows,
struck the grey sea with their oars. But then,
when I was as far from land as a man's voice
can carry when he yells, I shouted out
and mocked the Cyclops:

'Cyclops,
it seems he was no weakling, after all,
the man whose comrades you so wished to eat,
using brute force in that hollow cave of yours.
Your evil acts were bound to catch you out,
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. It made his heart more angry.
He snapped off a huge chunk of mountain rock
and hurled it. The stone landed up ahead of us,
just by our ship's dark prow. As the stone sank,
the sea surged under it, waves pushed us back
towards the land, and, like a tidal flood,
drove us on shore.5 I grabbed a long boat hook
and pushed us off, encouraging the crew,
and, with a nod of my head, ordering them
to ply their oars and save us from disaster.
They put their backs into it then and rowed.
But when we'd got some distance out to sea,
about twice as far, I started shouting,
calling the Cyclops, although around me

my comrades cautioned me from every side,
trying to calm me down:

'That's reckless.
Why are you trying to irritate that savage?
Just now he threw a boulder in the sea
and pushed us back on shore. We really thought
he'd destroyed us there. If he'd heard us speak
or uttering a sound, he'd have hurled down
another jagged rock and crushed our skulls,
the timbers on this ship, as well. He's strong,
powerful enough to throw this far.'

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

'Cyclops, if any mortal human being
asks about the injury that blinded you,
tell them Odysseus destroyed your eye,
a sacker of cities, Laertes' son,
a man from Ithaca.'

"When I said this,
he groaned and spoke out in reply:

'Alas!
Now an ancient prophecy about me
has truly been fulfilled! Telemus,
fine, tall son of Eurymus, a seer
who surpassed all men in prophecy,
reached old age among the Cyclopes
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,
so I can give you your gift as my guest,
and urge the famous Shaker of the Earth
to escort you home—I am his son,
and he boasts he's my father. If he wishes,
he himself will cure me. No other blessed god,
nor any mortal man, can do that.'

"He finished speaking. I answered him and said:

'I wish I were as certain I could end your life,
rob you of your living spirit, and send you
off to Hades' home, as I am confident
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 this prayer to lord Poseidon:

'Hear me, Poseidon, Enfolder of the Earth,
dark-haired god, if I truly am your son
and if you claim to be my father,
grant that Odysseus, sacker of cities,
a man from Ithaca, Laertes' son,
never gets back home. If it's his destiny
to see his friends and reach his native land
and well-built house, may he get back late
and in distress, after all his comrades
have been killed, and in someone else's ship.
May he find troubles in his house, as well.'

"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 it,

using all his unimaginable force.
It landed right behind the dark-prowed ship
and almost hit the steering oar. Its fall
convulsed the sea, and waves then pushed us on,
carrying our ship up to the further shore.

"We reached the island where our well-decked ships
were grouped together. Our comrades sat around 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 out.
I took great care to see that all men there
received an equal part. But when the flock
was being divided up, my well-armed comrades
awarded me the ram, my special gift,
one just for me. I sacrificed that ram,
there on the shore, to Zeus, Cronos' son,
lord of the dark cloud, ruler of all,
offering him burnt pieces of the thigh.
But he did not care for my sacrifice.
Instead he started planning to destroy
all my well-decked ships and loyal comrades.

"So then, all day long until the sunset,
we sat feasting on the huge supply of meat
and sweet wine, too. When the sun went down
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 shipmates and ordered them aboard.
They untied cables fastened to the sterns
and got in at once, moved to the rowing bench,
and sitting in good order in their rows,
they struck the grey sea with their oar blades.
So we sailed away from there, sad at heart,

happy to have avoided being destroyed,
although some dear companions had been killed."

## 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' 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' vessel; that one ship sails to the island of Aeaea, 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' home.]

"Next 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,
with an infinite supply of tasty food
set out before them. The smells of cooking
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, how Achaeans made it home—
and I told him 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,
he denied me nothing and helped me go.
He gave me a bag made out of ox-hide,
flayed from a creature nine years old,
and tied up in it all the winds that blow
from every quarter, for Cronos' son
has made Aeolus keeper of the winds,
and he could calm or rouse them, as he wished.
With a shining 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
who tend the beacon fires.3 But then sweet Sleep
came over me—I was too worn out.
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 back with me,
gifts of Aeolus, brave son of Hippotas.
Glancing at the man who sat beside him,
one of them would say something like this:

'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 glorious loot—
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 freely given him these presents.
Come on, let's see how much gold and silver
he has in this bag.'

"As they talked like this,
my companions' greedy thoughts prevailed.
They untied the bag. All the winds rushed out—
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
I was of two minds—I could jump overboard
and drown at sea or just keep going in silence,
remain among the living. I stayed there
and suffered on. Covering up my head,
I lay down 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' 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' splendid palace,
taking with me one comrade and a herald.
I found him feasting with his wife and children.
So we went into the house and sat down
on the threshold, right beside the door posts.
In their hearts they were amazed. They asked me

'Odysseus, how is it you've come back here?
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,
aided by malicious Sleep, have injured me.
But, my friends, you can repair all this—
that's in your power.'

"I said these words
to reassure them. But they stayed silent.
Then their father gave me this reply:

'Of all living men, you are the worst—
so you must leave this island with all speed.
It would violate all sense of what is right
if I assisted or escorted on his way
a man the blessed gods must hate. So leave.
You're here because 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 went on like this
for six whole days and nights. On the seventh
we came to Telepylus, great citadel
of Lamus, king of Laestrygonians,
where the herdsman driving in his flock
salutes the herdsman moving his beasts out.4
There a man who had no need of sleep
could earn two wages—one for tending cattle,
one for grazing sheep. Day and night-time trails
lie close together.5 We came up there,
into a lovely harbour, with a sheer cliff
around it on both sides. Jutting headlands
facing one another extended out
beyond the harbour mouth, a narrow entrance.

All my shipmates 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 clambered up the cliff
and stood there, on a rugged outcrop,
looking round. I could see no evidence
of human work or ploughing, only smoke
arising from the land. I sent some comrades out
to learn what the inhabitants were like,
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,
the noble daughter of Antiphates,
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 here and who they were.
She quickly pointed out her father's lofty home.
They reached the splendid house and found his wife,
a gigantic woman, like a mountain peak.
They were appalled. She called her husband,
strong Antiphates, out of a meeting,
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 powerful Laestrygonians poured out,

throngin in countless numbers from all sides—
not like men at all, but Giants. From the cliffs
they hurled rocks down on us, the largest stones
a man can lift. The clamour rising from the ships
was dreadful—men were being destroyed,
ships were smashing into one another,
with those 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,
so we could get away from this disaster.
They all churned the water with their oar-blades,
terrified of being killed. We were relieved,
as my ship left the beetling cliffs behind,
moving out to sea. But all the other ships,
moored together in the harbour, were destroyed.

"We sailed on from there with heavy hearts,
grieving for dear shipmates we had lost,
though glad we had avoided death ourselves,
until we reached the island of Aeaea,
where fair-haired Circe lived, fearful goddess
with a human voice—sister by blood
to bloody minded Aeetes, both children
of sun god Helios, who gives men light.6
Perse, child of Oceanus, was their mother.
Here, in silence, we brought our ship to land,
inside a harbour with fine anchorage.
Some god was guiding us. Then we disembarked
and laid up in that spot two days and nights,
our hearts consumed with weariness and pain.

"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 their voices. From the rocky lookout
where I stood, I could see smoke rising
from the spacious grounds of Circe's home
through dense brush and trees. Seeing the smoke,
my mind and heart considered going down
to look around. But as I thought about it,
the best initial action seemed to be
to get back to our swift ship by the shore,
let my comrades 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 river
for a drink—the sun's heat forced it down.
As it came out, I struck it in the spine,
the middle of its back. My bronze-tipped spear
sliced right through—with a groan the stag collapsed
down in the dust, and its spirit left the beast.
Planting my foot, I pulled my bronze spear
out of the wound and left it lying there,
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,
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
and hold it on my shoulder with one hand.7
I tossed the stag down right before our ship
and cheered up my crew with words of comfort,
standing by each man in turn:

'My friends,
we're not going down to Hades' house just yet,
although we're grieving, not until the day
our fate confronts us. So come on now,
while there's 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 were amazed at the stag lying there,
such a huge beast beside the restless sea.
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
we sat feasting on that huge supply of meat
and on sweet wine. When 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 east or west we are
we just don't know, or how far away
from where the Sun, who brings men light,
goes down underneath the earth or rises.8
But let's quickly put our heads together
to see if we have any options left.
I don't think we do. 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 saw with my own eyes
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
what Laestrygonian Antiphates had done
and the violence of great Polyphemus,
that man-eating Cyclops. They wept aloud,
shedding frequent tears. But their laments
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 led the other.
We shook our tokens in a bronze helmet.
When brave Eurylochus' lot fell out,
he set off with twenty-two companions,
all in tears, leaving us behind to grieve.
In a forest clearing they found Circe's house—
built of polished stone, with views in all directions.
There were mountain wolves and lions round it,
all bewitched by Circe's wicked potions.
But these beasts made no attack against my men.
No. They stood on their hind legs and fawned,
wagging their long tails. Just as dogs will beg
around their master when he comes from dinner—
since 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 fearful animals.
They stood in fair-haired Circe's gateway
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 which goddesses create,
finely woven, luminous, and beautiful.
Then Polites, one of the men's leaders,
the man I trusted most and cherished
more than any of my comrades, spoke:

'My 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, or maybe a woman—
come, let's call out to her right now.'

"He spoke,
and they all started shouting, calling her.
She came out at once, opened the bright doors,
and asked them in. In their foolishness,
they all accompanied her. Eurylochus
was the only one who stayed outside—
he thought it could be something of a trick.
She led the others in and sat them down
on stools and chairs, then made them 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
the drink she gave them, she took her wand,
struck each man, then penned them in her pigsties.
They had bristles, heads, and voices just like pigs—
their bodies looked like swine—but their minds
were as before, unchanged. In their pens they wept.
In front of them Circe threw down feed,
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
of his comrades' bitter fate. But though he tried,
he couldn't 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,
astonished, questioned him, he spoke out,
telling us of his companions' fate:

'Lord Odysseus, we went through the woods,
as you had ordered and, in a clearing there,

found a splendid house built of polished stone,
with a view in all directions. Inside,
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 up her shining doors without delay,
and asked them in. In their foolishness,
they all 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
a long time, watching for them.'

"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 hands, clasped my knees,
moaned, and spoke to me—his words had wings:

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

"That's what he said.
But I gave him this answer:

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

"With these words, I went up from the ship and shore.
But while 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
toward 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:

'Where are you off to now, you poor man,
going through these hills all by yourself
and knowing nothing of the country here?
Your comrades, over there in Circe's house,
are penned up like swine in narrow stalls.
Are you intending now to set them free?
I don't think you'll make it back yourself—
you'll stay there with the rest of them. But come,
I'll keep you free from harm and save you.
Here, take a remedial potion with you.
Go in Circe's house. It's a protection
and will clear your head of any dangers
this day brings. Now I'll describe for you
each and every one of Circe's fatal ploys.
She'll mix a drink for you and with the food
include a drug. But she won't have power
to cast a spell on you. This fine potion,
which I'll provide you, won't allow it.
I'll tell you now in detail. When Circe
strikes you with her elongated wand,
then draw that sharp sword on your thigh and charge,
just as if you meant to slaughter her.
She'll be afraid. And then she'll order you
to sleep with her. At that point don't refuse
to share a goddess' bed, if you want her
to free your crew and entertain you.
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,
so when she's got you with your clothes off,
she won't change you to an unmanned weakling.'

"After saying this, the Killer of Argus
pulled a herb out of the ground, gave it to me,
and explained its features. Its roots were black,
the flower milk-white. Moly the gods call it.9
It's hard for mortal men to pull it 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 kept going, my heart
was turning over many gloomy thoughts.
Once I'd made it over to the gateway
of fair-haired Circe's house, I just stood there
and called out. The goddess heard my voice.
She came out at once, opened her bright doors,
and asked me in. So I went in with her,
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,
her heart still bent on mischief. She gave it me,
and, when I'd drunk it, without being bewitched,
she struck me with her wand and said these words:

'Off now to your sty, and lie in there
with the rest of your companions.'

"She spoke.
But I pulled out the sharp sword on my thigh
and charged at Circe, as if I meant to kill her.
She gave a piercing scream, ducked, ran up,

and clasped my knees. Through her tears she spoke—
her words had wings:

'What sort of man are you?
Where are you from? Where is your city?
Your parents? I'm amazed you drank this drug
and were not bewitched. No other man
who's swallowed it has been able to resist,
once it's passed the barrier of his teeth.
In that chest of yours your mind holds out
against my spell. You must be Odysseus,
that resourceful man. The Killer of Argus,
Hermes of the Golden Wand, always told me
Odysseus in his swift black ship would come
on his way back from Troy. Come, 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.'

"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 won't agree to climb into your bed,
unless, goddess, you'll agree to swear
a solemn oath that you'll make no more plans
to injure me with some new mischief.'

"When I'd said this, she made the oath at once,
as I had asked, that she'd not harm me.
Once she'd sworn and finished with the oath,

I went up 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 to the sea.
One of them threw lovely purple coverlets
across the chairs and spread linen underneath.
Another pulled silver tables over to each chair
and then placed silver baskets on them.
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 shining bronze. She sat me in a tub,
then, 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 spirit
had left my limbs. After bathing me,
she rubbed me with rich oil, then dressed me
in a fine cloak and tunic and led me
to a handsome chair embossed with silver,
finely crafted, with a footstool underneath.
A servant brought in a lovely golden jug,
poured water out into a silver basin,
so I could wash, and set a polished table
at my side. Then the worthy steward
brought in bread and set it there before me,
placing with it large quantities of food,
given freely from her stores. She bid 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,
not reaching for the food, weighed down with grief,
she came up close and spoke winged words to me:

'Odysseus, why are you sitting here like this,
like someone who can't speak, eating out your heart,
never touching food or drink? Do you think
this is another trick? You don't need to fear—
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
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'd said this, Circe went through the hall,
her wand clutched in her hand, and opened up
the pig-sty doors. She drove the herd out.
They looked like full-grown pigs, nine years old,
standing in front of her. She went through them,
smearing on each one another potion.
Those bristles brought on by that nasty 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 man 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 close to me, the lovely goddess said:

'Son of Laertes, resourceful Odysseus,

born from Zeus, go now to the sea shore,
back to your swift ship, drag it up on land,
and stash your goods and all equipment
in the caves. Then come back here in person,
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 miserably, 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 shipmates, once they saw me,
thronged around, weeping—in their hearts it felt
as if they they'd got back to their native land,
the rugged town of Ithaca itself,
where they were born and bred. In their distress
they spoke winged words to me:

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

"They spoke. I replied and calmed them down:

'First of all, let's drag the ship onshore,
stow all our goods and tackle in the caves.
Then you can rouse yourselves and come with me,
see your comrades in Circe's sacred home,
eating and drinking. They have lots of both.'

"The words I spoke quickly brought them round.

Of all my shipmates there, Eurylochus
was the only one to hesitate. He spoke—
his words to them had wings:

'You wretched creatures,
where are you going? Are you so in love
with these disasters you'll go back there,
to Circe's house, where she'll transform you all
to pigs or wolves or lions, so we'll be forced
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 long sword
hanging on my sturdy thigh and striking him,
slicing off his head and knocking it to earth,
even though he was a relative of mine,
closely linked by marriage.10 But my crewmen,
one by one, relaxed me with their soothing words:

'Child of Zeus, if you give the order,
we'll leave him behind. He can stay 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 the hollow ship. He came along as well,
afraid I might reprimand him harshly.

"Meanwhile, Circe had been acting kindly
to the rest of my companions in her home.
She'd given them baths, rubbed them with rich oil,
and dressed them in warm cloaks and tunics.

We found them all quite cheerful, eating
in the hall. When my men saw each other
and recognized their shipmates face to face,
their crying and moaning echoed through the house.
The lovely goddess came to me and said:

'Resourceful Odysseus, Laertes' son
and Zeus' child, you should no longer rouse
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.
But come now, eat my food, and drink my wine,
until you've got back that spirit in your chest
you had when you first left your native land
of rugged Ithaca. You're exhausted now—
you have no spirit—you're always brooding
on your painful wanderings. There's no joy
inside your hearts—you've been through so much.'

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

'You god-driven man, now the time has come
to think about your native land once more,
if you are fated to be saved and reach
your high-roofed home and your own country.'

"My proud heart was persuaded by their words.
So all day long until the sun went down,
we sat there, feasting on huge amounts of meat
and on sweet wine. Once the sun had set
and darkness came, they lay down to sleep
in the shadowy hall. I went to Circe,

in her splendid bed, and clasped her knees.
The goddess listened to me as I begged,
speaking these winged words to her:

'Circe, grant me the promise which you made
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 among us.'

"I spoke. The lovely goddess answered me at once.

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

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

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

"The lovely goddess gave me a quick answer:

'Resourceful Odysseus, Laertes' son
and Zeus' child, don't concern yourself
about a pilot for your ship. Raise the mast,

spread your white sail, and just take your seat.
Then the breath of North Wind Boreas
will take you on your way. But once your ship
crosses flowing Oceanus, drag it ashore
at Persephone's groves, on the level beach,
where tall poplars grow, willows shed their fruit,
right beside deep swirling Oceanus.
Then you must go to Hades' murky home.
There 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 follow my instructions—
move close and dig a hole there two feet square.
Pour libations to the dead around it,
first with milk and honey, next sweet wine,
and then a third with water. And shake out
white barley meal. Then pray there in earnest
to many powerless 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 fine gifts, and that you'll make an offering
to Teiresias, a black ram just for him,
the finest creature in your flocks. And then,
when you've offered prayers of supplication
to celebrated nations of the dead,
you must sacrifice a ram and a black ewe,
twisting their heads down toward Erebus,
while you turn to face the flowing rivers,
looking backwards. At that point many spirits
will emerge—they're the shadows of the dead.
Then call your crew. Tell them to flay and burn
the sheep lying there, killed by pitiless bronze.
Pray to the gods, to powerful Hades
and dread Persephone. Then from your thigh,
you must yourself draw that sharp sword out,

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.'

"Circe finished. Dawn soon came on her golden throne.
The nymph then 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 house, rousing my companions,
going up to each man and reassuring him:

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

"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 headfirst from the roof, snapped his neck,
and broke his spine. His spirit went to Hades.
As my men came out, I spoke to them and said:

'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,
[720] to meet the shade of Teiresias from Thebes.'

"That's what I said, and it broke their spirits.
Sitting down right where they were, they wept,
they tore their hair. But their laments were useless.
We moved down to our swift ship by the shore,
shedding many tears of grief. Meanwhile 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 going back and forth,
if she has no desire to be observed?"

## BOOK ELEVEN
### 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' 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, Iphimedea, Phaedra, Procis, Ariadne, Maera, Clymene, and Eriphyle; Odysseus interrupts his narrative to discuss his leaving Phaeacia with Alcinous; 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 men return to the ship and sail away from Oceanus.]

"When we reached our boat down on the beach,
we dragged it out into the glittering 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.
Once we'd checked the gear all through the ship,
we just sat—wind and helmsman held the course.
All day long, the sail stayed full, and we sped on
across the sea, until the sun went down,
and all sea routes grew dark. Our ship then reached
the boundaries of deep-flowing 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, dragged our ship on land,

and walked along the stream of Oceanus,
until we reached the place Circe described.

"Perimedes and Eurylochus 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,
then sweet wine, and then a third with water.
Around the pit I sprinkled barley meal.
Then to the powerless heads of the departed
I offered many prayers, with promises
I'd sacrifice, once I returned to Ithaca,
a barren heifer in my home, the best I had,
and load the altar with fine gifts, as well.
To Teiresias in a separate 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.
Next I held the sheep above the hole
and slit their throats. Dark blood flowed down.

"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 sorrow, and many men
wounded by bronze spears, who'd died in war,
still in their blood-stained armour. Crowds of them
came thronging in from all sides of the pit,
with amazing cries. Pale fear took hold of me.
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 dread 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
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 spoke 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:

'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 head first
down from the roof. My neck was broken,
shattering the spine. My shade departed,
going down to Hades' house. I beg you now,
in the name of those we left behind,
the ones who are not with us, of your wife,
your father, who reared you as a child,
and Telemachus, whom you left at home,
your only son. I know that your fine ship,
once you leave here and sail from Hades' home,
will once more reach the island of Aeaea,
where, my lord, I ask you to remember me.
When you sail from there, don't leave me behind,
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,
memorial to an unfortunate 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.'

"He finished. I answered him and said:

'Unhappy man, I'll do this, complete it all.'

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

"Then appeared the ghost of my dead mother,
Anticleia, brave Autolycus' daughter.
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.
But still, in spite of all my sorrow,
I could not let her get too near the blood,
until I'd asked Teiresias my questions.

"Then came the shade of Teiresias from Thebes,
holding a golden staff. He knew who I was
and started speaking:

'Resourceful Odysseus,
Laertes' son and Zeus' 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.'

"Teiresias finished talking. I drew back

and thrust my silver-studded sword inside its sheath.
When the blameless prophet had drunk dark blood,
he said these words to me:

'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. But still,
though you'll suffer badly, you may get home,
if you will curb your spirit and your comrades.
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,
then I foresee destruction for your crew,
for you, and for your ship. And even if
you yourself escape, you'll get home again
in distress and late, in someone else's ship,
after losing every one of your companions.
There'll be trouble in your home—arrogant 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 there, and make rich sacrifice
to lord Poseidon with a ram, a bull,
and a boar that breeds with sows. Then leave.
Go home, and there make sacred offerings
to the immortal gods, who hold wide heaven,
to all of them in order. Your death will come
far from the sea, such a gentle passing,
when you are bowed down with a ripe old age,
and your people prospering around you.3
In all these things I'm telling you the truth.'

"He finished speaking. Then I replied and said:

'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,
in silence. 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.'

"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.'

"After saying this,
the shade of lord Teiresias returned

to Hades' home, having made his prophecy.
But I stayed there undaunted, till my mother
came and drank dark blood. Then she knew me.
Full of sorrow, she spoke out—her words had wings:

'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 waters, stand between us,
first and foremost Oceanus, which no man
can cross on foot. He needs a sturdy ship.
Have you only now come here from Troy,
after a long time wandering with your ship
and your companions? Have you not reached
Ithaca, nor seen your wife in your own home?'

"Once she'd finished, I answered her:

'Mother,
I had to come down here to Hades' home,
meet the shade of Teiresias of Thebes,
and hear his prophecy. I have not yet
come near Achaea's shores or disembarked
in our own land. I've been wandering around
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—and make sure you speak the truth—
What grievous form of death destroyed you?
A lingering disease, or did archer Artemis
attack and kill you with her gentle arrows?
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 her son, keeping watch
on everything? Or has she been married
to the finest of Achaeans?'

"When I'd said this,
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 else
has taken them as yet. Telemachus
controls the land unchallenged and can feast
in banquets with his equals, or at least
those which a man who renders judgment
should by rights attend. They all invite him.
As for your father, he stays on his farm
and never travels down into the city.
He has no bed or bedding—no cloaks
or shining coverlets. In wintertime,
he sleeps inside the house beside his slaves,
close to the fire in the dirt, and wears
disgraceful clothes. During the summer months
and in fruitful autumn, he makes his bed
from fallen leaves scattered on the ground
here and there along his vineyard slopes.
There he lies in sorrow, nursing in his heart
enormous grief, longing you'll come back.
A harsh old age has overtaken him.
That's how I met my fate and died, as well.
I was not attacked and killed in my own home
by gentle arrows of the keen-eyed archer,
nor did I die of some disease which takes
the spirit from our limbs, as we waste away
in pain. No. It was my longing for you,
glorious Odysseus, for your loving care,

that robbed me of my life, so honey sweet.'

"She finished. I considered how in my heart
I wished to hold the shade of my dead mother.
Three times my spirit prompted me to grasp her,
and I jumped ahead. But each time she slipped
out of my arms, like a shadow or a dream.
The pain inside my heart grew even sharper.
Then I spoke to her—my words had wings:

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

"I spoke. My honoured mother quickly said:

'My child, of all men most unfortunate,
no, Persephone, daughter of Zeus,
is not deceiving you. Once mortals die,
this is what's set for them. Their sinews
no longer hold the flesh and bone together.
The mighty power of blazing fire
destroys them, once our spirit flies from us,
from our white bones. And then it slips away,
and, like a dream, flutters to and fro.
But hurry to the light as quickly as you can.
Remember all these things, so later on
you can describe the details to your wife.'

"As we talked together, some women came,
all wives and daughters of the noblest men,
sent out by queen Persephone. They flocked
by the black blood, throngs of them. I wondered

how I could get to question each of them.
To my heart the best idea seemed to be
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.

"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
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.6
A high dark wave rose arching over them,
like a mountain, keeping them concealed,
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'll be giving birth
to marvelous children, for a god's embrace
does not lack power. Take good care of them,
and raise them well. But now you must go home.
Hold your tongue, and don't 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,
queen among women, bore other children
to Cretheus—Aeson, Pheres, and Amythaon—
who loved to go to battle in a chariot.

"Then I saw Antiope, daughter of Asopus.
She boasted she'd made love with Zeus himself,
and borne two sons, Zethus and Amphion,
who first established seven-gated Thebes,
constructing walls around it—for all their strength,
they lacked the power to live in spacious Thebes,
unless the place was fortified. After her,
I saw Alcmene, Amphitryon's wife,
who had sex with powerful Zeus and bore
that great fighter, lion-hearted Hercules.
And I saw Megara, proud Creon's daughter,
who married that son of Amphitryon,
a man whose fighting spirit never flagged.

"The next I saw was Oedipus' mother,
fair Jocasta, who, against her knowledge,
undertook a monstrous act—she married
her own son.7 Once he'd killed his father,
he made her his wife. And 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 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,
all that a mother's Furies can inflict.8

"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
of Minyan Orchomenus. As queen in Pylos,
she bore her husband splendid children—
Nestor, Chromius, noble Periclymenus,
and lovely Pero, a mortal wonder,
so much so that all the neighbouring men
sought her hand in marriage. But Neleus
wouldn't give her to anyone except the man
who drove great Iphicles' cattle herd
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 painful fate determined by the gods
ensnared him—those savage cattle herders
imprisoned him in cruel bondage.9
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' will then came to be fulfilled.

"Then I saw Leda, wife of Tyndareus.
She bore Tyndareus two stout-hearted sons,
horse-taming Castor and Polydeuces,
the illustrious boxer.10 Life-giving earth
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.
And they have won respect reserved for gods.

"After Leda, I saw Iphimedea,
wife of Aloeus. Poseidon, she said,

had made love to her, and she'd had two sons,
godlike Otus and famed Ephialtes.
[390] Though neither one of them lived very long,
grain-giving Earth had raised them up to be
the tallest and handsomest men by far,
after glorious Orion. They stood,
at nine years old, twenty-two feet wide
and fifty-four feet high.11 But they threatened
to bring the battle din of furious war
against the immortals on Olympus.
They wished to pile mount Ossa on Olympus,
then stack Pelion with its trembling forests
[400] on top of Ossa.12 Then they could storm heaven.
And if they'd reached their full-grown height as men,
they might well have succeeded. But Zeus' 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.13

"I saw Phaedra, Procis, and fair Ariadne,
daughter of Minos, whose mind loved slaughter.
Theseus brought her once away from Crete
to the hill in sacred Athens. But he got
[410] no joy of her. Before he did, Artemis
on sea-girt Dia killed Ariadne,
because of something Dionysus said.14

"And I saw Maera and Clymene,
and hateful Eriphyle, too, who sold
her dear husband's life for precious gold.
I cannot mention all the woman I saw,
every wife and daughter of those heroes—
immortal night would end before I finished.
It's time to sleep, in my swift ship or here.
[420] How I am escorted from this place
is now up to you and to the gods."

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 favours from the gods, you have
many fine possessions stored away at home."

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 try to stay until tomorrow.
By then I'll have completed all our gifts.
His leaving here is everyone's concern,
especially mine, since I control this land."

Resourceful Odysseus then replied to him and said:

"Lord Alcinous, of all men most renowned,
if you asked me to stay for one whole year,
to organize my escort and give splendid gifts,

then I would still agree. It's far better
to get back to one's own dear native land
with more wealth in hand. I'll win more respect,
more love from anyone who looks at me,
whenever I return to Ithaca."

Alcinous then answered 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
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,
the painful agonies of all the Argives
and your own, as well. Come then, tell me this—
and speak the truth—did you see any comrades,
those godlike men who went with you to Troy
and met their fate there? This night before us
will be lengthy, astonishingly so.
It's not yet time to sleep here in the halls,
so tell me of these marvelous events.
I could stay here until bright Dawn arrives,
if you'd agree to tell me in this room
the tale of your misfortunes."

Resourceful 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,
I will not hesitate to speak to you
of other things more pitiful than these.

I mean the troubles of those friends of mine
who perished later, who managed to escape
the Trojans frightening battle cries, but died
when they returned, thanks to the deviousness
of a malicious woman.

"Once sacred 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
and met their fate alongside Agamemnon
in Aegisthus' house. He knew me at once.
When he'd drunk some blood, he wept aloud,
shedding many tears, stretching 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 looked at him and wept. Pity filled my heart.
Then I spoke to him—my words had wings:

'Lord Agamemnon, son of Atreus,
king of men, what fatal net of grievous death
destroyed you? Did Poseidon stir the winds
into a furious storm and strike your ships?
Or were you killed by enemies on land,
while you were cutting out their cattle
or rich flocks of sheep? Or were you fighting
to seize their city and their women?'

"I paused, and he at once gave me his answer:

'Resourceful Odysseus, Laertes' son,
and Zeus' child, Poseidon didn't kill me
in my ships by rousing savage winds
into a vicious storm. Nor was I killed
by enemies on land. No. Aegisthus

brought on my fatal end. He murdered me,
and he was helped by my accursed wife,
after he'd invited me into his home
and prepared a feast for me, like an ox
one butchers in its stall. And so I died
the most pitiful of deaths. Around me
they kept killing the rest of my companions,
like white-tusked pigs at some wedding feast,
communal meal, or fine drinking party
in a powerful and rich man's home.
You've encountered dying men before,
many of them, those slain in single combat
or the thick of war. But if you'd seen that,
your heart would've felt great pity. There we were,
lying in the hall among the mixing bowls
and tables crammed with food, the entire floor
awash with blood. The saddest thing I heard
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.
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.15
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'd married. I really 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.'

"Agamemnon finished. I answered him at once:

'That's horrible. Surely wide-thundering Zeus
for many years has shown a dreadful hate
towards the family of Atreus,
thanks to the conniving of some woman.
Many died for Helen's sake, and then
Clytaemnestra organized a trap for you,
while you were somewhere far away.'

"I spoke,
and he immediately replied, saying:

'That's why you should never treat them kindly,
not even your own wife. Never tell her
all the things you've 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' daughter, is a virtuous woman,
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 comes back home. Then he'll welcome him
in an appropriate way. But my wife
didn't 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 any more. 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 in sandy Pylos,
or perhaps in Sparta with Menelaus.

For noble Orestes has not yet died
up there on the earth.'

"Once Agamemnon paused,
I gave him my answer right away:

'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.'

"So we two stood there in sad conversation,
full of sorrow and shedding many tears.
Then Achilles' shade came up, son of Peleus,
with those of splendid Antilochus
and Patroclus, too, as well as Ajax,
who in his looks and body was the best
of all Danaans, after Achilles,
who had no equal. Then the shadow
of the swift-footed son of Aeacus
knew who I was, and with a cry of grief,
he spoke to me—his words had wings:16

'Resourceful Odysseus, Laertes' son
and Zeus' 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 into Hades' home, the dwelling place
for the mindless dead, shades of worn-out men?'

"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.
He might tell me a plan for my return
to rugged Ithaca. I've not yet come near
Achaean land. I've still not disembarked

in my own country. I'm in constant trouble.
But as for you, Achilles, there's no man
in earlier days who was more blest than you,
and none will come in future. Before now,
while you were still alive, we Argives
honoured you as we did the gods. And now,
since you've come here, you rule with power
among those who have died. So Achilles,
you have no cause to grieve because you're dead.'

"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, tell me of my noble son—
whether he went off to war or not.
Did he became 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 Greece and 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 killed 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 moment,
those who act with disrespect against him,
denying him honour, would soon come to fear
my force, these overpowering hands of mine.'

"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.
I myself brought him in my fine ship
from Scyros, to join well-armed Achaeans.
And when we discussed our strategies
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 Achaeans fought,
he never stayed back in the crowds of men
with ranks of soldiers. No. He ran ahead,
far out in front. No man'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,
were also slaughtered there around him
because a certain woman wanted gifts.17
He was the finest looking man I saw
after noble Memnon. And then, when we,
the noblest Argives, were climbing in
the wooden horse crafted by Epeius,
with me in overall command, telling 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
or watched him wipe his cheeks to clear off tears.
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,
when he went to his ship. He was unhurt—
no blows from sharp bronze spears or other wounds
[690] from fighting hand-to-hand, the sort one gets
so frequently in battle. For Ares,
when he's angry, does not discriminate.'

"I spoke. Then the shade of swift Achilles
moved off with massive strides through meadows
filled with asphodel, rejoicing that I'd said
his son was such a celebrated man.

"The other shadows of the dead and gone
stood there in sorrow, all asking questions
about the ones they loved. The only one
[700] who stood apart was the shade of Ajax,
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 sons of Troy and Pallas Athena.18
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,
[710] who, in his looks and actions, was the best
of all Danaans after the noble son
of Peleus. I called to him—my words
were meant to reassure him:

'Ajax,
worthy son of Telamon, can't you forget,
even when you're dead, your anger at me

over those destructive weapons? The gods
made them 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,
son of Peleus. No one is to blame
but Zeus, who in his terrifying rage
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 toward Erebus, to join
the other shadows of the dead and gone.
For all his anger, he would have talked to me,
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,
throughout the spacious gates of Hades' home.19

"After him I noticed huge Orion
rounding up across a field of asphodel
wild creatures he himself had hunted down
in isolated mountains. In his hand,
he clutched his still unbreakable bronze club.

"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.
His hands could not fend them off his body.

He'd assaulted Leto, Zeus' lovely wife,
as she was passing through Panopeus,
with its fine dancing grounds, towards Pytho.20

"Then I saw Tantalus in agony,
standing in a pool of water so deep
it almost reached his chin. He looked as if
he had a thirst but couldn't take a drink.
Whenever that old man bent down, so keen
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
were in full bloom—pears and pomegranates,
apple trees—all with gleaming fruit—sweet figs
and luscious olives. Each time the old man
stretched out his arms to reach for them,
a wind would raise them to the shadowy clouds.

"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 uphill to the top.
But just as he was going to get that stone
across the crest, its overpowering weight
would make it change direction. The cruel rock
would roll back down again onto the plain.
Then he'd strain once more to push it up the slope.
His limbs dripped sweat, and dust rose from his head.

"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
of the golden sandals. Around him there
the dead were making noises, like birds

fluttering to and fro quite terrified.
And like dark night, he was glaring round him,
his unsheathed bow in hand, with an arrow
on the string, as if prepared to shoot.
The strap across his chest was frightening,
a golden belt inlaid with images—
amazing things—bears, wild boars, and lions
[790] with glittering eyes, battles, fights, and murders,
men being killed. I hope whoever made it,
the one whose skill conceived that belt's design,
never made or ever makes another.
His eyes saw me and knew just who I was.
With a mournful tone he spoke to me—
his words had wings:

'Resourceful Odysseus,
son of Laertes and a child of Zeus,
are you now bearing an unhappy fate
below the sunlight, as I, too, did once?
[800] I was a son of Zeus, son of Cronos,
and yet I had to bear countless troubles,
forced to carry out labours for a man
vastly inferior to me, someone
who kept assigning me the harshest tasks.
Once 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,
[810] Hermes and gleaming-eyed Athena.'

"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 former times, the ones
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.
I quickly made my way back to the ship,
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 down Oceanus' stream.
We rowed at first, but then a fair wind blew.

## 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' 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' 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 brush wood,
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.

"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 to us:

'You reckless men,
you've gone to Hades' home while still alive,
to meet death twice, when other men die once.
But come, eat this food and drink this wine.
Take all day. 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,
[30] or, thanks to vicious plans of sea and land,
endure great pain.'

"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
and drinking down sweet wine. The sun then set,
and darkness came. So we lay down and slept
beside stern cables of our ship. But Circe
took me by the hand and led me off,
some distance from the crew. She made me sit,
[40] while she lay there on the ground beside me.
I told her every detail of our trip,
describing all of it from start to finish.
Then queen 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.
Whoever unwittingly goes past them
[50] and hears the Sirens' call never gets back.
His wife and infant children in his home
will never stand beside him full of joy.
No. Instead, the Sirens' clear-toned song
will captivate his heart. They'll be sitting

in a meadow, surrounded by a pile,
a massive heap, of rotting human bones
encased in shriveled 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,
make your crew tie you down in your swift ship.
Stand there with hands and feet lashed to the mast.
They must attach the rope ends there as well.
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 crew has rowed on past the Sirens,
I cannot tell you which alternative
to follow on your route—for you yourself
will have to trust your heart. But I'll tell you
the options. One has overhanging rocks,
on which dark-eyed Amphitrite's great waves
smash with a roar. These cliffs the blessed 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
and got away. Instead, waves from the sea
and deadly blasts of fire carry away
a whirling mass of timbers from the boat
and human bodies. Only one ocean ship,
most famous of them all, has made it through,
the Argo, sailing on her way from Aeetes,
and waves would soon have smashed that vessel, too,
against the massive rocks, had not Hera
sent her through. For Jason was her friend.2
On the other route there are two cliffs.
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 rock face
there's a shadowy cave. It faces west,
towards Erebus. You'll steer your ship at it,
illustrious Odysseus. There's no man
powerful enough to shoot an arrow
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 monster. Nobody
would feel good seeing her, nor would a god
who crossed her path. She has a dozen feet,
all deformed, six enormously long necks,
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 out of sight in her hollow cave,
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
can yet boast they and their ship sailed past her
without getting hurt. Each of Scylla's heads
carries off a man, snatching him away
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 water down. She spews it out
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 quickly. It's much better
to mourn for six companions in your ship
than to have all of them wiped out together.'

"Circe paused. I answered her directly:

'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
you can fight. There's no defence against her.
The bravest thing to do is run away.
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 Crataiis, her mother, who bore her
to menace human beings. She'll restrain her—
Scylla's heads won't lash out at you again.
Next you'll reach the island of Thrinacia,

where Helios' 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
and never die. Their herders are divine,
fair-haired nymphs Lampetie and Phaethusa.
Beautiful Neaera gave birth to them
from Helios Hyperion, god of the sun.
Once she'd raised them, their royal mother
sent them off to live on Thrinacia,
an island far away, where they could tend
their father's sheep and bent-horned cattle.
Now, if you leave these animals unharmed
and focus on your journey home, I think
you may get back to Ithaca, although
you'll bear misfortunes. But if you harm them,
then I foresee destruction for your ship
and crew. Even if you yourself escape,
you'll get back home in great distress and late,
after all your comrades 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 and urged my comrades
to get on board and loosen off the stern ropes.
They quickly climbed into the ship, sat down
in proper order at each rowing bench,
and struck the gray sea with their oars. Fair winds
began to blow behind our dark-prowed ship,
filling the sail, excellent companions
sent by fair-haired Circe, fearful goddess
who possessed the power of song. We checked out
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,
we may 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 meadows.
She said I alone should listen to them.
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 ordering you to set me free,
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.
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
in the hollow ship, and then sat at their oars,
churning the water white with polished blades
carved out of pine. With my sharp sword I cut
a large round chunk of wax into small bits,
then kneaded them in my strong fingers.
This pressure and the rays of Helios,
lord Hyperion, made the wax grow warm.
Once I'd 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 can shout, moving forward quickly,

our swift ship did not get past the Sirens,
once it came in close, without being noticed.
So they began their clear-toned cry:

'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 this island and not listened to us,
sweet-voiced melodies sung from our lips.
That brings him joy, and he departs from here
a wiser man, for we two understand
all the things that went on there in Troy,
all Trojan and Achaean suffering,
thanks to what the gods then willed, for we know
everything that happens on this fertile earth.'

"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.
Once they'd rowed on well beyond the Sirens,
my loyal crewmates quickly pulled out wax
I'd stuffed in each man's ears and loosed my ropes.

"But once we'd left the island far behind,
I saw giant waves and smoke. Then I heard
a crashing roar. The men were terrified.
The oars were snatched away, out of their hands,
and banged each other in the swirling sea.
Once they were no longer pulling hard
on their tapered oars, the boat stopped moving.
I went through the ship, cheering up the crew,

standing beside each man and speaking words
of reassurance:

'Friends, up to this point,
we've not been strangers to misfortunes.
Surely the bad things now are nothing worse
than when the Cyclops with his savage force
kept us his prisoners in his hollow cave.
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,
and keep striking them against the surging sea.
Zeus may somehow let us escape from here
and thus avoid destruction. You, helmsman,
I'm talking, above all, to you, so hold
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,
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 didn't speak a word of Scylla—she was
a threat for which there was no remedy—
in case my comrades, overcome with fear,
might stop rowing and huddle 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
as soon as she appeared up on the rock
and brought disaster down on my companions.

I couldn't catch a glimpse of her at all.
My eyes grew weary as I searched for her
all around that misty rock. We sailed on,
up the narrow strait, groaning as we moved.
On one side lay Scylla; on the other one
divine Charybdis terrified us all,
by swallowing salt water from the sea.
When she spewed it out, she seethed and bubbled
uncontrollably, just like a cauldron
on a massive fire, while high above our heads
spray was falling on top of both the cliffs.
When she sucked the salt sea water down,
everything in there looked totally confused,
a dreadful roar arose around the rocks,
and underneath the dark and sandy ground
was visible. Pale fear gripped my crewmen.
When we saw Charybdis, we were afraid
we'd be destroyed. Then Scylla snatched away
six of my companions, right from the ship,
the strongest and the bravest men I had.
When I turned to watch the swift ship and crew,
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.
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.3
Then, in the entrance to her cave, Scylla
devoured the men, who still 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'd made it past those rocks and fled,
escaping Scylla and dread Charybdis,
we reached the lovely island of the god,
home of those splendid broad-faced cattle
and numerous rich flocks belonging to
Helios Hyperion, god of the sun.
While I was still at sea in my black ship,
I 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 Aeaea. They had both strictly charged
that I should at all costs miss this island,
the property of Helios, who brings
such joy to men. So with a heavy heart,
I spoke to my companions:

'Comrades,
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 Aeaea. 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.
So 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 hard man,
Odysseus, with more strength than other men.
Your limbs are never weary. One would think
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
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, the ones
most likely to completely wreck our ship,
no matter what the ruling gods may wish?
Surely we should let black night persuade us,
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
or a large flock of sheep, not one of you
will be so overcome with foolishness
that you'll kill a cow or sheep. No. 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
disembarked and made a skilful dinner.
When everyone had eaten food and drunk
to his heart's ease, they wept as they recalled
those dear companions Scylla snatched away
out of the hollow ship and then devoured.
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 nasty wind
and an amazing storm, which hid in clouds
both land and sea alike. And from heaven
the night rushed down. Once rose-fingered Dawn arrived,
we dragged up our ship and made it secure
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,
so let's not touch those cattle, just in case
that causes trouble for us. For these cows
and lovely sheep belong to Helios,
a fearful god, who spies out all there is
and listens in on everything as well.'

"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 or South Wind blew.
As long as the men had red wine and bread,
they didn't touch the cattle. They were keen
to stay alive. But once what we had stored
inside our ship was gone, they had to roam,
scouring around for game and fish and birds,
whatever came to hand. They used bent hooks
to fish, while hunger 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'd moved
across the island, far from my comrades,
I washed my hands in a protected spot,
a shelter from the wind, and said my prayers
to all the gods who hold Mount Olympus.
Then they poured sweet sleep across my eyelids.
Meanwhile Eurylochus began to give
disastrous advice to my companions:

'Shipmates, although you're suffering distress,
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 that way,
is worst of all. So come, let's drive away
the best of Helios' cattle, and then
we'll sacrifice to the immortal gods
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 wealthy offerings. 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
choking on a wave than starving to death
on an abandoned island.'

"Eurylochus spoke.
My other comrades agreed with what he'd said.
They quickly rounded up the finest beasts
from Helios' herd, which was close by,
sleek, broad-faced animals with curving horns
grazing near the dark-prowed ship. My comrades
stood around them, praying to the gods.
They broke off tender leaves from a high oak,

for there was no white barley on the ship.4
After their prayers, they cut the creature's throats,
flayed them, and cut out portions of the thighs.
These they covered in a double layer 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 up the rest and skewered it on spits.
That was the moment sweet sleep left my eyes.
I went down to our swift ship by the shore.
As I drew closer to our curving ship,
the sweet smell of hot fat floated round me.
I groaned and cried out to immortal gods:

'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 him the news—
we had killed his cattle. 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 companions of Odysseus,
Laertes' son, who, in their arrogance,
have killed my animals, the very ones
I always look upon with such delight
whenever I move up to starry heaven
and then turn back from there toward the earth.

If they don't pay me proper retribution
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
from fair Calypso, who said she herself
had heard it from Hermes the Messenger.

"I came down to the sea and reached the ship.
Then I bitterly attacked my crewmen,
each of them in turn, standing by the boat.
But we couldn't 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
like cattle lowing filled the air.

"For six days,
those comrades I had trusted feasted there,
eating the cattle they had rounded up,
the finest beasts in Helios' herd.
But when Zeus, son of Cronos, brought to us
the seventh day, the stormy winds died down.
We went aboard at once, put up the mast,
hoisted the white sail, and then set off,

out on the wide sea

"Once we'd left that island,
no other land appeared, only sky and sea.
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,
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,
like a diver, off the ship. 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' lightning made our boat
shiver from stem to stern and filled it up
with sulphurous smoke. My crew fell overboard
and were carried in the waves, like cormorants,
around our blackened ship, because the god
had robbed them of their chance to get back home.

"But I kept pacing up and down the ship,
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
about floating back to grim Charybdis.
All night I drifted. When the sun came up,

I reached Scylla's cliff and dread Charybdis
sucking down salt water from the sea.
But I jumped up into the high 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,
overshadowing Charybdis. I hung there,
staunch in my hope that when she spewed again,
she'd throw up keel and mast. And to my joy
they finally appeared. Just at the hour
a man gets up for dinner from assembly,
one who adjudicates the many quarrels
young men have, who then seek judgment,
that's when those timbers first came into view
out from Charybdis.5 My hands and feet let go
and from up high I fell into the sea
beyond 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,
the gods conducted me to Ogygia,
the island where fair-haired Calypso lives,
fearful goddess with the power of song.
She welcomed and took good care of me.
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.

## 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]

Then shrewd Odysseus stripped off his rags, grabbed up
the bow and quiver full of arrows, and sprang
over to the large doorway. He dumped swift arrows
right there at his feet and then addressed the suitors:

"This competition to decide the issue
is now 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,
who was just about to raise up to his lips
a fine double-handled goblet he was holding
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,
one man, even with truly outstanding strength,
would risk confronting evil death, his own black fate?
Odysseus took aim and hit him with an arrow

in the throat. Its point passed through his tender neck.
He slumped over on his side, and, as he was hit,
the cup fell from his hand. A thick spurt of human blood
came flowing quickly from his nose. Then, suddenly
he pushed the table from him with his foot, spilling
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
everywhere along the well-constructed walls,
but there were no weapons anywhere, no strong spear
or shield for them to seize. They began to shout,
yelling words of anger at Odysseus:

"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 the vultures
are going to eat you up right here."

Each of them
shouted out some words like these. They did not think
he'd killed the man on purpose. In their foolishness,
they didn't realize they'd all become caught up
in destruction's snare. Shrewd Odysseus scowled at them
and gave his answer:

"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 your devious way 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 net has caught you all."

As Odysseus said these words, pale fear seized everyone.
Each man looked around to see how he might flee
complete destruction. Only Eurymachus spoke—
he answered him and said:

"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 responsible for all 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 has died, as he deserved.
So at this point you spare your own people.
Later on we'll collect throughout the land
repayment for all 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 back in gold
and bronze until your heart is mollified.
Until that time, no one is blaming you
for being so angry."

Shrewd Odysseus glared at him
and then replied:

"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 any man
wishes to evade his death and lethal fate,
to run away. But I don't think there's one
who will escape complete destruction."

Once Odysseus spoke, their knees and hearts went slack
right where they stood. Then Eurymachus spoke once more,
calling out to them:

"Friends, this man won't hold in check
those all-conquering hands of his. Instead,
now he's got the polished bow and quiver,
from that smooth threshold he'll just shoot at us
until he's killed us all. So let's think now
about how we should fight. Pull out your swords,
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,
clear the door, get down into the city,
and raise the alarm as swiftly as we can.
Then this man should soon take his final shot."

With these words, Eurymachus pulled out his sword,
a sharp two-edged blade of bronze, and then charged out
straight at Odysseus, with a blood-curdling shout.
As he did so, lord Odysseus shot an arrow.
It struck him in the chest beside the nipple
and drove the swift shaft straight down into his liver.
Eurymachus' sword fell from his hand onto the ground.
He bent double and then fell, writhing on the table,
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. He'd drawn out his sharp sword,
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
between the shoulders. 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 to pull out the long-shadowed spear,
some Achaean might attack and stab him with a sword
or strike him while he was stooping down. And so
he quickly ran away and then moved across
to his dear father. Standing close to him, he spoke—
his words had wings:

"Father, now I'll bring you
a shield, two spears, and a bronze helmet,
one that fits your temples. When I get back,
I'll arm myself and hand out other armour
to the swineherd and the 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, and Telemachus obeyed
his dear father. He went off to the storeroom
where their splendid weapons lay. From the place
he took four shields, eight spears, and four bronze helmets
with thick horsehair plumes. He went out carrying these

and came back to his dear father very quickly.
First he armed himself with bronze around his body,
and the two servants did the same, putting on
the lovely armour. Then they took their places
on either side of skilled and sly Odysseus,
who, as long as he had arrows to protect him,
kept on aiming at the suitors in his house,
shooting at them one by one. As he hit them,
they fell down in heaps. But once he'd used his arrows,
the king could shoot no more. So he leaned the bow
against the doorpost of the well-constructed wall,
and let it stand beside the shining entrance way.
Then on his own he set across his shoulders
his four-layered shield, and on his powerful head
he placed a beautifully crafted helmet
with horsehair nodding ominously on top.
Then he grabbed two heavy bronze-tipped spears.

In that well-constructed wall there was a side door,
and close to the upper level of the threshold
into the sturdy hall the entrance to a passage,
shut off with close-fitting doors. So Odysseus
told the worthy swineherd to stand beside this door
and watch, for there was just one way of reaching it.1
Then Agelaus spoke, 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 any more."

But Melanthius the goatherd answered him and said:

"It can't be done, divinely raised Agelaus.
The fine gate to the yard is awfully near,
and the passage entrance hard to get through.2
One man could block the way for everyone,
if he were brave. But come, let me bring you

armour from the storeroom. You can put it on.
It's in the house, I think—there's nowhere else
Odysseus and his noble son could store
their weapons."

Once goatherd Melanthius said this,
he climbed a flight of stairs inside the palace,
up to Odysseus' storerooms. There he took twelve shields,
as many spears, as many helmets made of bronze
with bushy horsehair plumes. Once he'd made it back,
carrying the weapons, as quickly as he could
he gave them to the suitors. When Odysseus saw them
putting armour on and their hands brandishing
long spears, his knees and his fond heart went slack.
His task appeared enormous. He called out quickly
to Telemachus—his words had wings:

"Telemachus,
it seems one of the women in the house
is stirring up a nasty fight against us,
or perhaps Melanthius might be the one."

Shrewd Telemachus then said in 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.
And try to learn if one of the women
has done this, or if it's Melanthius,
son of Dolius—I suspect it's him."

While they were saying these things to one another,
Melanthius the goatherd went back once more
to carry more fine armour from the storeroom.
But the loyal swineherd saw him and spoke out,

saying a quick word to Odysseus, who was close by:

"Resourceful Odysseus, Laertes son,
raised from Zeus, there's that man again,
the wretch we think is visiting 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,
all those schemes he's thought up in your home."

Resourceful Odysseus then answered him and said:

"These proud suitors Telemachus and I
will keep penned up here inside the hall,
no matter how ferociously they fight.
You two twist Melanthius' feet and arms
behind him, throw him in the storeroom,
then lash boards 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 said this,
they listened eagerly and then obeyed his words.
They moved off to the storeroom, without being seen
by the man inside. He was, as it turned out, searching
for weapons in a corner of the room. So then,
when Melanthius the goatherd was coming 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, its seams
unraveling on the straps—the two men jumped out
and grabbed him. They dragged him inside by the hair,

threw him on the ground—the man was terrified—
and tied his feet and hands with heart-wrenching bonds.
They lashed them tight behind his back, as Odysseus,
Laertes' royal son, who had endured so much,
had told them. They fixed a twisted rope to him,
yanked him up the lofty pillar, and raised him
near the roof beams. And then, swineherd Eumaeus,
you taunted him and said:

"Now, Melanthius,
you can really keep watch all night long,
stretched out on a warm bed, as you deserve.
You won't miss the golden throne of early Dawn,
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,
tied up and hanging in bonds which would destroy him.
The two put on their armour, 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, with many brave men in the hall.
Then Athena, Zeus' daughter, came up to them,
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,
Athena, who incites armed men to action.
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,
for all the things you're keen to bring out
here in the hall. You're going to pay for it
with your own head. Once our swords have sliced
your strength from you, we'll mix your property,
all the things you have inside your home
and in the fields, with what Odysseus owns.
We won't allow your sons and daughters
to live within your house or your dear wife
to move in Ithaca, not in the city."

After they said this, 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
Priam's city of broad streets was taken.
So how come now, when you've come home
among your own possessions, you're moaning
about acting bravely with these suitors?
Come on, my friend, stand here beside me,
see what I do, so you can understand
the quality of Mentor, Alcimus' son,
when, surrounded by his enemies,
he repays men who've acted well for him."

Athena spoke. But she did not give him the strength

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
the appearance of a swallow.

Meanwhile the suitors
were being driven into action by Agelaus,
Damastor's son, by Eurynomus, Amphimedon,
Demoptolemus, Peisander, Polyctor's son,
and clever Polybus. Among the suitors still alive
these were the finest men by far. Odysseus' bow
and his swift arrows had destroyed the others.
Agelaus spoke to them, addressing everyone:

"Friends, this man's hands have been invincible,
but now they'll stop. Mentor has moved away,
once he'd made some empty boast. And now,
they're left alone before the outer gates.
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 the glory. Those others over there
will be no trouble after he's collapsed."

Agelaus spoke, and in their eagerness
to follow what he'd said, they all hurled their spears.
But Athena made sure their spear throws missed the mark.
One man hit a door post in the well-built hall.
Another struck the closely fitted door. One ash spear,
weighted down with bronze, fell against the wall.
When they'd escaped the suitor's spears, lord Odysseus,
who'd been through so much, was the first to speak:

"Friends, now I'll give the word—let's hurl our spears
into that crowd of suitors trying to kill us,
adding to the harmful acts they did before."

Once Odysseus spoke, they all took steady aim,
then threw their pointed spears. Odysseus struck down
Demoptolemus, Telemachus hit Euryades,
the swineherd struck Elatus, and the cattle herder
killed Peisander. These men's teeth chewed up the earth,
all of them together. The suitors then pulled back
into the inner section of the hall. The others
then rushed up to pull their spears out of the dead.
The suitors kept throwing spears with frantic haste,
but, though there were many, Athena made them miss.
One man struck the door post of the well-built hall.
Another hit the closely fitted door. One ash spear,
weighted down with bronze, fell against the wall.
But Amphimedon did hit Telemachus' hand
a glancing blow across the wrist. The bronze point
cut the surface of his skin. And with his long spear
Ctessipus grazed Eumaeus' shoulder above his shield,
but the spear veered off and fell down on the ground.
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 swineherd Eumaeus
hit Polybus. The cattle herder Philoetius
then struck Ctesippus in the chest and boasted
above the body, saying:

"Son of Polytherses,
you love to jeer—but don't yield any more
to your stupidity and talk so big.
Leave that sort of boasting to the gods,
for they are far more powerful than you.
This is your guest gift—something to pay back
the ox hoof you gave godlike Odysseus
back when he was begging in the 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 injured
Leocritus, son of Evenor—he struck him
with his spear right in the groin and drove the bronze
straight through—so Leocritus fell on his face,
his whole forehead smashing down onto the ground.
Then Athena held up her man-destroying aegis
from high up in the roof.3 The suitors' minds panicked,
and they fled through the hall, like a herd of cattle
when a stinging gadfly goads them to stampede,
in spring season, when the long days come. Just as
the falcons with hooked talons and curved beaks
fly down from mountains, chasing birds and driving them
well below the clouds, as they swoop along the plain,
and then pounce and kill them, for there's 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, throughout the hall.
As they smashed their heads in, dreadful groans arose,
and the whole floor was awash in blood.

But then,
Leiodes ran out, grabbed Odysseus' knees,
and begged him—his words had wings:

"Odysseus,
I implore you at your knees—respect me
and have pity. I tell you I've never
harmed 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 didn't 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'll lie dead,

since there's no future thanks for one's good deeds."

Shrewd Odysseus glared at him and answered:

"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
remote from me, so my dear wife could go
away with you and bear your children.
That's why you won't escape a bitter death."

As he said this, Odysseus picked up in his fist
a sword that lay near by—Agelaus, when he was killed,
had let it fall onto the ground. With this sword
Odysseus struck Leiodes right on the neck—
his head rolled in the dust as he was speaking.

And then the minstrel Phemius, son of Terpes,
who'd been compelled to sing before the suitors,
kept trying to get away from his own murky 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' 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 knees of Laertes' son, Odysseus.
So he set the hollow lyre down on the ground,
between the mixing bowl and silver-studded chair,
rushed out in person to clasp Odysseus' knees,
and pleaded with him—his words had wings:

"I implore you, Odysseus, show me respect
and pity. There'll be sorrow for you later,

if you kill me, a minstrel, for I sing
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 dear son Telemachus
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 numbers
brought me here by force."

As Phemius said this,
royal Telemachus heard him and spoke up,
calling to his father, who was close by:

"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
as you were on the rampage in the hall."

Telemachus spoke. Medon, whose mind was clever,
heard him, for he was cowering underneath a chair,
his skin covered by a new-flayed ox-hide, trying
to escape his own black fate. He quickly jumped out
from beneath the chair, threw off the ox-hide,
rushed up to clasp Telemachus' knees, and begged—
his words had wings:

"Here I am, my friend.
Stop! And tell your father to restrain himself,
in case, as he exults in his great power,
he slaughters me with that sharp bronze of his,
in his fury with the suitors, those men

who consumed his goods here in his own hall,
those fools who did not honour you at all."

Resourceful Odysseus then smiled at him and said:

"Cheer up! 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,
until I finish all I need to do in here."

After Odysseus spoke, the two men went away,
outside the hall, and sat down there, by the altar
of great Zeus, peering round in all directions,
always thinking they'd be killed.

Odysseus, too,
looked round the house to check if anyone
was hiding there, still alive, trying to escape
his own dark 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, fishermen
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 takes away their life—that's how
the suitors then were lying in heaps on one another.

Resourceful Odysseus then said to Telemachus:

"Telemachus, go and call the nurse in here,
Eurycleia, so I can speak to her.
Something's on my mind—I want to tell her."

Once Odysseus spoke, Telemachus obeyed

what his dear father said. He shook the door and called
to Eurycleia, saying:4

"Get up, old woman,
born so long ago—the one in charge
of female servants in the palace.
Come out. My father's calling for you.
He's got something he wants to say."

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.
There she found Odysseus with the bodies of the dead,
spattered with blood and gore, like a lion moving off
from feeding on a farmyard ox, his whole chest
and both sides of his muzzle caked with 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 spoke to her—
his words had wings:

"Old woman, you can rejoice
in your own heart—but don't cry out aloud.
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
then answered him and said:

"All right my child,
I'll tell you the truth. In these halls of yours,
there are fifty female servants, women
we have taught to carry out their work,
to comb out wool and bear their slavery.
Of these, twelve in all have gone along
without a sense of shame and no respect
for me or even for Penelope herself.
Telemachus has only just grown up,
and his mother hasn't let him yet control
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
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'd said this, the old woman went through the house
to tell the women the news and urge them to appear.
Odysseus then called Telemachus to him,
together with Eumaeus and Philoetius.
He spoke to them—his words had wings:

"Start carrying those corpses outside now,
and then take charge of the servant women.
Have these splendid chairs and tables cleaned,
wiped with porous sponges soaked in water.
Once you've put the entire house in order,
then take those servants from the well-built hall
to a spot outside between the round house

and the sturdy courtyard wall and kill them.
[550] Slash them with long swords, until the life is gone
from all of them, and they've forgotten
Aphrodite and how they loved the suitors
when they had sex with them in secret."

Odysseus spoke. Then the crowd of women came,
wailing plaintively and shedding many tears.
First they gathered up the corpses of the dead
and laid them out underneath the portico,
leaning them against each other in the well-fenced yard.
Odysseus himself gave them their instructions
[560] and hurried on the work. The women were compelled
to carry out the dead. After that, they cleaned
the splendid chairs and tables, wiping them down
with water and porous sponges. Telemachus,
along with Philoetius and Eumaeus,
with shovels scraped the floor inside the well-built hall,
and women took the dirt and threw it in the yard.
When they'd put the entire hall in order,
they led the women out of the sturdy house
to a place between the round house and fine wall
[570] round the courtyard, herding them into a narrow space
where there was no way to escape. Shrewd Telemachus
began by speaking to the other two:

"I don't want
to take these women's lives with a clean death.
They've 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 round house,
then pulled it taut and high, so no woman's foot
could reach the ground. Just as doves or long-winged thrushes
[580] charge into a snare set in a thicket, as they seek out
their roosting place, and find out they've been welcomed

by a dreadful bed, that's how those women held their heads
all in a row, with nooses fixed around their necks,
so they'd have a pitiful death. For a little while
they twitched their feet, but that did not last long.

Then they brought Melanthius out through the doorway
into the yard. With pitiless bronze they sliced away
his nose and ears, then ripped off his cock and balls
as raw meat for dogs to eat, and in their rage
[590] hacked off his hands and feet. After they'd done that,
they washed their hands and feet and went inside the house,
back to Odysseus. Their work was done. But he
called out to Eurycleia, his dear nurse:

"Old woman,
bring sulphur here to purify the house.
And bring me fire so I can purge the hall.
Ask Penelope to come here with her slaves,
and get all the women in the house to come."

His dear nurse Eurycleia answered him:

"My child,
what you say is all well and good, but come,
[600] I'll fetch you clothing, a cloak and tunic,
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 disgrace."

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

"But first make me a fire in the hall."

Dear nurse Eurycleia then followed what he'd said.
She brought fire and sulphur, so Odysseus
purged the house and yard completely. Eurycleia
went back through Odysseus' splendid home to tell

[610] the women what had happened and to order them
to reappear. They came out holding torches,
then gathered round Odysseus, embracing him.
They clasped and kissed his head, his hands, and shoulders,
in loving welcome. A sweet longing seized him
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 doesn't 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 went up to an upstairs room,
laughing to herself, to inform her mistress
her beloved husband was inside the house.
Her knees moved quickly as her feet hurried on.
She stood beside her lady's head and spoke to her:
"Wake up, 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,
[10] but he's back in the house. And he's killed
those arrogant suitors who upset this home,
used up his goods, and victimized his son."

Wise Penelope then answered her:
"Dear nurse,
the gods have made you mad. They can do that—
turn even someone really sensible
into a fool and bring the feeble minded
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,
a place whose name no one should ever speak.
Come now, go back down to the women's hall.
Among my servants, if some other one
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."

The dear nurse Eurycleia then said to her:
"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
to conceal his father's plans, until the time
he could pay back those overbearing men
for their forceful oppression."

Eurycleia spoke.
Penelope rejoiced. She jumped up out of bed,
hugged the old woman, tears falling from her eyelids,
then she spoke to her—her words had wings:
"Come now,
dear nurse, tell me the truth. If he's really here,
back home as you claim, then how could he
turn his hands against those shameless suitors?
He was alone, and in this house those men
were always in a group."

Her dear nurse Eurycleia
then answered her:
"I didn't see or hear about it.

I only heard the groans of men being killed.
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 summon me. And then,
I found Odysseus standing with the bodies—
dead men on the hard earth all around him,
lying on each other, a heart-warming sight—
and he was there, covered with blood and gore,
just like a lion. Now all those bodies
have been piled up at the courtyard gates,
and he's purging his fair home with sulphur.
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 come about at last. He's come himself,
to his own hearth while still alive—he's found
you and your son inside these halls and taken
his revenge on all suitors in his home,
men who acted harmfully against him."

Wise Penelope then answered Eurycleia:
"Dear nurse, don't laugh at them and boast too much.
You know how his appearance in the hall
would please everyone, especially me
and the son born from 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
at their heart-rending pride and wicked acts.
There was no man on this earth they honoured,
bad or good, when he came into their group.
They've met disaster through their foolishness.
But in some place far away Odysseus

has forfeited his journey to Achaea,
and he himself is lost."

Dear nurse Eurycleia
then answered her:
"My child, what kind of speech has slipped
the barrier of your teeth, when you declared
your husband won't get home—he's in the house,
at his own hearth. Your heart just has no trust.
But come on, I'll tell you something else—
it's a clear proof—that scar a boar gave him
some time ago with its white tusk. I saw it.
I washed it clean. I was going to tell you,
but his hand gripped me by the throat—his heart
in its great subtlety wouldn't 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
then answered her:
"Dear nurse, you find it hard
to grasp the plans of the eternal gods,
even though you're really shrewd. But let's go
to my son, so I can see the suitors
now they're dead—and the man who killed them."

Penelope spoke, then went down from the upper room,
her heart turning over many things—Should she
keep her distance and question her dear husband,
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 in the firelight opposite Odysseus,
beside the further wall. He was sitting there
by a tall pillar, looking at the ground, waiting
to learn if his noble wife would speak to him
when her own eyes caught sight of him. She sat there

a long time in silence. Amazement came in her heart—
sometimes her eyes gazed at him full in the face,
but other times she failed to recognize him,
he had such shabby clothing covering his body.
[120] Telemachus spoke up, addressing a rebuke
directly to her:
"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 keep her distance from a husband
who's come home to her in his native land
in the twentieth year, after going through
so many harsh ordeals. That heart of yours
is always harder than a stone."

[130] Wise Penelope
then answered him:
"My child, inside my chest
my heart is quite amazed. I cannot speak
or ask questions, or look directly at him.
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.
Other people will not recognize them."

As she spoke, lord Odysseus, who'd been through so much,
[140] smiled and immediately spoke to Telemachus—
his words had wings:
"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 leave many to avenge him later,
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 means."

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."

Resourceful Odysseus said this in reply:
"All right, I'll say what seems to me the best.
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
down 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.
There later on we'll think of our next move,
whatever the Olympian god suggests."

They listened eagerly to what Odysseus said
and were persuaded. So first of all they bathed
and put on tunics. The women got dressed up.

Then the godlike singer took his hollow lyre
and encouraged their desire for lovely songs
and noble dancing. The whole great house resounded
to the steps of men celebrating a good time
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
to maintain her wedded husband's home
and persevere till he arrived back home."

That's what someone would've said—he'd never know
what was going on. Meanwhile, Eurynome,
the housekeeper, gave brave Odysseus a bath,
rubbed him with oil, and put a tunic on him,
a fine cloak, as well. Athena poured beauty on him,
large amounts to make him taller, more robust
to look at, and on his head she made his hair
flow in curls resembling a hyacinth in bloom.
Just as a man sets a layer of gold on silver,
a skillful artisan whom Pallas Athena
and Hephaestus have taught all sorts of crafts,
so he produces marvelous 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 sat back down in the chair from which he'd risen,
opposite his wife, and said to her:
"Strange lady,
to you those who live on Mount Olympus
have given, more so than to other women,
an unfeeling heart. No other woman
would harden herself and keep her distance
from her husband, who, in the twentieth year,
came back to her in his own native land,
after going through so much misfortune.

So come, nurse, spread out a bed for me,
so I can lie down by myself. The heart
inside her breast is made of iron."

Wise Penelope then answered him:
"Strange man,
I am not making too much of myself,
or ignoring you. Nor is it the case
that I'm particularly offended.
I know well 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, cloaks, and shining coverlets."

Penelope said this to test her husband.
But Odysseus, angry at his true-hearted wife,
spoke out:
"Woman, those words you've just uttered
are very painful. Who's shifted my bed
to some other place? That would be difficult,
even for someone really skilled, unless
a god came down in person—for he could,
if he wished, set it elsewhere easily.
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
is a great symbol which I made myself
with no one else. A long-leaved olive bush
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 good roof over it, then added

closely fitted jointed doors. After that,
I cut back the foliage, by removing
branches from the long-leaved olive bush.
I trimmed the trunk off, upward from the root,
cutting it skillfully and well with bronze,
so it followed a straight line. Once I'd made
the bedpost, I used an augur to bore 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,
silver, and ivory, and then across it
I stretched a bright purple thong of ox-hide.
And that's the symbol I describe for you.
But, 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
went weak at the 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 to him, threw her arms around his neck,
kissed his head, and said:
"Don't be angry, Odysseus,
not with me. In all other matters
you've been the cleverest of men. The gods
have brought us sorrows—they were not willing
the two of us 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 didn't welcome you this way
when I first saw you. But in my dear breast
my heart was always fearful, just in case
some other man would come 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 else,
if she'd known Achaea's warrior sons
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
which made sorrow come to us as well.
But now you've mentioned 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 woman, Actoris,
whom my father gave me when I came here.
For both of us she kept watch at the doors
of our strong bedroom. You've now won my heart,
though it's been truly stubborn."

Penelope spoke,
and stirred in him an even more intense desire
to weep. As he held his loyal and loving wife,
he cried. Just as it's a welcome sight for swimmers
when land appears, men whose well-constructed ship
Poseidon has demolished on the sea, as winds
and surging waves were driving it, and a few men
have swum to shore, escaping the grey sea,
their bodies thickly caked with brine, and they climb
gladly up on land, evading that disaster,
that how Penelope rejoiced to see her husband.
She simply couldn't stop her white arms holding him
around the neck. And rose-fingered early Dawn
would've appeared with them still weeping there,
if goddess Athena with the gleaming eyes,
had not thought of something else—she prolonged
the lengthy night as it came to an end, keeping
Dawn and her golden throne waiting by Ocean's stream—
she would not let her harness her swift horses,

who carry 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.
That's what the spirit of Teiresias
prophesied to me when I descended
inside Hades' house to ask some 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 him:
"You'll have a bed
when your heart so desires, for the gods
have seen to it that you've returned back here
to your well-built home and native land.
But since you've thought of it and some god
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?
All right, I'll say it, and I'll hide nothing.
But your heart will not find it delightful.
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,
and have no knowledge of ships painted red
or well-made oars that serve those ships as wings.
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 broad shoulders, he told me to set it
in the ground there, make rich sacrifice
to lord Poseidon with a ram, a bull,
and a boar that breeds with sows, then leave,
go home, and there make sacred offerings
to immortal gods who hold wide heaven,
all of them in order. My death will come
far from the sea, such a gentle passing,
when I'm bowed down with a ripe old age,
with my people prospering around me.
He said all this would happen to me."

Wise Penelope then said to him:
"If it's true the gods
are going to bring you a happier old age,
there's hope you'll have relief from trouble."

While they went on talking to each other in this way,
Eurynome and the nurse prepared the bed
with soft coverlets, by light from flaming torches.
Once they'd quickly covered up the sturdy bed,
the old nurse went back to her room to rest,
and the bedroom servant, Eurynome, led them
on their way to bed, a torch gripped in her hands.
When she'd brought them to the room, then she returned.
Odysseus and Penelope approached with joy
the place where their bed stood from earlier days.
Telemachus, Philoetius, and Eumaeus
stopped their dancing feet, made the women stop as well,
and then lay down in the shadowy hall to sleep.
Odysseus and Penelope, once they'd had the joy

of making love, then entertained each other
telling stories, in mutual conversation.
The lovely lady talked of all she'd been through
in the house, looking at that destructive group,
the suitors, who, because of her, had butchered
so many cattle and fat sheep and drained from jars
so much wine. Odysseus, born from Zeus, then told
all the troubles he'd brought down on men, all the grief
he'd had to work through on his own. Penelope
was happy listening, and sleep did not flow down
across her eyelids until he'd told it all.
He began by telling how he first destroyed
the Cicones, and then came to the fertile land
of Lotus-eating men, and all the Cyclops did—
and how he forced him to pay the penalty
for his brave comrades eaten by the Cyclops—
then how he came to Aeolus, who'd taken him in
quite willingly and sent him on his way.
But it was not yet his destiny to reach
his dear native land. Instead, storm winds once more
caught him, drove him across the fish-filled seas,
for all his weary groans. He told how he next came
to Telepylos where the Laestrygonians live,
men who destroyed his ships and well-armed comrades,
all of them, and how Odysseus was the only one
to escape in his black ship.1 He went on to talk
of Circe's devious resourcefulness and how
in his ship with many oars he'd then gone down
to Hades' murky home in order to consult
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'd listened to
the Sirens' voices, in their never-ending song,
then come to the Wandering Rocks, dread Charybdis,
and to Scylla, whom men have never yet escaped
without being harmed, how his comrades slaughtered
the oxen of sun god Helios, how his ship

was shattered by a flaming lightning bolt thrown down
from high-thundering Zeus, how his fine comrades perished,
all at once, while he alone escaped from fate,
how he reached the nymph Calypso on her island,
Ogygia, how she kept him in her hollow caves,
longing for him to be her husband, nurturing him
and telling him she'd 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 then had come
to the Phaeacians, who greatly honoured him,
as if he were a god, and sent him in a ship
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 makes men's limbs relax, came over him,
and eased disturbing worries he had in his heart.
Then Athena, goddess with the gleaming eyes,
came up with something else. When she thought Odysseus
had had his heart's fill of pleasure with his wife and slept,
from Ocean she quickly stirred up early Dawn
on her golden throne to bring her light to men.
Odysseus rose from his soft bed and told his wife:
"Lady, the two of us by now have had
sufficient 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've come back to the bed we love,
you should tend to our wealth inside the house.
As for the flocks those arrogant suitors stole,
I'll seize many beasts as plunder on my own,
and Achaeans will give others, till they fill up
each and every pen. Now I'm going to go
out to my forest lands, and there I'll see
my noble father, who on my behalf

has suffered such anxiety. Lady,
since I know how intelligent you are,
I'm asking you to follow these instructions—
once sunrise comes, the story will be out
about the suitors slaughtered in our home.
So you should go up to your upper room
with your female attendants. Then sit there.
Don't look in on anyone or ask questions."

Once he'd said this, he put his splendid armour on,
around his shoulders, and roused Telemachus,
Philoetius, and Eumaeus, and told them all
to get weapons in their hands to fight a war.
They did not disobey, but dressed themselves in bronze,
opened the doors, and went outside, with Odysseus
in the lead. By now light was shining on the ground,
but Athena kept them hidden by the night,
as she led them quickly from 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' burial; Amphimedon complains to Agamemnon about his death at Odysseus' 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' house, where Eumaeus, Philoetius, and Telemachus have prepared dinner; Laertes' appearance is transformed; Dolius and his sons arrive; the men in Ithaca hear about the slaughter and collect their dead; Eupeithes urges action against Odysseus; Medon and Halitherses advise against such action; the majority decide to follow Eupeithes; 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 Eupeithes; Athena stops the Ithacan army and sends it back to the city; a thunderbolt from Zeus stops Odysseus; Athena establishes a lasting oath between both sides.]

Meanwhile Hermes of Cyllene summoned up
the spirits of the suitors. In his hand he held
the beautiful gold wand 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 squeak when one of them falls down
[10] out of the cluster on the rock where they cling
to one another, that how these spirits squawked
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 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
Here they found Achilles' shade, son of Peleus,
and of Patroclus, too, noble Antilochus,
and Ajax, who had the finest form and shape

of all Danaans, after the son of Peleus,
who had no peer. These shades were gathered there,
in a group around Achilles. Then to them came
the spirit of Agamemnon, son of Atreus,
full of sorrow. Around him were assembled shades
of all those who'd been killed with him and met their fate
in Aegisthus' house. The son of Peleus' shade
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,
because on Trojan soil you were the king
of many powerful 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
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
you'd 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:
"Godlike Achilles, fortunate 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 the swirling dust,
a great man in your full magnificence,
with your skill in horsemanship forgotten.
As for us, we fought there all day long.
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 with warm water
and oil we cleaned your lovely skin. And then,
standing around you, the Danaans wept,
shedding plenty of hot tears, and cut their hair.
When your mother heard the news, she came
with immortal sea nymphs up from the sea.3
An amazing cry arose above the water—
all Achaeans were then seized with trembling.
They would've all jumped up and run away
to the hollow ships, if one man, well versed
in ancient wisdom, had not held them back.
I mean Nestor, whose advice in earlier days
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.
This is his mother coming from the sea
with her immortal sea nymphs to look on
the face of her dead son.'

"That's what Nestor said,
and the brave Achaeans stopped their running.
Then the daughters of the Old Man of the Sea
stood round you in a piteous lament,
as they put immortal clothing on you.4
And Muses, nine in all, sang out a dirge,
their lovely voices answering each other.
You'd not have seen a single Argive there
without tears, their hearts so 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
[90] moved around the funeral pyre in armour,
as you were burning, both foot soldiers
and charioteers, making an enormous noise.
And then, Achilles, once Hephaestus' flame
was finished with you, we set your white bones
in unmixed wine and oil. Your mother gave
a two-handled jar of gold. She said it was
a gift from Dionysus, something made
by illustrious Hephaestus. In this jar,
glorious Achilles, lie your white bones,
[100] mixed in with those of dead Patroclus,
son of Menoetius.5 Separate from these
are Antilochus' bones, whom you honoured
above all the rest of your companions
after Patroclus.6 Then, over these bones
we raised a huge impressive burial mound,
we—the sacred army of Argive spearmen—
on a promontory projecting out
into the wide Hellespont, so that men,
those now alive and those in future days,
[110] can view it from a long way out at sea.
Your mother asked the gods for lovely prizes
and set them out among the best Achaeans
for a competition. In earlier days
you've been present at the funeral games
of many warriors, when, once a king dies,
the young men, after tying up their clothes,
prepare to win the contests. But if you'd seen
that spectacle you'd have truly marveled—
the goddess, silver-footed Thetis, set
[120] such beautiful prizes in your honour.
The gods had that much special love for you.
So even in death, your name did not die.
No. 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,
Zeus organized a dreadful fate for me,
at Aegisthus' hands and my accursed wife's."7

As they talked this way to one another, Hermes,
killer of Argus, came up close to them, leading down
the shades of suitors whom Odysseus had killed.
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, splendid Amphimedon,
a guest friend of his from Ithaca, his home.
The shade of Atreus' son spoke to him first, saying:
"Amphimedon, what have you suffered,
all of you picked men of the same age,
to come down here beneath the gloomy earth?
If one were to choose the city's finest men,
one would not select any men but these.
Did Poseidon overwhelm you in your ships
by rousing violent winds and giant waves?
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. Don't you remember
the time I made a visit to your home
with godlike Menelaus—to urge Odysseus
to come with us in our well-benched ships
to Ilion? It took us an entire month
to cross all that wide sea, and it was hard
to win Odysseus, sacker of cities,
over to our side."

Amphimedon's shade
then answered him and said:

"Noble son of Atreus,
Agamemnon, Zeus-fostered king of men,
I do remember all these things you say,
and I'll describe for you every detail,
the truth of how we died, a wicked fate,
and how it came about. For many years,
Odysseus was away from home, so we
began to court his wife. She did not refuse
a marriage she detested, nor did she
go through with it. Instead, she organized
a gloomy destiny for us, our death.
In her heart she thought up another trick.
She had a huge loom set up in her rooms
and on it wove a delicate wide fabric.
And right away she said this to us:

'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
that a man who'd won much property
should have to lie without a death 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
and keep unraveling 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,
spoke out, 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 some malignant god
brought Odysseus back from some foreign place
to the borders of the field where the swineherd
has his house. And there, too, came the dear son
of godlike Odysseus, once he'd returned
in his black ship, back from sandy Pylos.8
The two hatched a plan against the suitors,
to bring them to a nasty death, then left
for the well-known city. Telemachus
made the journey first, whereas Odysseus
got there later. The swineherd led his master,
who wore shabby clothing on his body—
he looked like an ancient worn-out beggar
leaning on a stick, rags covering his skin.
So none of us could recognize the man
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
the 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
his bow and gray iron axes, a contest
for those of us who bore an evil fate,
the prelude to our death. None of us
could stretch the string on that powerful bow.
We weren't nearly strong enough. But then,
when the great bow was in Odysseus' hands,
we all called out to say we should not give
that bow to him, no matter what he said.

Telemachus alone kept urging him—
he told him to do it. Once lord Odysseus,
who had endured so much, picked up the bow,
he strung it with ease and shot an arrow
through the iron axes. Then he went and stood
inside the doorway with a fearful glare
and kept shooting volleys of swift arrows.
He hit lord Antinous and went on shooting,
aiming at other men across the room,
letting lethal arrows fly. Men collapsed,
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,
butchering men everywhere. The screams
were hideous, as heads were smashed apart.
The whole floor swam with blood. That's how we died,
Agamemnon, and even now our bodies
are lying uncared for in Odysseus' house.
Each man's friends at home don't know what's happened,
the ones who'd wash the black blood from our wounds,
then lay our bodies out and weep for us,
the necessary rites for those who've died."

The shade of Atreus' son then answered Amphimedon:
"O son of Laertes, happy Odysseus,
a resourceful man, who won himself
a wife whose excellence was truly great.
How fine the heart in faultless Penelope,
daughter of Icarius!  She remembered well
the husband she was married to, Odysseus.
The story of her excellence will not die—
immortal gods will make a pleasing song
for men on earth about faithful Penelope.
Tyndareus' daughter acted differently,
when she planned to carry out her evil acts
and killed her wedded husband—among men
there'll be a hateful song for her.9  She gives

all women an evil reputation,
even one whose actions are done well."

So these two talked to one another, as they stood
in the house of Hades, deep beneath the earth.
Once Odysseus and his men had left the city,
they soon reached Laertes' fine, well-managed farm,
which Laertes had once won by his own efforts,
working really hard. His house was there, with sheds
surrounding it on every side, where his servants,
bonded slaves who worked to carry out his wishes,
ate and sat and slept. An old Sicilian woman
lived inside his house, looking after the old man,
caring for him at the farm, far from the city.
Odysseus then spoke to his servants and his son:
"You should go inside the well-built home.
Hurry up and kill the finest pig there is,
so we can eat. I'll sound out my father,
to find out if he can recognize me,
see who I am, once he's laid eyes on me,
or if he doesn't know me any more,
since I've been away so long."

Odysseus spoke,
then gave his battle weapons to his servants.
They quickly went inside the house. Then Odysseus,
walking out to test his father, came up beside
the fruitful vineyard and from there continued down
to the extensive orchard, where he failed to find
Dolius or any sons of his father's slaves.
They'd gone off to gather large rocks for the wall
around the vineyard, with the old man in the lead.
In the well-established vineyard he found his father.
He was digging round a plant, all by himself,
dressed in a filthy, shabby, patched-up tunic.
Around his legs he'd tied shin pads stitched from ox-hide
to protect himself from scratches, and on his hands

he had on gloves, since there were thistles in that spot.
[300] On his head he wore a goatskin hat. In these clothes
he was dealing with his grief. When lord Odysseus,
who had endured so much, saw him worn down with age
and carrying so much heavy sorrow in his heart,
he stood under a tall pear tree and shed a tear,
debating in his mind and heart whether he should
embrace and kiss his father or describe for him
in detail how he got back to his native land
or start by questioning him, to test him out
on every point. As he thought about his options,
[310] the best decision seemed to be to test him first,
using words which might provoke him. With this in mind,
lord Odysseus went straight up to his father,
who was digging round 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, vine,
olive, pear, or garden plot in all the field—
that needs some care. I'll tell you something else—
[320] don't let this make you angry in your heart—
you yourself are not being well looked after.
Along with your old age, you're filthy dirty,
and badly dressed in those disgusting clothes.
Surely it can't be because you're lazy
your lord refuses to look after you.
In appearance 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,
[330] as old men should. So come now, tell me this,
and speak out candidly—Whose slave are you?
Whose orchard are you tending? And tell me
the truth about this, too, so I understand—
Is this place we've reached really Ithaca,
as some man I just met on my way here

told me. His mind was not too clever—
he didn't try to tell me any details
or listen to my words when I asked him
about a friend of mine, if he's still alive
or is in Hades' home, already dead.
I'll explain it to you. Listen to me,
and pay attention. In my dear native land,
I once entertained a man, someone who'd come
to my own home. No other human being
from far away has visited my house
as a more welcome guest. He said he came
from Ithaca. He told me his father
was Laertes, son of Arcesius.
I took him to the house, entertained him
with generous hospitality, and gave him
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, what's more, four women
skilled in fine handicrafts and beautiful,
the very ones he wished to choose himself."

Then his father shed a tear and answered him:
"Stranger, yes indeed, you've reached the country
which you asked about. But it's been taken over
by arrogant and 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 presents
and fine hospitality—that's the right
of him who offers kindness first. But come,
tell me this, and make sure you speak the truth.

How many years ago did you welcome him,
that unlucky guest, my son, if, indeed,
such an ill-fated man ever was alive?
Somewhere far from native land and friends
the fish have eaten him down in the sea,
or on land he's been the prey of savage beasts
and birds. Neither his father nor his mother,
we who gave him birth, could lay him out
for burial or lament for him. Nor did
the wife he courted with so many gifts,
faithful Penelope, bewail her husband
on his bier, closing up 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 brought you here?
Or did you come on other people's ship
as passenger, men who let you disembark
and then set off again?"

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
far from the city. As for Odysseus,
this is the fifth year since he went away
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'd meet again as host and guest,
[410] and give each other splendid presents."

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' heart.
Already, as he looked at his dear father, sharp pains
were shooting up his nostrils. He jumped over,
embraced Laertes, kissed him, and then said:
"Father,
I'm here—the very man you asked about.
I've returned here in the twentieth year,
[420] back to my native land. Stop your grieving,
these tearful moans. I'll tell you everything,
though it's essential we move really fast.
I've killed the suitors in our home, avenged
their heart-rending insolence, their evil acts."

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:
[430] "First, let your eyes inspect this scar—a boar
inflicted that on me with its white tusk,
when I went to 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 the well-established vineyard—back then
I was a child following you in the yard,
and I asked about each one. It was here—
we walked by these very trees. You named them
and described them to me. You offered me
thirteen pear trees and ten apple trees
along with forty fig trees. In the same way,
you said you'd give me fifty rows of vines,
bearing all sorts of different types of grapes,
when Zeus' seasons load their tops 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
around the son he loved and struggled hard to breathe.
Lord Odysseus, who had endured so much, held him.
After he'd revived and his spirit came once more
into his chest, Laertes spoke again and said:
"Father Zeus, it seems 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 soon come here
against us, and they'll send out messengers
all through Cephallenia, to every city."

Resourceful Odysseus then answered him and said:
"Take courage, and don't allow these things
to weigh down your heart. Let's go to the house,
the one close to the orchard, where I sent
Telemachus, together with the swineherd
and the keeper of the goats, so they could
prepare a meal as soon as possible."

After they'd talked like this, they went to the fine house.
Once they reached Laertes' well-furnished home, they found
Telemachus with the swineherd and goat keeper

carving lots of meat and mixing gleaming wine.
Inside the home the Sicilian servant woman
gave great-hearted Laertes a bath, then rubbed him
with oil and threw a lovely cloak around him.
Athena then approached and fleshed out the limbs
on that shepherd of his people. She made him
taller than before and sturdier to the eye.
When he left the bath, his dear son was astonished—
as he looked at him he seemed like the immortals.
Odysseus spoke to him—his words had wings:
"Father, surely one of the eternal gods
has made you handsomer to look at—
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 king of Cephallenians.
With strength like that, I could've stood with you
yesterday, my armour on my shoulders,
and driven off the suitors in our home.
I'd have made many of their knees go slack
inside the hall—I'd have pleased your heart."

In this way, the two men conversed with one another.
Meanwhile, the other men had finished working
Dinner was prepared. So they sat down one by one
on stools and chairs. As they were reaching for the food,
old Dolius appeared. With him came his sons,
tired out from work. The ancient Sicilian woman,
their mother, had gone outside and summoned them.
She fed them and took good care of the old man,
now that his age had laid its grip on him. These men,
once they saw Odysseus and their hearts took note of him,

stood in the house astonished. Then Odysseus
talked to them with reassuring words and said:
"Old man, sit down and have some dinner.
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,
so we've been waiting in the house."

Odysseus spoke.
Dolius went straight up to him, both arms outstretched,
grabbed Odysseus' hand and kissed it on the wrist.
Then he spoke to him—his words had wings:
"My friend,
you're back with us, who longed for your return
but never thought to see it! The 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
you've come back here, or should we send her
a messenger?"

Resourceful Odysseus answered him
and said:
"Old man, she already knows.
Why should you be so concerned about it?"

Odysseus spoke, and Dolius sat down again
on his polished stool. Then Dolius' sons
also came up around glorious Odysseus,
clasping his hands with words of welcome. Then they sat
in a row alongside Dolius, their father.
So these men occupied themselves with dinner
inside the house.
Meanwhile, Rumour the Messenger
sped swiftly through the entire city, speaking
of the suitors' dreadful death, their destiny.

People heard about it all at once and came in
from all directions, gathering with mournful groans
before Odysseus' home. Each one brought his dead
outside the house and buried them. All the men
from other cities they sent home, placing them
aboard swift ships to be escorted back by sailors.
Then, with sorrowful hearts, they went in person
to meet in an assembly. Once they'd got there
together in a group, Eupeithes rose to speak.
Constant grief lay on his heart for his own son,
Antinous, the first man killed by lord Odysseus.
Weeping for him, he spoke to the assembly:
"My friends, this man has planned and carried out
dreadful acts against Achaeans. He led
many fine courageous men off in his fleet,
then lost his hollow ships, with all men dead.
Now he's come and killed our finest men by far
among the Cephallenians. So come on,
before he can quickly get to Pylos
or to 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 murderers 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 let us go,
in case those men have a head start on us
and get across the sea."

As Eupeithes said this,
he wept, and all Achaeans were seized by pity.
Then Medon and the godlike singer, released
from sleep, approached them from Odysseus' house,
and stood up in their midst. They were astonished.
Then Medon, a shrewd man, spoke out.

"Men of Ithaca,
now hear me. Odysseus didn't plan these acts
without the gods' consent. I myself observed
an immortal god who stood beside him,
looking in every detail just like Mentor.
The deathless god appeared before Odysseus
at that time to spur him on to action,
and, at another time, charged through the hall,
terrifying the suitors. They collapsed in droves."

As Medon spoke, pale fear gripped them all. And then,
old warrior Halitherses, son of Mastor, addressed them.
He was the only man who could see past and future.
Bearing in the mind their common good, he spoke out,
saying these words:
"Men of Ithaca,
listen to me now, hear what I have to say.
What's happened now, my friends, has come about
because of your own stupidity.
You just would not follow my instructions
or Mentor's, that shepherd of his people,
and make your sons stop their reckless conduct,
their monstrous acts of wanton foolishness,
squandering a fine man's property and then
dishonouring his wife, claiming the man
never would come back. So now, let that be,
and agree with what I'm going to tell you—
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'd just said.
They'd been won over by Eupeithes. And so,
they quickly rushed away to get their weapons.
Once they'd put gleaming bronze around their bodies,
they gathered in a group on the spacious grounds

before the city. Eupeithes was the leader
in this foolishness. He thought he could avenge
the killing of his son, but he would not return—
that's where he was going to meet his fate.
Then Athena spoke to Zeus, Cronos' son, 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 be creating
further brutal war and dreadful battle,
or bring both sides together here as friends?"

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 devised this plan all on your own,
so Odysseus could take out his revenge
against these men, after he got back?
Do as you wish. But I'll lay out for you
what I think is right. Since lord Odysseus
has paid back the suitors, let them swear
a binding oath that he'll remain their king
all his life, and let's make them forget
the killing of their sons and brothers.
Let them love each other as they used to,
and let there be wealth and peace in plenty."

His words stirred up Athena, who was already keen.
She swooped down from the heights of Mount Olympus.
Meanwhile, once his group had eaten their hearts' fill
of food as sweet as honey, lord Odysseus,
who had endured so much, was the first to speak:
"Someone should go outside to look around,
see whether they are getting close to us."

Once he said this, a son of Dolius went out,
as he had ordered. He stood in the doorway

and saw all those men approaching. At once
he called out to Odysseus—his words had wings:
"They're here, close by. Let's get our weapons—
we'd better hurry!"

At these words, they leapt up
and put on their armour. Odysseus and his men
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.
When they'd put glittering bronze around their bodies,
they opened up the doors and went outside. Odysseus
led them out. But then Athena, Zeus' daughter,
with the shape and voice of Mentor, came up to them.
When lord Odysseus, who'd endured so much, saw her,
he was glad and quickly spoke up 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 ancestral family—
for in earlier times we've been preeminent
for strength and courage everywhere on earth."

Shrewd Telemachus then answered him and said:
"Dear father, if that's what you want, you'll see
that I, with my heart as it is at present,
won't shame your family. I'll do what you say."

When he said this, Laertes felt great joy and said:
"You dear gods, what a day this is for me!
I'm really 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 to him:
"Child of Arcesius,

by far the dearest of all those I cherish,
pray to the young girl with the flashing eyes
and to Father Zeus, then without delay
raise that long spear of yours and throw it."

Pallas Athena spoke and then breathed into him
enormous power. Laertes said a prayer
to great Zeus' daughter, and quickly lifting up
his long-shadowed spear, he threw it. It hit home,
through the bronze cheek piece on Eupeithes' helmet,
which didn't stop the spear—the bronze point went on through.
Eupeithes fell down with a thud, his armour
crashing round him. Odysseus and his splendid son
charged at the fighters in the front, striking them
with swords and two-edged spears. They'd have killed them all,
cut them down so none of them returned, had not
Athena, daughter of aegis-bearing Zeus, cried out—
her voice held back every man in that whole army.
"Men of Ithaca, stop this disastrous war,
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 dropped their weapons and all fell on the ground,
at that goddess' resounding voice. They turned round,
back towards the city, eager to save their lives.
Then much-enduring lord Odysseus gave out
a fearful 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 at the feet of the bright-eyed daughter
of that mighty father. And then Athena,
goddess with the glittering eyes, said to Odysseus:
"Resourceful Odysseus, Laertes' son,
and child of Zeus, hold back. Stop this fight,
this impartial war, in case thundering Zeus,

[700] who sees far and wide, grows angry with you."

Once Athena spoke, Odysseus obeyed,
joy in his heart. And then Pallas Athena,
daughter of aegis-bearing Zeus, in shape and form
looking just like Mentor, had both parties swear
a solemn pact designed to last forever.