BOOK NINETEEN
Eurycleia Recognizes Odysseus

[Odysseus and Telemachus hide the weapons; Telemachus leaves to go to bed; Penelope comes down; Melantho insults Odysseus a second time; Penelope upbraids her, then has a conversation with Odysseus; Penelope tells him of her deception of the suitors; Odysseus gives her a long false story of his Cretan ancestry and talks of meeting Odysseus; Penelope questions him about Odysseus' clothes and comrades; Penelope orders Eurycleia to wash Odysseus' feet; the story of the scar on Odysseus' knee, how Odysseus got his name; the hunting expedition with Autolycus; Eurycleia recognizes the scar; Odysseus threatens her; Penelope and Odysseus resume their conversation; Penelope tells about her dream; Odysseus comments on the interpretation of the dream; Penelope talks about the two gates of dreams, then proposes the contest of firing an arrow through twelve axe heads; Odysseus urges her to have the contest; Penelope goes upstairs to sleep.]

So lord Odysseus remained in the hall behind,
thinking of ways he might kill off the suitors,
with Athena's help. He spoke out immediately
to Telemachus—his words had wings:
"Telemachus,
all these war weapons we must stash inside,
and when the suitors notice they're not there
and question you, then reassure them,
using gentle language:

'I've put them away
in a place far from the smoke. Those weapons
are no longer like the ones Odysseus left
when he set off for Troy so long ago.
They're tarnished. That's how much the fire's breath
has reached them. Moreover, a god has set
greater fear inside my heart—you may drink
too much wine and then fight amongst yourselves
and wound each other. That would shame the feast,
disgrace your courtship. For iron by itself
can draw a man to use it.'"

Odysseus finished.
His dear father's words convinced Telemachus.
He called his nurse, Eurycleia, and said to her:
"Nurse, come and help me. Keep the women
in their rooms, so I can put away in storage
these fine weapons belonging to my father.
Since the time he left, when I was still a child,
no one's looked after them, and smoky fires
have tarnished them. Now I want to keep them
beyond the reach of breathing fire."

His dear nurse, Eurycleia, then said to him:
"Yes, my child, may you always think about
caring for this house, guarding all its wealth.
But come, who will go off and fetch a light
and carry it for you, if you won't let
the servant women, who could hold torches,
walk out in front of you?"

Shrewd Telemachus
then answered her and said:
"This stranger will.
I won't let anyone who's touched my food
rest idle, not even if he's come here
from somewhere far away."

Telemachus spoke.
She did not reply—her words could find no wings.
So she locked shut the doors in that stately room.
Then both Odysseus and his splendid son jumped up
and carried away the helmets, embossed shields,
and pointed spears. In front of them Pallas Athena
held up a golden lamp and cast a lovely light.
Then suddenly Telemachus spoke to his father:
"Father, what my eyes are witnessing
is an enormous wonder. In this room
the walls and beautiful pedestals,

the fir beams and high supporting pillars
are glowing in my eyes, as if lit up
by blazing fire. Some god must be inside,
one of those who hold wide heaven."

Resourceful Odysseus
then answered him and said:
"Keep quiet.
Check those ideas and ask no questions.
This is how gods who hold Olympus work.
You should go and get some rest. I'll stay here,
so I can agitate the servants even more—
and your mother. As she laments, she'll ask
for each and every detail."

Odysseus finished.
Telemachus moved off, going through the hall,
below the flaming torches, out into the room
where he used to rest when sweet sleep came to him.
Then he lay down there and waited for the dawn.
Lord Odysseus remained behind, in the hall,
thinking how to kill the suitors with Athena's help.
Then wise Penelope emerged out of her room,
looking like Artemis or golden Aphrodite.
Beside the fire where she used to sit, they placed
a chair for her, inlaid with ivory and silver.
Imalcius, a craftsman, had made it years ago.
He'd fixed a footstool underneath, part of the chair,
on which they usually threw a large sheep fleece.
Here wise Penelope sat, while white-armed servants
came from the women's hall and started to remove
the lavish amounts of food, the tables, and the cups
high-spirited suitors had been drinking from.
The embers in the braziers they threw on the floor,
then filled them up with plenty of fresh wood
for warmth and light. But then Melantho once again
went at Odysseus, chiding him a second time:

"Stranger, are you still going to pester us
even now, all through the night in here,
roaming around the house, spying on women?
Get outside, you wretch, and be satisfied
with what you've had to eat, or soon enough
you'll be beaten with a torch and leave that way."

Resourceful Odysseus scowled and said to her:
"You're a passionate woman—why is it
you go at me like this, with such anger
in your heart? Is it because I'm filthy,
wear shabby clothing on my body,
and beg throughout the district? I have to—
sheer need forces that on me. That's what
beggars and vagabonds are like. But once
I was wealthy and lived in my own home,
in a rich house, too, among my people.
I often gave gifts to a wanderer like me,
no matter who he was or what his needs
when he arrived. I had countless servants
and many other things that people have
when they live well and are considered rich.
But then Zeus, son of Cronos, ruined me.
That's what he wanted, I suppose. And so,
woman, take care that you, too, someday
don't lose all that grace which now makes you
stand out among the woman servants here.
Your mistress may lose her temper with you
and make things difficult, or Odysseus
may come home, for there's still a shred of hope.
Even if he's dead and won't come home again,
thanks to Apollo he's got Telemachus,
a son just like himself. And no woman
in these halls who acts with recklessness
escapes his notice. He's a child no longer."

Odysseus spoke. Wise Penelope heard his words

and rebuked Melantho, saying to her:
"You can be sure,
you bold and reckless bitch, I've noticed
your gross acts. And you'll wipe away the stain
with your own head. You clearly know full well,
because you heard me say it—I'm intending
to ask this stranger in my halls some questions
about my husband, since I'm in so much pain."

Penelope paused, then spoke to Eurynome,
her housekeeper, and said:
"Eurynome,
bring a chair over here with a fleece on it,
so the stranger can sit down and talk to me
and hear me out. I want to question him."

Once Penelope had spoken, Eurynome
quickly brought a polished chair and placed it there.
She threw a sheep fleece over it. Lord Odysseus,
who'd been through so much, sat down on it. And then
wise Penelope began their conversation:
"Stranger, first of all I'll ask this question—
Who are you among men? Where are you from?
From what city? And where are your parents?"

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:
"Lady, no human living on boundless earth
could find fault with you. And your fame extends
right up to spacious heaven, as it does
for an excellent king who fears the gods
and governs many courageous people,
upholding justice. His black earth is rich
in barley and in wheat, and his orchards
are laden down with fruit. His flocks bear young
and never fail, while the sea yields up its fish.
All this from his fine leadership. With him
his people thrive. So here inside your home

ask me questions about anything except
my family or my native land, in case
[150] you fill my heart with still more sorrow,
as I remember them. For I'm a man
who's suffered a great deal, and there's no need
for me to sit here weeping my laments
in someone else's house—for it's not good
to be sad all the time and never stop,
in case the slaves or you yourself resent it
and say I swim in tears because my mind
is now besotted, loaded down with wine."

Wise Penelope then answered him and said:
[160] "Stranger, the immortal gods destroyed
my excellence in form and body
when Argives got on board their ships for Troy.
Odysseus went with them, my husband.
If he would come and organize my life,
my reputation then would be more famous,
more beautiful, as well. But now I grieve.
Some god has laid so many troubles on me.
For all the finest men who rule the islands—
Dulichium, Same, wooded Zacynthus—
[170] and those who live in sunny Ithaca,
these men are courting me against my will.
And they are ruining the house. That's why
I have no time for suppliants and strangers,
or for heralds who do the people's work.1
Instead I waste away my heart, longing
for Odysseus. They're all keen on marriage,
but I trick them with my weaving. Some god
first breathed into my heart the thought
that I should place a huge loom in the halls
[180] and weave a robe, wide and delicate fabric.
So I spoke to them at once:

'You young men,

my suitors, since lord Odysseus is dead,
you're keen for me to marry, but 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 I said, and their proud hearts agreed.
So every day I'd weave at the big loom.
But at night, once the torches were set up,
I'd unravel it. And so for three years
I tricked Achaeans into believing me.
But as the seasons came and months rolled on,
and many days passed by, the fourth year came.
That's when they came and caught me undoing yarn—
thanks to my slaves, those ungrateful bitches.
They all shouted speeches at me. And so,
against my will, I was forced to finish off
that piece of weaving. Now I can't escape
the marriage or invent some other scheme.
My parents are really urging me to marry,
and my son is worrying about those men
eating away his livelihood. He notices,
because he's now a man, quite capable
of caring for a household to which Zeus
has granted fame. But tell me of your race,
where you come from. For you did not spring up
out of an oak tree in some ancient story
or from a stone."

Odysseus, a man of many schemes,
then answered her and said:
"Noble lady,

wife of Odysseus, Laertes' son,
will you never stop asking your questions
about my family? All right, I'll tell you.
But you'll be giving me more sorrows
than those which grip me here—as is the rule
when a man's been absent from his native land
as long as I have now, wandering around,
through many towns of mortal men, suffering
great distress. Still, I'll answer what you ask,
the questions you have posed. There's a place
in the middle of the wine-dark sea called Crete,
a lovely, fruitful land surrounded by the sea.
Many men live there, more than one can count,
in ninety cities. The dialects they speak
are all mixed up. There are Achaeans
and stout-hearted native Cretans, too,
Cydonians and three groups of Dorians,
and noble Pelasgians. Their cities
include great Cnossos, where king Minos reigned,
after he'd talked with Zeus for nine full years,
the father of my father, brave Deucalion.
Deucalion had me and king Idomeneus.
But Idomeneus went away to Troy
in his beaked ships with Atreus' sons.
My name's well known—Aethon—the younger son,
but Idomeneus was older by birth
and was the finer man. I saw Odysseus there
and gave him welcoming gifts. The wind's force
brought him to Crete, as he was sailing on,
bound for Troy—it drove him off his course
past Malea. He'd moored at Amnisus,
where one finds the cave of Eilithyia,
in a difficult harbour, fleeing the storm,
but only just. He went immediately
up to the city, seeking Idomeneus,
saying he was his loved and honoured friend.
But by now nine or ten days had gone by

since Idomeneus had set off for Troy
in his beaked ships. So I invited him
into my house and entertained him well,
with a kind welcome, using the rich store
of goods inside my house. For the others,
comrades who followed him, I gathered up
and gave out barley from the public stores,
gleaming wine, and cattle for sacrifice,
enough to satisfy their hearts. And there
those Achaean lords remained twelve days.
The great North Wind held them there, penned them in—
he would not let them stand up on the earth.
Some angry deity had stirred him up.
But on the thirteenth day, the wind eased off,
and they put out to sea."

As Odysseus spoke,
he made the many falsehood seem like truth.
Penelope listened with tears flowing down.
Her flesh melted—just as on high mountains
snow melts away under West Wind's thaw,
once East Wind blows it down, and, as it melts,
the flowing rivers fill—that's how her fair cheeks
melted then, as she shed tears for her husband,
who was sitting there beside her.2 Odysseus
felt pity in his heart for his grieving wife,
but his eyes stayed firm between his eyelids,
like horn or iron, and he kept up his deceit
to conceal his tears. But then, when Penelope
had had enough of crying and mourning,
she spoke to him once more and said:
"Now, stranger,
I think I'd really like to test you out,
to see if you did, in fact, entertain
my husband and his fine companions there,
in your halls, as you just claimed. So tell me
what sort of clothes he had on his body

and the kind of man he was. And tell me
about his comrades who went there with him."

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:
"Lady, it's difficult to tell you this
for any man who's been away so long—
it's now the twentieth year since he went off
and left my country. But I'll describe for you
how my heart pictures him. Lord Odysseus
wore a woolen purple cloak, a double one.
The brooch on it was made of gold—it had
a pair of clasps and a fine engraving
on the front, a dog held in its forepaws
a dappled fawn, gripping it as it writhed.
Everyone who saw it was astonished
at those gold animals—the dog held down
the fawn, as he throttled it, and the fawn
was struggling with its feet, trying to flee.
I noticed the tunic on his body—
glistening like the skin of a dry onion—
it was so soft and shone out like the sun.
In fact, many women kept watching him
in wonder. And I'll tell you something else.
Keep in mind I don't know if Odysseus
dressed his body in these clothes at home,
or if some comrade gave them to him
on his swift ship after he went aboard,
or perhaps a stranger did—Odysseus
was liked by many men. Few Achaeans
could equal him. I gave him gifts myself,
a bronze sword, a lovely purple cloak,
with a double fold, and a fringed tunic,
and I sent him off on his well-benched ship
with every honour. And in his company
he had a herald, older than himself,
but not by much. I'll tell you about him.
He looked like this—he had rounded shoulders,

a dark skin, and curly hair. And his name
was Eurybates. Odysseus valued him
more than any other of his comrades—
he had a mind that matched his own."

As Odysseus spoke, in Penelope he roused
desire to weep still more, because she recognized
in what Odysseus said signs that he spoke the truth.
But then, when she'd had enough of tearful sorrow,
she answered him and said these words:
"Stranger,
though I pitied you before, in my home
you'll now find genuine welcome and respect.
I was the one who gave him that clothing
you talk about. I brought it from the room,
folded it, and pinned on the shining brooch
to be an ornament for him. But now,
I'll not be welcoming him here again,
when he returns to his dear native land.
Odysseus set off with an evil fate
to catch a glimpse of wicked Ilion,
a place that never should be spoken of."

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:
"Noble wife of Odysseus, Laertes' son,
don't mar your lovely skin or waste your heart
by weeping for your husband any more.
I don't blame you in the least, for anyone
would mourn the husband she had married
and then lost, one she'd had loving sex with
and to whom she borne a child, even if
he were not Odysseus, who, people say
is like the gods. But end your crying,
and listen to my words. I'll tell you the truth,
hiding nothing—for I've already heard
about Odysseus' return. He's close by,
in the wealthy land of Thesprotians,

still alive and bringing much fine treasure
with him. He's urging men to give him gifts
throughout that land. He lost his loyal friends
on the wine-dark sea and his hollow ship,
as he was moving from the island Thrinacia.
Zeus and Helios were angry with him—
his crew had slaughtered Helios' cattle.
So they all perished in the surging sea.
But Odysseus, holding onto the ship's keel,
was tossed by waves on shore, in the land
of the Phaeacians, who by their descent
are close relations of the gods. These men
honoured him with all their hearts, just as if
he were a god. They gave him many gifts
and were keen to bring him home unharmed.
Odysseus would have been here long ago,
but to his heart it seemed a better thing
to visit many lands collecting wealth.
For above all mortal men, Odysseus
knows ways to win many advantages.
No other man can rival him in this.
That's what Pheidon, the Thesprotian king,
told me, and he swore to me in person,
as he poured libations in his home,
the ship was launched and comrades were prepared
to take him back to his dear native land.
But before they left he sent me away.
It happened that a Thesprotian ship
was sailing for wheat-rich Dulichium.
He showed me all the rich possessions
Odysseus had collected. There was enough
to feed his family for ten generations—
that's how much was lying in storage there
in that king's house. Odysseus, he said,
had gone to Dodona to find out there,
from the towering oak, what plans Zeus had
for the voyage back to his dear native land,

after being away so long.3 Should he come
openly or in secret? He's near by and safe
and will be here soon. He won't stay away
from his friends and native land much longer.
I'll make an oath on that for you. May Zeus
be my first witness, highest and best of gods,
and the hearth of excellent Odysseus,
which I've reached, all these things will happen
just as I describe. In this very month
Odysseus will come, as the old moon wanes
and the new moon starts to rise."

Wise Penelope
then answered him and said:
"O stranger,
I wish what you have said might come about.
You'd soon come to recognize my friendship,
so many gifts from me that any man
who met you would call you truly blessed.
But my heart has a sense of what will be—
Odysseus won't be coming home again,
and you'll not find a convoy out of here,
because there are no leaders in this house,
not the quality of man Odysseus was,
if there was ever such a man, to welcome
honoured strangers and send them on their way.
But, you servant women, wash this stranger,
and prepare a place to sleep—a bed, cloaks,
bright coverlets—so in warmth and comfort
he may reach Dawn with her golden throne.
Tomorrow morning early give him a bath
and rub him down with oil, so he'll be ready
to take his seat inside the hall and eat his meal
beside Telemachus. Things will go badly
for any one of them who injures him
and pains his heart—that man will accomplish
nothing further here, even though his rage

is truly fierce. How will you learn from me,
stranger, that I in any way excel
among all women for my prudent plans
and my intelligence, if you dine here,
in my halls, dressed in filthy ragged clothes?
Men don't live long. And if a man is harsh
and thinks unfeelingly, then everyone
lays painful curses on his future life,
and when he's dead they all make fun of him.
But if a man is innocent and thinks
with no sense of injury, then strangers
bear his fame far and wide among all men,
and many say of him 'He's a true man.'"

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:
"Honoured wife of Odysseus, Laertes' son,
I've hated cloaks and shining coverlets
since I first left the mountain snows of Crete,
when I departed on my long-oared ship.
So I'll lie down, as I've been doing before
through sleepless nights. I've lain many nights
on foul bedding, awaiting bright-throned Dawn.
And having my feet washed brings no delight
into my heart. No woman in your household
will touch my feet, none of the serving women
in your home, unless there is an old one,
who knows true devotion and has suffered
in her heart as many pains as I have.
I'd not resent it if she touched my feet."

Wise Penelope then answered him and said:
"Dear stranger, no guest from distant lands
who's come into my house has ever been
as wise as you or more welcome—your words
are all so sensible and thoughtful. I do have
an old woman with an understanding heart.
She gave my helpless husband her fine care

the day his mother first gave birth to him.
Although she's weak and old, she'll wash your feet.
So come now, stand up, wise Eurycleia,
and bathe a man the same age as your master.
Perhaps Odysseus has feet and hands like his,
for mortal men soon age when times are bad."

Penelope spoke, and the old woman held her hands
over her face and shed warm tears. She spoke out
uttering words of sorrow:
"Alas for you, my child.
There's nothing I can do. Zeus must despise you
above all people, though you have a heart
that fears the gods. No mortal up to now
has given Zeus, who hurls the thunderbolt,
so many rich burned pieces of the thigh,
or offered such well-chosen sacrifice
as you've made to him, praying you might reach
a sleek old age and raise your splendid son.
But now from you alone he's taken away
the day that you'll return. And it may be
that women in some strange and far-off land
make fun of him, as well, when he arrives
at some famous home, the way these bitches,
mock you here, all of them. To stop their slurs,
their insults, you won't let them wash your feet.
But Icarius' daughter, wise Penelope,
has asked me to do it, and I'm willing.
So for Penelope's sake I'll bathe your feet,
and for yours, since the heart in me is stirred
with sorrow. But come now, listen to me.
Hear what I say. Many worn-out strangers
have come here, but none of them, I tell you,
was so like him to look at—your stature,
voice, and feet are all just like Odysseus."

Then resourceful Odysseus answered her and said:

"Old woman, those who've seen the two of us
with their own eyes all say the same—we both
look very like each other, as you've seen
and mentioned."

After these words from Odysseus,
the old woman took the shining bowl to wash his feet.
She poured in plenty of cold water and added
warmer water to it. Odysseus then sat down
some distance from the hearth and quickly turned around
towards the darkness. For suddenly in his heart
he was afraid that, when she touched him, she might see
a scar he had, and then the truth would be revealed.
She came up and began to wash her master.
She recognized the scar immediately, a wound
a boar's white tusk had given him many years ago,
when he'd gone to Parnassus, making a visit
to Autolycus, his mother's splendid father,
and his sons. That man could surpass all others
in thievery and swearing. A god himself, Hermes,
had given him those skills. For him he used to burn
pleasing offerings, thighs of younger goats and lambs.
So Hermes traveled with him, bringing willing favours.
When he came to the wealthy land of Ithaca,
Autolycus had met his daughter's new born son,
and once he'd finished dinner, Eurycleia
set the child upon his knees and spoke to him:
"Autolycus, you must personally find
your daughter's child a name. We've been praying
for a long time now to have this child."

So Autolycus then answered her and said:
"My son-in-law and daughter, give the boy
whatever name I say. Since I've come here
as one who's been enraged at many people,
men and women, on this all-nourishing earth,
let him be called Odysseus, a man of rage.4

[530] As for me, when he's become a full-grown man
and comes to see his mother's family home
at Parnassus, where I keep my property,
I'll give him some of it and send him off.
He'll be delighted."

It was for that reason,
to get those splendid presents from Autolycus,
that Odysseus had come. Autolycus and his sons
clasped his hand in welcome, greeted him with kindness,
and his mother's mother, Amphithea, hugged him,
kissed him on the head and both his lovely eyes.
[540] Autolycus then called out to his noble sons
to prepare a meal, and they answered his call.
Quickly they brought in a male ox, five years old,
flayed it, and prepared the beast, slicing up the limbs.
They cut these skillfully, pierced the meat with spits,
roasted them with care, and passed around the portions.
Then they dined all day long until the sun went down.
They feasted equally—their hearts were quite content.
But when the sun went down and darkness came,
they then lay down to rest and took the gift of sleep.
[550] But as soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
they went off to the hunt, with Autolycus' sons
and dogs, as well. And lord Odysseus left with them.
They climbed up steep, tree-covered Mount Parnassus
and quickly reached its windy gullies. By this time,
Helios had just begun to strike the fields,
rising from deep streams of gently flowing Ocean.
The beaters reached a clearing. The dogs went first,
ahead of them, following the tracks. Behind them,
came Autolycus' sons, with lord Odysseus
[560] in their group, close to the dogs. He was holding up
his long-shadowed spear. Now, right there a huge wild boar
was lying in a tangled thicket—it was so dense
the power of watery winds could not get through,
none of Helios' rays could pierce it, and the rain

would never penetrate. There were fallen leaves
in piles around the place. The sound of rustling feet
from men and dogs, as they pushed on the hunt,
came round the beast, and he charged from the thicket
to confront them—his back was really bristling,
eyes flashing fire, as he stood at bay before them.
Odysseus rushed in first, his strong hands gripping
the long spear, keen to strike the boar. But the beast
got the jump on him and struck him above the knee,
charging at him from the side, a long gash in his flesh
sliced by its tusk, but it didn't reach Odysseus' bone.
But then Odysseus struck the boar, hitting it
on its right shoulder. The bright point of his spear
went clean through—the boar fell in the dust, squealing,
and its life force flew away. Autolycus' dear sons
attended to the carcass. They skillfully bound up
the wound on noble, godlike Odysseus, staunching
with a spell the flow of his dark blood. And then
they quickly went back to their dear father's home.
When Autolycus and Autolycus' sons
had fully cured him and presented splendid gifts,
they soon sent him back in a joyful frame of mind
to his native land in Ithaca. When he got back,
his father and his honoured mother were delighted,
asked him every detail of how he'd got the wound,
and he told them the truth—how, while he was hunting
with Autolycus' sons when he'd gone to Parnassus,
a boar's white tusk had gored him. That was the scar
the old woman was then holding in her hands.
She traced it out and recognized it. She dropped his foot.
His leg fell in the basin, and the bronze rang out.
It tipped onto its side. Water spilled out on the ground.
All at once, joy and sorrow gripped her heart. Her eyes
filled up with tears, and her full voice was speechless.
She reached up to Odysseus' chin and said:
"It's true, dear child.
You are Odysseus, and I didn't know you,

not till I'd touched all my master's body."

She spoke, and her eyes glanced over at Penelope,
anxious to tell her that her husband had come home.
But Penelope could not see her face or understand,
for Athena had diverted her attention.
Then Odysseus' arms reached out for Eurycleia—
with his right hand he grabbed her by the throat,
and with the other pulled her closer to him.
Then he said:
"My good mother, why this wish
to have me slaughtered? You yourself nursed me
at this breast of yours. Now in the twentieth year,
after suffering through numerous ordeals,
I've come back to my native land. And now,
you've recognized me—a god has put that
in your heart. Stay silent, so in these halls
no one else finds out. I'll tell you something—
and it will happen. If a god overpowers
these arrogant suitors, sets them under me,
I'll not spare you, though you are my nurse,
when I kill other women in my home."

Prudent Eurycleia then answered him:
"My child,
what words escaped the barrier of your teeth!
You know how strong and firm my spirit is.
I'll be as tough as a hard stone or iron.
I'll tell you something else. Keep it in mind.
If a god does overpower these lordly suitors
and sets them under you, then I'll tell you
about the women in your home, the ones
dishonouring you and those who bear no shame."

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:
"Good mother, why speak to me about them?
There's no need. I myself will look at them

and get to know each one. But keep this news
to yourself. Leave the matter with the gods."

Once Odysseus spoke, the old woman left the room
to fetch water for his feet, since what she'd had before
had all been spilled. When she'd finished bathing him,
she rubbed him with rich oil. Then Odysseus once more
pulled his chair closer to the fire to warm himself.
He hid the scar under his rags. Wise Penelope
began to speak. She said:
"Stranger, there's one small thing
I'll ask you for myself. Soon it will be time
to take a pleasant rest. And sleep is sweet
to anyone it seizes, even if he's troubled.
But some god has given me unmeasured grief,
for every day I get my joy from mourning,
from laments, as I look after my own work
and supervise the servants in the house.
But when night comes and Sleep grips everyone,
I lie in bed, and piercing worries crowd
my throbbing heart and give me great distress,
while I mourn. Just as Pandareus' daughter,
the nightingale of the green woods, sings out
her lovely song when early spring arrives,
perched up in thick foliage of the forest,
and pours forth her richly modulating voice
in wailing for her child, beloved Itylus,
lord Zethus' son, whom with a sword one day
she'd killed unwittingly—that's how my heart
moves back and forth in its uncertainty.5
Should I stay with my son and keep careful watch
on all possessions and my female slaves
and my large and lofty home, honouring
my husband's bed and what the people say,
or go off with the best of those Achaeans
who court me in my halls—the one who offers
countless bridal gifts. My son, while young

and with a feeble mind, would not permit
that I got married and left my husband's home.
But now he's grown—his youth has reached its limit—
he's begging me to go back home again,
to leave this house, for he's very worried
about the property which these Achaeans
are using up. But come, listen to my dream
and interpret it for me. In this house
I have twenty geese come from the water
to eat my wheat. And when I look at them
I am delighted. Then from the mountains
a huge hook-beaked eagle came and killed them—
snapping all their necks. They lay there in piles,
inside my hall, while he was carried up
into a shining sky. Now in that dream
I wept and wailed. Meanwhile, all around me
fair-haired women of Achaea gathered,
as, in my sorrow, I was there lamenting
that the eagle had slaughtered all my geese.
But he came back and, sitting on a beam
projecting from the roof, checked my sorrow,
and in a human voice spoke out to me:

'Daughter of famous Icarius,
you must be brave. That was no dream,
but a true glimpse of what will really happen.
The suitors are those geese, and I am here—
before I was an eagle, but now I've come
as your own husband, who will execute
a cruel fate on each and every suitor.'

"That's what he said. Then sweet sleep released me.
When I looked around the hall, I saw the geese—
they were pecking at the wheat beside the trough,
as they used to do before."

Resourceful Odysseus

then answered her and said:
"Lady, it's quite impossible
to twist another meaning from this dream,
since the real Odysseus has revealed to you
how he will end all this. The suitors' deaths
are all plain to see, and not one of them
will escape destruction and his fate."

Wise Penelope then gave him her reply:
"Stranger, stories told in dreams are difficult—
their meanings are not clear, and for people
they are not realized in every detail.
There are two gates for insubstantial dreams,
one made of horn and one of ivory.
Those which pass through the fresh-cut ivory
deceive—the words they bring are unfulfilled.
Those which come through the gate of polished horn,
once some mortal sees them, bring on the truth.
But, in my case, I don't think that strange dream
came through that gate. It really would have been
a welcome thing to me and to my son.
But I'll tell you something else. Keep it in mind.
That morning is already drawing near
which will separate me from Odysseus' house,
a day of evil omen. I'll now organize
a competition featuring those axes
he used to set inside his hall, in a line,
like a ship's ribs, twelve of them in all.
He'd stand far off and shoot an arrow through them.6
I'll now set up this contest for the suitors.
The one whose hand most deftly strings his bow
and shoots an arrow through all twelve axes
is the one I'll go with. I'll leave my house,
where I've been married, a very lovely home,
full of what one needs to live—even in dreams
it will stay in my memory forever."

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:
"Honoured wife of Odysseus, Laertes' son,
don't delay this contest in your halls
a moment longer. I can assure you,
Odysseus will be here with all his schemes,
before these men pick up the polished bow,
string it, and shoot an arrow through the iron."

Wise Penelope then answered him:
"Stranger,
if you wished to sit beside me in these halls
to bring me pleasure, sleep would never sit
on these eyelids of mine. But there's no way
men can go on forever without sleep.
Immortal gods have set a proper time
for every man on this grain-bearing earth.
So now I'll go up to my upper room
and lie down on the bed, which is for me
a place for grieving, always wet with tears,
since Odysseus went to wicked Ilion,
a name which never should be mentioned.
I'll lie down there. But you can stretch out here,
in the house, putting bedding on the floor.
Or let the servants make a bed for you."

Once she'd said this, she went to her bright upper room,
not alone, for two attendant women went with her.
When she and her servants reached the upper room,
she cried out for Odysseus, her dear husband,
till bright-eyed Athena cast sweet sleep on her eyelids.