CHAPTER ONE

BOOK EIGHT

BOOK EIGHT
Odysseus is Entertained in Phaeacia

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

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

"Come now, Phaeacian counsellor and leader,
come to the assembly to inform yourself
about the stranger who has just arrived

at the palace of our wise Alcinous.
He's been wandering on the sea, but in form
he looks like one of the immortals."

With such words she roused the heart and spirit in each man,
and so the seats in the assembly filled up quickly,
as people gathered there. Many of those present
were astonished when they saw Laertes' clever son—
Athena had poured an amazing poise on him
across his shoulders and his head and made him look
taller and more powerful, so the Phaeacians
would welcome him and he would win from them
respect and awe—and prevail in competition,
the many rival contests where Phaeacians
would be testing lord Odysseus. When the men
had all assembled for the meeting there,
Alcinous spoke to them and said:

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

the godlike minstrel Demodocus, the man
who has received from god the gift of song
above all others. He can entertain us
with any song his heart prompts him to sing."

Alcinous spoke and led them off. The sceptred kings
came after him, while a herald went to find
the godlike singer. Fifty-two hand-picked young men
went off, as Alcinous had ordered, to the shore
beside the restless sea. Once they reached the boat,
they dragged the black ship into deeper water,
set the mast and sails in place inside the vessel,
lashed the rowing oars onto their leather pivots,
then hoisted the white sail. Next, they moored the ship
well out to sea and then returned to the great home
of their wise king. Halls, corridors, and courtyards
were full of people gathering—a massive crowd,
young and old. On their behalf Alcinous slaughtered
eight white-tusked boars, two shambling oxen, and twelve sheep.
These carcasses they skinned and dressed and then prepared
a splendid banquet. Meanwhile the herald was returning
with the loyal singer, a man the Muse so loved
above all others. She'd given him both bad and good,
for she'd destroyed his eyes but had bestowed on him
the gift of pleasing song. The herald, Pontonous,
then brought up a silver-studded chair for him.
He set its back against a lofty pillar in their midst,
hung the clear-toned lyre on a peg above his head,
then showed him how to reach it with his hands.
The herald placed a lovely table at his side,
with food in a basket and a cup of wine to drink,
when his heart felt the urge. Then all those present
reached for the splendid dinner set in front of them.
Once they'd enjoyed their heart's fill of food and drink,
the minstrel was inspired by the Muse to sing
a song about the glorious deeds of warriors,
that tale, whose fame had climbed to spacious heaven,
about Odysseus and Achilles, son of Peleus,
when, at a lavish feast in honour of the gods,
they'd fought each other in ferocious argument.1
Still, in his heart Agamemnon, king of men,
had been glad to see the finest of Achaeans

quarrelling, for that's what he'd been told would happen,
when he'd crossed the stone threshold in sacred Pytho
to consult Phoebus Apollo in his oracle
and the god had answered him with this reply—
that from this point on, disasters would begin
for Trojans and Danaans, as great Zeus willed.
This was the song the celebrated minstrel sang.

Odysseus's strong hands took his long purple cloak,
pulled it above his head, and hid his handsome face.
He felt ashamed to let Phaeacians look at him
with tears streaming from his eyes. So every time
the godlike minstrel stopped the song, Odysseus
would wipe away the tears, take his two-handled cup,
and pour out a libation to the gods. But then,
when Demodocus started up again, urged to sing
by Phaeacian noblemen enjoying his song,
Odysseus would hide his head once more and groan.
He concealed the tears he shed from all those present,
except Alcinous, the only one who noticed,
since he sat beside him and heard his heavy sighs.
So Alcinous quickly spoke to the Phaeacians,
men who love the sea:

"Listen to me,
you counsellors and leaders of Phaeacians.
Now we have refreshed our spirits. We've shared
this food, and music has accompanied
our splendid banquet. So let's go outside
and test ourselves in all sorts of contests,
then this stranger, once he gets back home,
can tell his friends how much we surpass
all other men at wrestling and boxing,
at jumping and at running."

Once he'd said this,
Alcinous led them out, and they followed him.
The herald hung the clear-toned lyre on the peg,
took Demodocus by the hand, and led him out,
taking him along the very path other men,
Phaeacia's best, had walked along to watch the games.
So they made their way to the assembly ground.

A large crowd in their thousands followed them.
Many fine young men came forward to compete—
Acroneus, Ocyalus, and Elatreus,
then Nauteus, Prymneus, and Anchialus,
Eretmeus, too, along with Ponteus,
Proreus, Thoön, and Anabesineus,
with Amphialus, son of Polyneus,
son of Tecton. Euryalus came up, as well,
a match for man-destroying Ares, god of war,
son of Naubolus. His handsome looks and shape
made him, after Laodamas, who had no equal,
the finest of Phaeacians. Three sons of Alcinous
stepped out, as well—Halius, Laodomas,
and godlike Clytoneus. In the first contest
these men competed in the foot race on a course
laid out for them with markers. They all sprinted off,
moving quickly. A cloud of dust rose from the ground.
Clytoneus was by far the finest runner,
so he raced ahead and got back to the crowd,
leaving the others well behind, about as far
as the furrow laid down by a team of mules
in ploughing fallow land.2 Then the competitors
tested their skill in the painful sport of wrestling,
and of all the noble princes Euryalus
proved himself the best. Next, in the leaping contest
Amphialus came out victorious, and then,
Elatreus triumphed in the discus throw,
as did Laodamas, fine son of Alcinous,
in the boxing match. Once they'd enjoyed these contests,
Laodamas, son of Alcinous, spoke to them:

"Come, my friends, why don't we ask the stranger
whether there's some contest he knows all about
and understands. From the way his body looks
he's no weakling—not in his thighs and calves,
his thick neck and those two strong upper arms—
lots of power there, no lack of youthful strength.
He's just exhausted by his many troubles.
The sea is bad at breaking a man down,
no matter what his strength. From what I know,
there's nothing worse."

Then Euryalus
answered him and said:

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

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

"Honoured stranger,
come and test yourself in competition,
if there's some sport in which you have great skill
It seems to me you know how to compete,
since there's no greater glory for a man
than what he wins with his own hands and feet.
So come, make the attempt. All that sorrow—
cast it from your heart. Your journey homeward
will no longer be postponed. Your ship is launched,
your comrades are all ready to set off."

Then shrewd Odysseus answered him and said:

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

Euryalus then replied by taunting Odysseus
right to his face:

"No, no, stranger. I don't see you
as someone with much skill in competition—
not a real man, the sort one often meets—
more like a sailor trading back and forth
in a ship with many oars, a captain

in charge of merchant sailors, whose concern
is for his freight—he keeps a greedy eye
on the cargo and his profit. You don't seem
to be an athlete."

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

"Stranger, what you've said is not so wise,
like a man whose foolishness is blinding him.
How true it is the gods do not present
their lovely gifts to all men equally,
not beauty, shape, or skill in speaking out.
One man's appearance may not be attractive,
but a god will crown his words with beauty,
so men rejoice to look on him—he speaks
with confidence and yet sweet modesty,
and thus stands out among those in assembly,
and when he moves throughout the city,
they look at him as if he were a god.
And yet another man can be so beautiful,
he looks like an immortal, but his words
are empty of all grace. That's how you are.
Your appearance is particularly handsome—
a god could hardly make that any finer—
but your mind is empty. Your rude speech
has stirred the spirit in my chest. For I
am not without skill in competition,
not the way you chat about. No. In fact,
when I relied upon my youth and strength,
I think I ranked among the very best.
Now I'm hurt and suffering, I'm holding back,
because I've gone through so much misery
in dealing with men's wars and painful waves.
But still, though I have undergone so much,
I'll test myself in these contests of yours.
For what you've said is gnawing at my heart—
that speech which you just made provokes me."

Odysseus finished and then, still wrapped up in his cloak,
picked up a hefty discus, bigger than the others,
much heavier than the ones used by Phaeacians

when they competed with each other. With a whirl,
he sent it flying from his powerful hand.
The stone made a humming sound as it flew along,
and the long-oared Phaeacians, men who love their ships,
ducked down near the ground, below that flying stone.
It sailed beyond the marks of all the other men,
speeding lightly from his hand, and Athena,
in the likeness of a man, noted where it fell.
Then she called out to him and said:

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

Athena spoke, and resourceful lord Odysseus
was happy, glad to see someone supporting him
in competition. So with a more cheerful voice
he said to the Phaeacians:

"Equal that, you youngsters.
I'll quickly send another after it,
which will go as far, I think, even further.
As for other contests, let any man
whose heart and spirit urge him, come up here,
and test himself. You've made me so worked up.
In boxing, wrestling, or running—I don't care.
Any one at all from you Phaeacians,
except Laodamas, for he's my host.
And what man fights against another man
who shows him hospitality? Anyone
who challenges the host who welcomes him
in a foreign land is a worthless fool,
for he is cancelling his own good fortune.
But from the others I'll not back away,
nor will I take them lightly. No. I wish
to see their skill and test them man to man.
In all the competitions men engage in,
I am no weakling. I well understand
how to use a polished bow with skill.

I was the first to shoot an arrow off
and, in a multitude of enemies,
to kill a man, even as companions
[280] standing close by me were still taking aim.
In that Trojan land, when Achaeans shot,
the only one who beat me with the bow
was Philoctetes.3 But of all the rest
I claim I'm far the best—of mortal men,
I mean, ones now on earth who feed on bread.
For I won't seek to make myself a match
for men of earlier times—for Hercules,
or Eurytus of Oechalia, warriors
who competed with the gods in archery.
[290] That's why great Eurytus was killed so young
and did not reach old age in his own home.
Apollo, in his anger, slaughtered him,
because Eurytus had challenged him
in a contest with their bows. With my spear,
I throw further than any other man
can shoot an arrow. But in the foot race
I'm afraid that one of the Phaeacians
may outrun me, for in those many waves
I was badly beaten down—on board ship
[300] I did not have a large supply of food,
and so my legs are weak."

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

"Stranger, since you have not been ungracious
in your speech to us and wish to demonstrate
the merit you possess, in your anger
that this man came up and taunted you
in these games of ours, mocking your excellence
in a manner no one would ever do,
[310] if in his heart he fully understood
how to speak correctly, come, hear me now,
so you can tell this to some other hero,
when you're back in your own home and feasting
with your wife and children there beside you,
remembering our qualities, the skills

Zeus gave us when our ancestors were here,
which still endure. We have no special gift
in boxing fights or wrestling, but we run fast.
We're the finest sailors, love feasts, the lyre,
dancing, new clothes, warm baths, and going to bed.
So come, all those of you among Phaeacians
who dance the best, perform for us, and then
our guest, when he gets back, can tell his friends
just how much we surpass all other men
in seamanship, speed on foot, dance, and song.
Let a man go and get that sweet-toned lyre
for Demodocus—it's somewhere in the hall."

Godlike Alcinous finished. The herald got up
to fetch the hollow lyre from the royal palace.
Nine officials chosen from among the people,
men who organized each detail of their meetings,
stood up, smoothed off a dancing space, and then marked out
a fair and spacious circle. The herald came up,
carrying the clear-toned lyre for Demodocus,
who then moved to the centre. Around the singer
stood boys in the first bloom of youth, skilled dancers,
whose feet then struck the consecrated dancing ground.
In his heart, Odysseus was amazed. He marvelled
at the speed with which they moved their dancing feet.

The minstrel struck the opening chords to his sweet song—
how Ares loved the fair-crowned Aphrodite,
how in Hephaestus' house they first had sex
in secret, and how Ares gave her many gifts,
while he disgraced the bed of lord Hephaestus.4
But sun god Helios observed them making love
and came at once to tell Hephaestus. Once he heard
the unwelcome news, Hephaestus went into his forge,
pondering some nasty scheme deep in his heart.
He set up his massive anvil on its block,
then forged a net no one could break or loosen,
so they'd have to stay immobile where they were.
When, in his rage, he had made that snare for Ares,
he went into the room which housed his marriage bed,
anchored the netting all around the bed posts,
and then hung loops of it from roof beams high above,

fine as spiders' webs, impossible to see,
even for a blessed god—that's how skillfully
he made that net. Once he'd organized the snare
around the bed, he announced a trip to Lemnos,
that well-built citadel, his favourite place by far
of all the lands on earth. Ares of the Golden Reins,
who maintained a constant watch, saw Hephaestus,
the celebrated master artisan, leaving home,
and went running over to Hephaestus' house,
eager to have sex with fair-crowned Aphrodite.
She had just left the presence of her father Zeus,
mighty son of Cronos, and was sitting down.
Ares charged inside the house, clutched her hand, then spoke,
saying these words to her:

"Come, my love,
let's get into bed—make love together.
Hephaestus is not home. No doubt he's gone
to visit Lemnos and the Sintians,
those men who speak like such barbarians."5

Ares spoke. To Aphrodite having sex with him
seemed quite delightful. So they went off to bed
and lay down there together. But then the crafty net
made by Hephaestus' ingenuity fell round them,
so they could not move their limbs or lift their bodies.
After a while, they realized they could not get out.
Then the famous crippled god came back to them—
he turned round before he reached the land of Lemnos.
Helios had stayed on watch and gave him a report.
With a grieving heart, Hephaestus went up to his home,
stood at the front door, where a cruel anger gripped him.
He made a dreadful cry, calling out to all the gods:

"Father Zeus, all you other sacred gods
who live forever, come here, so you can see
something disgusting and ridiculous—
Aphrodite, Zeus's daughter, scorns me
and lusts after Ares, the destroyer,
because he's beautiful, with healthy limbs,
while I was born deformed. I'm not to blame.
My parents are! I wish they'd never borne me!

See how these two have gone to my own bed
and are lying there, having sex together,
while I look on in pain. But I don't think
they want to stay lying down like this for long,
no matter how much they may be in love.
They'll both soon lose the urge to stay in bed.
But this binding snare will confine them here,
until her father gives back all those presents,
courting gifts I gave him for that shameless bitch—
a lovely daughter but a sex-crazed wife."6

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

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

That's how the gods then talked to one another.

But lord Apollo, son of Zeus, questioned Hermes:

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

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

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

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

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

The famous lame god then replied:

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

Earthshaker Poseidon
then answered him and said:

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

Then the celebrated crippled god replied:

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

After saying this,
powerful Hephaestus then untied the netting.

Once they'd been released from their strong chains, both gods
jumped up immediately—Ares went off to Thrace,
and laughter-loving Aphrodite left for Paphos,
in Cyprus, where she has her sanctuary, her sacred altar.
There the Graces bathed and then anointed her
with heavenly oil, the sort that gleams upon the gods,
who live forever. Next, they took some gorgeous clothes
and dressed her—the sight was marvellous to see.

That was the song the famous minstrel sang.
As he listened, Odysseus felt joy in his heart—
long-oared Phaeacians, famous sailors, felt it, too.
Alcinous then asked Laodamas and Halius
to dance alone. No man could match their dancing skill.
The two men picked up a lovely purple ball,
which clever Polybus had made for them.
Then, leaning back, one of them would throw it high,
towards the shadowy clouds, and then the other,
before his feet touched ground, would catch it easily.
Once they had shown their skill in tossing it straight up,
they threw it back and forth, as they kept dancing
on the life-sustaining earth, while more young men
stood at the edge of the arena, beating time.
The dancing rhythms made a powerful sound.
Then lord Odysseus spoke:

"Mighty Alcinous,
most renowned among all men, you claimed
your dancers were the best, and now, indeed,
what you said is true. When I gaze at them,
I'm lost in wonder."

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

"Leaders and counsellors of the Phaeacians,
listen—this stranger seems to me a man
with an uncommon wisdom. So come now,
let's give him gifts of friendship, as is right.
Twelve distinguished kings are rulers here
and govern in this land, and I myself

am the thirteenth king. Let each one of you
bring a fresh cloak and tunic, newly washed,
and a talent of pure gold. All of this
we should put together very quickly,
so this stranger has his gifts in hand
and goes to dinner with a joyful heart.
Euryalus must apologize in person
to the stranger, verbally and with a gift,
for what he said is not acceptable."

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

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

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

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

Then Odysseus, that resourceful man, replied and said:

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

Odysseus spoke
and slung the silver-studded sword around his shoulders.
As the sun went down, splendid presents were brought in,
carried to Alcinous' home by worthy heralds.
The sons of noble Alcinous took the lovely gifts
and set them down before their honoured mother.
With powerful king Alcinous leading them,
they came in and sat down on their upraised thrones.
Mighty Alcinous then said to Arete:

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

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

"You must attend to the lid yourself,
and secure it quickly with a knot,
so no one robs you on your journey,
perhaps when you are lost in a sweet sleep
sometime later, as your black ship sails on."

Long-suffering lord Odysseus heard what she advised.
He quickly shut the lid and bound it with a knot,
a tricky one which he'd learned from queenly Circe.
Then the housekeeper invited him to step
into the bathing tub. His heart was filled with joy
to see hot water—he'd not had such welcome care
since the day he had left fair-haired Calypso's home.
Till then he had been treated always like a god.
The servant women washed him, rubbed him down with oil,
and dressed him in a handsome cloak and tunic.
He left his bath and went to drink wine with the men.
Nausicaa, whose beauty was a gift from god,
standing by the doorway of that well-built hall,
looked at Odysseus and was filled with wonder.
She spoke winged words to him:

"Farewell, stranger.
When you are back in your own land,
I hope you will remember me sometimes,
since you owe your life to me."

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

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

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

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

At Odysseus' words, the herald took the serving
and handed it to noble Demodocus,
who accepted it with a delighted heart.
Their hands reached out to take the tasty food
prepared and set out there before them. And then,
when they'd had their heart's fill of food and drink,
quick-witted Odysseus said to Demodocus:

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

Odysseus spoke. And the minstrel, inspired by god,
began to sing to them, taking up the story
at the point where Argives, having burned their huts
and gone on board their well-oared ships, were sailing off,
while those warriors led by glorious Odysseus
were at Troy's meeting ground, hidden in the horse.7
Trojans had dragged the horse all by themselves

inside their citadel. It stood there, while Trojans
sat and talked around it, confused what they should do.
There were three different options people favoured—
to split the hollow wood apart with pitiless bronze,
or drag it to the heights and throw it from the rocks,
or let it stay there as a great offering to the gods,
something to assuage their anger. And that, indeed,
is what they finally did, for it was their fate
to be wiped out once they had within their city walls
a gigantic wooden horse in which lay hidden
all the finest Argives, bringing into Troy
death and destruction. Then Demodocus sang
how Achaea's sons left their hollow hiding place,
poured from the horse, and then destroyed the city.
He sang about the various ways those warriors
laid waste that lofty city and how Odysseus,
like Ares, god of war, and godlike Menelaus
went to the home of Deïphobus, where, he said,
Odysseus battled in the most horrendous fight,
from which he then emerged at last victorious,
thanks to assistance from Athena's mighty heart.

That was the tale the celebrated minstrel sang.
Odysseus was moved to weep—below his eyes
his face grew wet with tears. Just as a woman cries,
when she prostrates herself on her dear husband
who has just been killed in front of his own city
and his people, trying to save his children
and the citizens from the day they meet their doom—
as he dies, she sees him gasping his last breath,
embraces him, and screams out her laments,
while at her back her enemies keep beating her,
with spears across her spine and shoulders,
then lead her off, cheeks ravaged by her grief,
into a life of bondage, misery, and pain—
that's how Odysseus let tears of pity fall
from his eyes then. But he concealed those tears
from all of them except Alcinous, who,
as he sat there beside him, was the only one
who noticed and could hear his heavy sighs.
So he spoke out at once, addressing his Phaeacians,
lovers of the sea.

"Listen to me,
you Phaeacian counsellors and leaders.
Let Demodocus cease from playing now
his clear-toned lyre, for the song he sings
does not please all his listeners alike.
Since our godlike minstrel was first moved to sing,
as we were dining, our guest has been in pain,
his mournful sighs have never stopped. His heart,
I think, must surely overflow with grief.
Then let our singer end his song, so all of us,
both hosts and guest, can enjoy our feasting.
Things will be much better. We've done all this—
the farewell dinner and the friendship gifts,
offered up with love—in honour of our guest.
To any man with some intelligence,
a stranger coming as a suppliant
brings the same delight a brother does.
And you, our guest, should no longer hide
behind those cunning thoughts of yours and skirt
the things I ask you. It's better to be frank.
Tell me your name, what they call you at home—
your mother and your father and the others,
those in the town and in the countryside.
There's no one in the world, mean or noble,
who goes without a name once he's been born.
Parents give one to each of us at birth.
Tell me your country and your people,
your city, too, so ships can take you there,
using what they know to chart their passage.
Phaeacians have no pilots, no steering oar,
like other boats, for their ships on their own
can read men's hearts and thoughts—they know
all men's cities, their rich estates, as well,
and quickly skim across wide tracts of sea,
concealed in mist and clouds, without a fear
of shipwrecks or disaster. Still, my father,
Nausithous, once told me this story—
he used to say we made Poseidon angry
because we carried everyone in safety.
He claimed that one day, as a well-built ship
with a Phaeacian crew was sailing back

from such a trip, over the misty sea,
Poseidon would destroy it and then place
a massive ring of mountains round our city.
That's what the old man said. It's up to god
to make that happen or leave it undone,
whatever he finds pleasing to his heart.
So come, tell me this, and speak the truth—
Where have you travelled in your wanderings?
What men's countries have you visited?
Tell me of people and their well-built towns,
whether they are cruel, unjust, and savage,
or welcome strangers and fear god in their hearts.
Tell us why you weep, your heart full of pain,
to hear the fate of Argives and Danaans,
and of Troy. Gods made these things happen.
They spun out that destructive thread for men,
to weave a song for those as yet unborn.
Was someone in your family killed at Troy—
a good and loyal man, a son-in-law,
your wife's father, one of those we truly love
after our flesh and blood? A companion?
A fine and worthy man dear to your heart?
For a companion who's a heart's true friend
is every bit as dear as one's own brother."