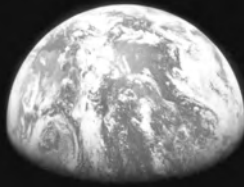


HOMER

THE ESSENTIAL

ODYSSEY



TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY  
STANLEY LOMBARDO

INTRODUCTION BY  
SHEILA MURNAGHAN

Homer

The Essential *Odyssey*



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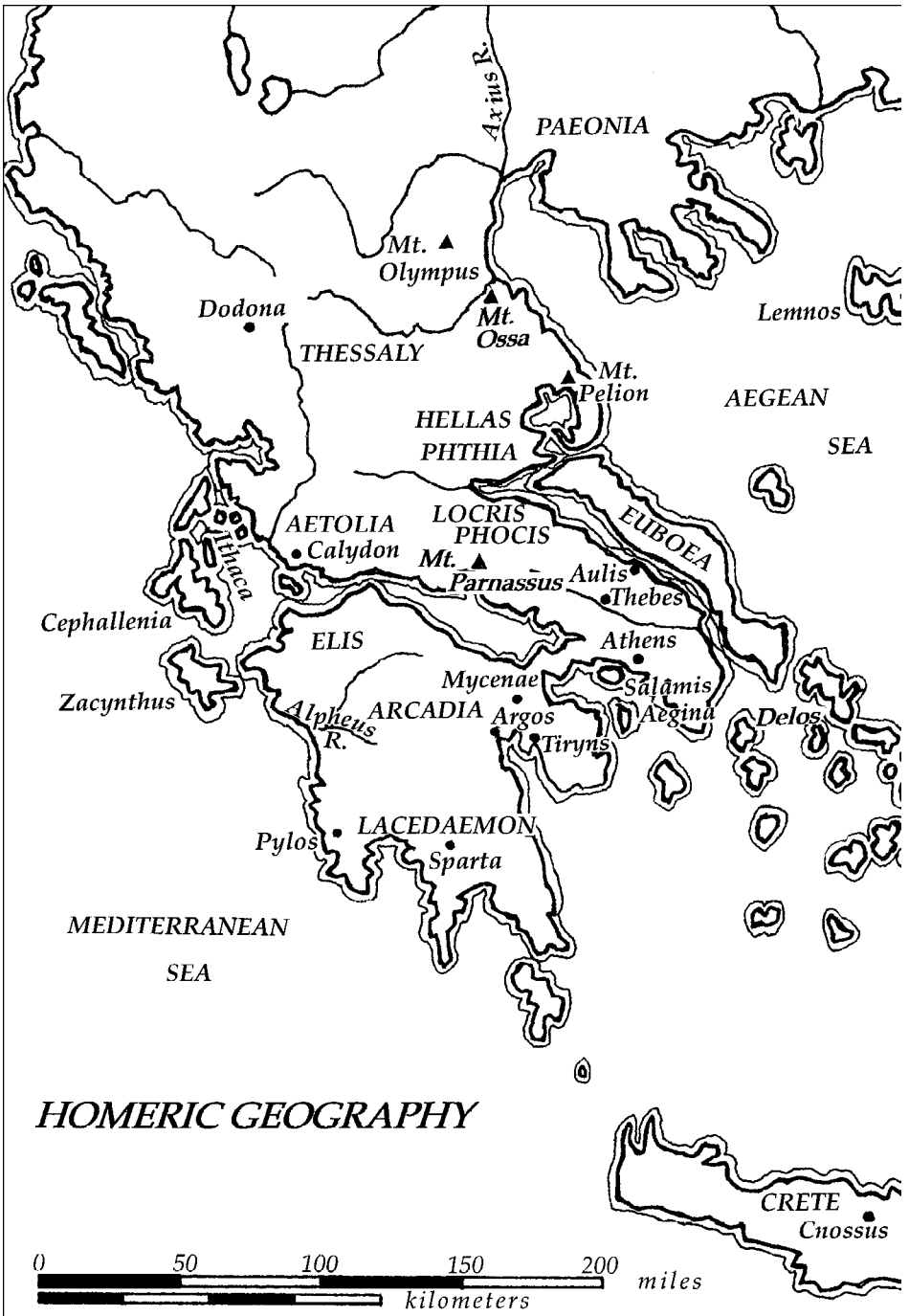
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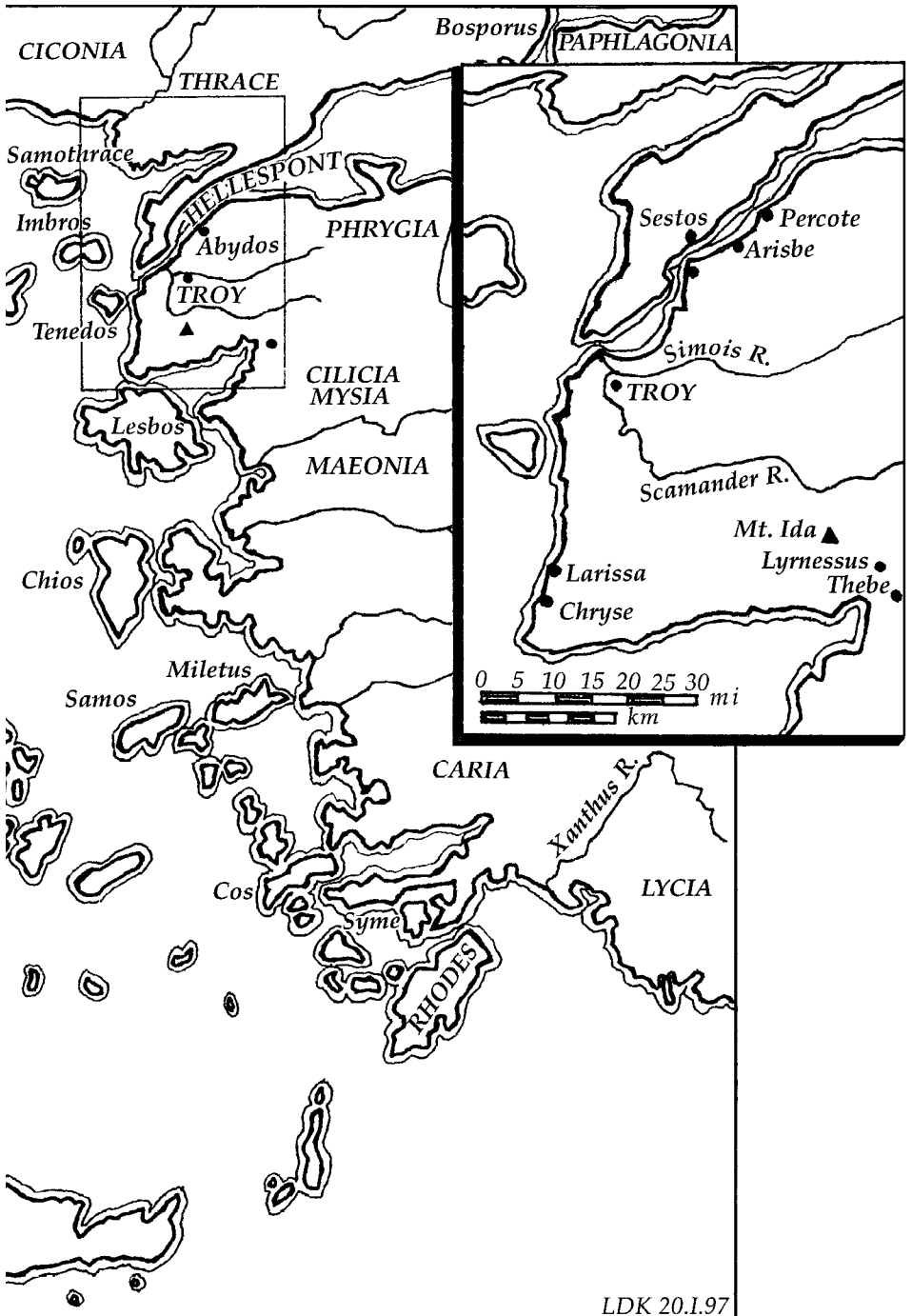
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# Introduction

The *Odyssey* is an epic account of survival and homecoming. The poem tells of the return (or in Greek, *nostos*) of Odysseus from the Greek victory at Troy to Ithaca, the small, rocky island from which he set out twenty years before. It was a central theme of the Trojan legend that getting home again was at least as great a challenge for the Greeks as winning the war. Many heroes lost their homecomings by dying at Troy, including Achilles, the greatest warrior of the Greeks, whose decision to fight in the full knowledge that he would not survive to go home again is told in the *Iliad*, the other epic attributed to Homer. Others were lost at sea or met with disaster when they finally arrived home. The story of the returns of the major Greek heroes was a favorite subject of heroic song. Within the *Odyssey*, a bard is portrayed as singing “the tale / Of the hard journeys home that Pallas Athena / Ordained for the Greeks on their way back from Troy” (1.343–45), and we know of an actual epic, no longer surviving, that was entitled the *Nostoi* or “Returns” of the Greeks. The *Odyssey* is also a version of this story, and it contains accounts of the homecomings of all the major heroes who went to Troy. But it gives that story a distinctive emphasis through its focus on Odysseus, who is presented as the hero best suited to the arduous task of homecoming and the one whose return is both the most difficult and protracted and the most joyful and glorious.

In telling this story, the poet has also given the greatest weight, not to the perilous, exotic sea journey from Troy, on the west coast of Asia Minor (present-day Turkey), to the shore of Ithaca, off the west coast of Greece, but to the final phase of the hero’s return, his reentry into his household and recovery of his former position at its center. As a result, the *Odyssey* is, perhaps surprisingly, an epic poem that foregrounds its hero’s experiences in his home and with his family, presenting his success in picking up the threads of his previous life as his greatest exploit. The *Odyssey* charges the domestic world to which its hero returns with the same danger and enchantment found in the larger, wilder realm of warfare and seafaring. Seen from the

perspective of his wanderings, Odysseus' home becomes at once more precious and more precarious. As he struggles to reestablish himself in a place that has been changed by his twenty-year absence, we are made to reconsider, along with him, the value of the familiar and the danger of taking it for granted.

## A Tale of Homecoming

The *Odyssey* makes skillful use of the craft of storytelling to create this emphasis on the final phase of Odysseus' homecoming. Throughout the poem, Odysseus' story is set against that of another great hero of Troy, Agamemnon, whose own return failed just at the point when he reached his home. As the leader of the Greek expedition, Agamemnon seemed poised to enjoy the greatest triumph, and he was able to make the sea journey back to the shores of his kingdom without much trouble. But in his absence his wife, Clytemnestra, had taken a lover, Aegisthus, who plotted to kill Agamemnon on his return, cutting him down just when he thought he could relax his guard and rejoice in his achievement. This story has the status in the *Odyssey* of a kind of norm or model for what might be expected to happen, and it is brought up at strategic moments to serve as a warning to Odysseus and his supporters, a repeated reminder that simply arriving home does not mean the end of peril and risk.

The importance of this final phase is also conveyed by the intricate structure of the *Odyssey's* plot, which places stress on Ithaca and on Odysseus' experiences there through the manipulation of chronology and changes of scene. The action of the *Odyssey* begins, not with the fall of Troy as one might expect, but just a few weeks before Odysseus' arrival at Ithaca ten years later. The poem opens with a divine council, in which the gods recognize that the fated time for Odysseus' return has finally arrived and take steps to set it in motion. In the human realm, the urgency of this moment is more acute on Ithaca, where events are moving swiftly in a dangerous direction, than on Ogygia, the remote island where Odysseus is trapped with a goddess, Calypso, in a suspended state of inactivity and nostalgia that has been going on for seven years and could continue indefinitely. The plan the gods come up with has two parts: Athena will go to Ithaca to prompt Odysseus' son, Telemachus, to useful action, and Hermes will go to Calypso and command her to

release Odysseus; the poet chooses to narrate the Ithacan part first, giving priority to the situation and characters there. Thus, before we see Odysseus in action, we are introduced to Odysseus' household in his absence, where his long years away have created a difficult situation that is now heading toward a crisis.

All the young men of Ithaca and the surrounding region are trying to take over Odysseus' vacant position, staking their claims by setting themselves up as suitors to Odysseus' wife, Penelope. In this role, they spend their days feasting and reveling in Odysseus' house, steadily consuming the resources of his large estate. Unable to send them packing, Penelope has cleverly held them at bay for three years, but they have discovered her ruses and their patience is running out. Meanwhile, Telemachus is just reaching manhood. Until now, he has been too young to do anything about the suitors, but he too is getting impatient with the unresolved nature of the situation and the constant depletion of his inheritance. Athena's strategy is to spur him on to a full assumption of his adult role. She appears to him disguised as a traveling friend of his father's, Mentos, the king of the Taphians, and urges him to make a journey to the mainland, where he can consult two of the heroes who have returned from Troy, Nestor and Menelaus, in the hopes of finding out what has happened to Odysseus.

The aim of Telemachus' voyage is, specifically, information that might help to clarify and resolve the situation on Ithaca but, more broadly, education, the initiation into the ways of a proper heroic household that Telemachus is unable to find in his own fatherless, suitor-besieged home, and an opportunity for him to discover and display his own inherent nobility. With the subtle guidance of Athena, who accompanies him, now in the disguise of Mentor, an Ithacan supporter of Odysseus, Telemachus first visits Nestor in Pylos and then Menelaus and his wife, Helen, in Sparta. From Menelaus, he receives the inconclusive news that Odysseus, when last heard of, was stranded with Calypso. But he also learns from both of his hosts about the homeward journeys of all the major Greek heroes, and hears reminiscences about the father he has never met. He gains a companion in Nestor's son Peisistratus and has the experience of being spontaneously recognized as Odysseus' son.

Thus the initial section of the *Odyssey*, which occupies the first four of its twenty-four books, is what is known as the "Telemachy,"

the story of Telemachus. It is only in the fifth book that we encounter Odysseus in person, as the poem begins again at the beginning, now offering an account of what has been happening to Odysseus during the same time. The scene returns to Olympus, and the other part of the divine plan is put into action. Hermes is sent to free Odysseus from Calypso, and a new eight-book section focused on Odysseus begins. This is a new beginning for Odysseus as well as for the poem: in the episodes that follow, Odysseus has to create himself anew, acquiring again all the signs of identity and status that were once his. With Calypso's reluctant blessing, he builds a raft and sets off across the sea, only to be hit with a storm by his great divine enemy, the sea-god Poseidon. He narrowly avoids drowning and manages to reach the shore of Schería, a lush, isolated island inhabited by a race of magical seafarers, the Phaeacians. Through his encounters with the Phaeacians, Odysseus gradually recovers his former status. He gains the help of the Phaeacian princess, Nausicaa, who provides him with clothes and directions, and he makes his way to the court of their king, Alcinous, where he is welcomed and promised transportation back to Ithaca. At a great feast at Alcinous' court, he is finally ready to identify himself, and he gives an account of his adventures since leaving Troy. Thus the earliest part of the *Odyssey's* story is actually narrated in the middle of the poem, in a long first-person flashback that occupies Books 8 through 12.

The experiences that Odysseus recounts are strange and fascinating: his visit to the land of the Lotus-Eaters; his risky confrontation of the one-eyed, man-eating giant, the Cyclops Polyphemus; his battle of wits with the enchantress Circe, who turns men into pigs with a stroke of her magic wand; his visit to the Underworld where he meets his mother, his comrades from Troy, and the prophet Tiresias, who tells him about a last mysterious journey before his life is over; his success in hearing the beautiful, but usually deadly, singing of the Sirens; the difficult passage between two horrific monsters, Scylla and Charybdis; and the ordeal of being marooned on the island of the Sun God, where his starving crew make the fatal mistake of eating the god's cattle. These famous stories have many parallels in widely disseminated folktales, with which they share an element of magic and an ability to convert basic human situations and concerns into marvelous plots. They are so well told that they enchant Odysseus' Phaeacian listeners, and they have come to dominate the later

reputation of Odysseus, so that it is often a surprise to readers who encounter or reencounter the *Odyssey* itself that those adventures actually occupy a relatively small portion of the poem.

The second half of the poem begins with Odysseus' passage from Scheria to Ithaca in a swift Phaeacian ship, and the rest of the poem is concerned with the process by which, having made it to Ithaca, he reclaims his position there and restores the conditions that existed when he left. Because of the danger posed by the suitors, who have already been plotting to murder Telemachus, this process has to be slow, careful, and indirect. Soon after he reaches the Ithacan shore at the beginning of Book 13, Odysseus adopts a disguise: with the aid of Athena, he is transformed into an old, derelict beggar. Before approaching his house, he goes for help and information to the hut of his loyal swineherd, Eumaeus, and there he is joined by Telemachus, as he returns from his journey to the mainland. At this point the two parallel strands of the plot merge, and the poem maintains from then on a consistent forward momentum toward the conclusion of the plot, in contrast to the more complicated structure of the first half. Odysseus reveals himself to Telemachus, and together they plot a strategy that will allow them to overcome the suitors, despite the suitors' reckless arrogance and superior numbers. Infiltrating his house in his beggar's disguise, Odysseus is able to exploit Penelope's decision that she will set a contest to decide whom she will marry, a contest that involves stringing a bow that Odysseus left behind when he went to Troy and shooting an arrow through a series of axe heads. Insisting on a turn when all the suitors have failed, Odysseus gains the weapon he needs to defeat his enemies. With the help of a small band of supporters, he takes on the suitors, and the house of Odysseus becomes the scene of a battle that is as glorious and bloody as those at Troy. With the skill and courage of a great warrior, Odysseus takes back his wife and his home, bringing his journey to a triumphant conclusion at last.

## **Odysseus and His Allies**

Odysseus' triumph is possible only because of his exceptional nature, marked by a distinctive form of heroism. Like the other heroes who fought at Troy, Odysseus is physically powerful and adept at the arts of war, but what really distinguishes him is a quality of mind. In

Greek, this quality is designated by the term *mêtis*, which denotes intelligence, cunning, versatility, and a facility with words. Odysseus is a master at assessing situations, devising plans, using language for his own ends, and manipulating the relations of appearance and reality. His skills extend far beyond those of the typical warrior to include, for example, craftsmanship, as when he builds his own raft with which to leave Calypso. His most characteristic and successful tactic is his use of disguises, which depends on a rare willingness to efface his own identity and a cool-headed capacity to say one thing while thinking another. Odysseus disguises himself at every stage of the *Odyssey's* plot. In his early and defining encounter with the monstrous Cyclops, Odysseus overcomes his physical disadvantage through the brilliant trick of telling the Cyclops that his name is "no man" (a word that has several forms in Greek, one of which happens to be *mêtis*). After Odysseus succeeds in blinding the Cyclops and escaping from his cave, he would still be at the mercy of the Cyclops' neighbors if the Cyclops were not crying out to them that "No man is hurting me." When he washes up, dispossessed and shipwrecked among the Phaeacians, Odysseus shrewdly suppresses his identity until he can demonstrate his civility and distinction and win his hosts' support. And on Ithaca his success depends on his extended impersonation of an old, broken-down beggar. In pretending to be a beggar on Ithaca, Odysseus is repeating an old tactic, as we learn when Helen tells Telemachus how Odysseus once sneaked into Troy in a similar disguise.

Extraordinary as Odysseus may be in his versatility and self-reliance, he can by no means achieve his homecoming alone. He relies on a range of helpers, both divine and human, whose relations with him help to define who he is and to articulate the central values of the poem. Of these, the most powerful is his divine patron, the goddess Athena. Not only is Athena Odysseus' ardent champion, but she actively supervises and directs the action of the *Odyssey*, which is, in a sense, her personal project. The action begins when she intervenes on Olympus to turn her father Zeus' attention away from the family of Agamemnon to the plight of Odysseus. Athena gets things moving on Ithaca by stirring up Telemachus, and she accompanies him on his actual journey disguised as Mentor. When Odysseus himself arrives on Ithaca, the final, most intense phase of the action begins with an encounter between Odysseus and Athena, in which

she appears to him openly, assures him of her support, and gives him his disguise. Just as she opens the action of the poem, Athena also shuts it down. Having slaughtered the suitors, Odysseus has to contend with their relatives, who swarm his estate in a vengeful crowd. Warfare is just beginning between this group and Odysseus and his supporters, when Athena, with Zeus' blessing, intervenes to insist that they make peace. In the final lines of the poem, Athena swears both sides to binding oaths that will assure amity and prosperity among the Ithacans.

Athena is Odysseus' divine counterpart, a figure who similarly represents a combination of martial abilities and intelligence. She is the daughter of Zeus and of the goddess Metis, the personification of cunning. Born from Zeus' head after he swallowed Metis, Athena is Zeus' ever-loyal daughter, a perpetual virgin who never leaves her father, and she stands for both military power and cleverness as they are subordinated to Zeus' authority and regulation of the universe. She is a military goddess who is associated especially with just causes and civilization, and a crafty goddess whose intelligence inspires expert craftsmanship—the metalworking and shipbuilding of gifted men and the fine weaving of gifted women—as well as clever plans. Her sponsorship of Odysseus, with the carefully sought blessing of Zeus, indicates that his cause is seen among the gods as just, and Odysseus is unusual among Homeric characters for the gods' clear endorsement of his cause, as well as for the steadiness of their support. Zeus' favor is clear from the divine council with which the poem opens. Although he seems to have forgotten about Odysseus at that point and has to be reminded by Athena, his mind is on the terrible crime and just punishment of Aegisthus, the figure in the Agamemnon story who provides a parallel to Penelope's suitors. Before the suitors are even mentioned, then, they are cast by analogy into the role of villains and Odysseus into the role of divinely sanctioned avenger.

The point at which the *Odyssey* starts is, in fact, the moment in Odysseus' story at which Athena can first hope to get Zeus to grant Odysseus his full attention and support. Their conversation takes place at a time when the sea-god Poseidon is away from Olympus, feasting with the far-off Ethiopians. Poseidon, as the poet tells us, is the only god who does not pity Odysseus, and throughout his adventures, Poseidon is opposed to Athena as Odysseus' bitter adversary.



The immediate cause of his enmity is anger on behalf of the Cyclops, who is Poseidon's son, and who calls on Poseidon to avenge him after he has been blinded by Odysseus. More generally, as the god of the treacherous and uncertain sea, Poseidon represents all the challenges of the wild realm between Troy and Ithaca that Odysseus must first negotiate before he can face the problems that await him on land. Further, behind the particular story of Odysseus lie the perennial divine struggles that determine the nature of the cosmos. In cosmic history, Poseidon is Zeus' brother, who has received the sea as his not-quite-equal portion in a division of the universe in which Zeus gained the superior portion of the sky and a third brother, Hades, the Underworld. As a consequence, Poseidon is constantly jealous of his prerogatives and sensitive to any diminution of his honor, and he is in a recurrent state of opposition to Zeus' favorite, Athena, an opposition that in part symbolizes a conflict between untamed wildness and civilization. The best known expression of this opposition is their competition to be the patron deity of the city of Athens. This competition is won by Athena when she produces an olive tree—the plant sacred to her—and it is judged to be more useful to civilization than a spring of salt water produced by Poseidon.

In the world of the Homeric epics, the help of the gods is not a randomly bestowed benefit, but an advantage that expresses and reinforces a mortal's inherent qualities and his or her ability to command the help of other mortals. For all the divine favor he enjoys, Odysseus must also rely on key mortal supporters in order to achieve his aims. In particular, he must rely on the members of his household, who create and preserve the position at its center that he hopes to reclaim. The success of his return depends on the reconstitution of a series of relationships that define both his own identity and the social order in which it is meaningful.

The most important relationship through which Odysseus establishes and maintains his identity is with his wife, Penelope. One of the most impressive features of the *Odyssey* is that, despite its portrayal of a male-dominated world and its allegiance to its male hero, Penelope turns out to be fully as important and interesting a character as Odysseus—a feature of the poem that is apparent in recent criticism, which has been intensely concerned with Penelope and the interpretive issues raised by her role. The poem's domestic focus

gives prominence to the figure of the wife, whose activities are confined to the household, and to forms of heroism other than the physical strength and courage required on the battlefield or on the high seas, qualities of mind that a woman could possess as much as a man.

Penelope is Odysseus' match in the virtues that the *Odyssey* portrays as most important: cleverness, self-possession, and patient endurance. Her *mêtis* is revealed in the famous trick with which she keeps the suitors at bay for several years leading up to the time of the *Odyssey's* action. Telling them that she cannot marry any of them until she has woven a shroud for her father-in-law, Laertes, she weaves by day and secretly unweaves at night. This trick, which works until she is betrayed by those disloyal female slaves, is a brilliant use of the resources available to her in a world in which women's activities are severely restricted and closely watched. She uses both the woman's traditional activity of weaving and the woman's traditional role of serving the men of her family to her advantage. The marriage of Odysseus and Penelope is based, then, in likemindedness, a quality designated in Greek by the term *homophrosynê*, which suggests both a similar cast of mind, in this case a similar wiliness, and a congruence of interests, in this case a similar dedication to the cause of Odysseus' return.

Despite Penelope's virtue, Odysseus approaches her with great caution, disguising himself from her as carefully as from the suitors. The result is an extended stretch of narrative in which husband and wife deal with each other indirectly, each testing the other in conversations that are tailored to his ostensible identity as a wandering beggar, especially in a meeting by the fire late in the evening before the contest. A strong sympathy develops between them, as he recounts a meeting he supposedly once had with Odysseus and she describes the difficulties of her situation, tells him of a dream that seemingly foretells the defeat of the suitors, and confides her intention of setting the contest of the bow. Throughout this episode it remains unclear how we should understand Penelope's state of mind as she responds to the stranger with increasing openness and makes the crucial decision that allows him to succeed. A number of critics, bearing in mind Penelope's own intelligence and the many hints Odysseus gives, have concluded that she must realize, or at least suspect who he really is. Others see her as finally bowing to the pressures around her at just the moment when the husband she has been waiting for is finally home.

The importance of Penelope's role is confirmed in the last book of the *Odyssey*. There the scene shifts once more to the Underworld, where the ghosts of the dead suitors arrive with the news of Odysseus' triumph. Agamemnon, who has played the role of Odysseus' foil throughout the poem, offers a final comment on how differently Odysseus' story has turned out, and he attributes this—not to Odysseus' extraordinary talents and efforts—but to his success in winning a good wife.

“Well done, Odysseus, Laertes' wily son!  
 You won a wife of great character  
 In Icarus' daughter. What a mind she has,  
 A woman beyond reproach! How well Penelope  
 Kept in her heart her husband, Odysseus.  
 And so her virtue's fame will never perish,  
 And the gods will make among men on earth  
 A song of praise for steadfast Penelope.”

(24.199–206)

Agamemnon here comes close to saying that Penelope, not Odysseus, is the real hero of the *Odyssey*, the one who makes its happy ending possible, and the one who earns the reward of undying celebration in song.

## History and the Poetic Tradition

The *Odyssey* is the product of a long poetic tradition that developed over several periods of early Greek history, all of which have left their mark on the poem. The Trojan legend, with its tales of disaster and destruction for both the defeated Trojans and the victorious Greeks, is a mythic account of the end of the first stage of ancient Greek history, which is known as the Bronze Age, after the widespread use of bronze (rather than iron, which was not yet in common use), or the Mycenaean period, after the city of Mycenae, one of the main power centers of that era. Mycenaean civilization developed in the centuries after 2000 B.C.E., which is approximately when Greek-speaking people first arrived in the area at the southern end of the Balkan peninsula that we now know as Greece. Those Greek speakers gradually established there a rich civilization dominated by

a few powerful cities built around large, highly organized palaces. These palaces were at once fortified military strongholds and centers for international trade, in particular trade with the many islands located in the Aegean Sea, to the east of the Greek mainland. On the largest of those islands, the island of Crete, there was already flourishing, by the time the Mycenaeans arrived in Greece, a rich and sophisticated civilization, known as Minoan civilization, by which the Mycenaeans were heavily influenced and which they came ultimately to dominate.

From the Minoans the Mycenaeans gained, along with many other crafts and institutions, a system of writing: a syllabary, in which each symbol stands for a particular syllable, as opposed to an alphabet, in which each symbol stands for a particular sound. The Mycenaeans adapted for writing Greek the syllabary which the Minoans used to write their own language, a language which, although we have examples of their writing, still has not been identified. This earliest Greek writing system is known to present-day scholars as Linear B, and archaeologists excavating on Crete and at various mainland centers including Mycenae and Pylos have recovered examples of it incised on clay tablets. These tablets contain not—as was hoped when they were found—political treaties, mythological poems, or accounts of religious rituals—but detailed accounts of a highly bureaucratic palace economy: inventories of grain or livestock, lists of palace functionaries assigned to perform such specialized roles as “unguent boiler,” “chair-maker,” or “bath-pourer.”

Mycenaean civilization reached its height at about 1600 B.C.E., and came to an end in a series of natural disasters and political disruptions about 400 years later, around 1200 B.C.E. We do not really know what happened, but all of the main archaeological sites show some evidence of destruction, burning, or hasty abandonment at about that time, and a sharp decline thereafter in the ambition and complexity of their material culture. Among these is the site of Troy itself, which was discovered in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century by Heinrich Schliemann, who followed the topographical details given in the *Iliad*; through this discovery, Schliemann both vindicated the historical validity of Homer and helped to found the field of archaeology.

Related in some way to the disruptions that ended the Bronze Age was the emergence of a new group of Greek speakers as the dominant people on the mainland. The classical Greeks referred to

these people as the Dorians and believed that they had invaded Greece from the north. Modern historians are uncertain whether they were new migrants or people already present in Greece who newly came to power in the upheavals of this period. In any case, many people left the mainland as a consequence and moved east, settling on various islands of the Aegean and along the coast of Asia Minor, in the area that is now western Turkey but which then became, in its coastal region, as much a part of the Greek world as was the mainland itself. Both the Greeks who remained on the mainland and those who migrated to Asia Minor lived in conditions that involved less wealth and less highly organized concentrations of political and military power than were characteristic of the Mycenaean period. Their period is traditionally known as the “Dark Age” because their physical remains suggest a less magnificent level of civilization and because we know relatively little about it, although recent work in archaeology is increasing our knowledge and revealing more evidence of prosperity and artistic achievement than had previously been available. One result of the transition to the Dark Age was that writing, which was probably practiced in the Mycenaean period only by a small class of professional scribes, fell out of use, and the Greeks became once again a culture without writing. On the other hand, they had always relied, and they continued to rely, on oral communication as their central means of recalling, preserving, and transmitting the historical memories, religious beliefs, and shared stories that in our culture would be committed to writing—or now to various forms of electronic media. In particular, the Greeks of Asia Minor, known as the Ionians, developed a tradition of heroic poetry, through which they recalled their own history, looking back and recounting the experiences of that earlier lost era. This poetry centered on certain legendary figures and events, among them the events surrounding the Trojan War, which, as mentioned earlier, appear to reflect the final moments of Mycenaean civilization.

The so-called Dark Age came to an end during a period roughly corresponding to the eighth century—the 700s—B.C.E. The cultural shift that we label the end of the Dark Age and the beginning of the Archaic period involved not a series of upheavals, as with the end of the Bronze Age, but the emergence of new activity in a variety of fields. A growth in population led to a wave of colonization, with established Greek centers sending out colonies to such

places as the Black Sea, Sicily, southern Italy, and southern France. There was also greater contact among the various Greek communities, which were politically distinct and remained so for centuries. This led to the development of institutions designed to unite those communities culturally and to reinforce a shared Greek, or panhellenic, heritage, such as the oracle of Apollo at Delphi and the Olympic games (founded in 776 B.C.E.). Around this time, the Greeks began to build large-scale stone temples and to make large-scale statues and a new kind of pottery decorated with elaborate geometric patterns. Many of the features of Greek culture that we associate with the Classical Period—the period that loosely corresponds to the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E.—had their origins in the eighth century.

In addition to colonization, this was also a time of increased trade and thus of greater contact with other Mediterranean cultures. One consequence of this trade was the renewal of contacts, which had been intensive in the Mycenaean period, with cultures of the Near East. Through their dealings with the Phoenicians, a Semitic people living in present-day Lebanon, the Greeks learned a new system of writing—not a syllabary like Linear B, but an alphabet, the alphabet which is still used to write Greek and which was adapted to become the Roman alphabet, now widely used for many languages, including English. This new way of writing Greek quickly became much more widespread than Linear B had been, and it was put to a greater variety of uses. Among these was the writing down of poetry, and it is generally believed among scholars (although by no means universally agreed) that the *Odyssey* and a number of other surviving poems (including the other Homeric epic, the *Iliad*; two poems by Hesiod, the *Theogony* and the *Works and Days*; and a group of hymns also attributed to Homer) came into being in the written form in which we know them at that time.

While we know these poems in written form, we can see in their style and in their narrative techniques traces of their oral origins, although there is considerable disagreement among scholars over how close to those origins these particular works may be. Specifically, these poems manifest a use of repeated elements—phrases, lines, groups of lines, and types of episodes—that are an essential feature of an oral poet's style. Because a poet who performs orally does not memorize and recite an unchanging artifact but composes

his song as he goes at the same rate at which he delivers it, he relies on a supply of stock elements; acquiring that supply is a key aspect of his training. Analysts of Homeric style have discovered that these repeated features form an elaborate system, involving both ready-made whole lines and shorter phrases that allowed the poet easily to generate new lines that fit the meter in which he composed, known as the dactylic hexameter. Among the most striking of these are the phrases used to identify the characters, which link their names with their attributes or their ancestry and exist in different forms to be used as needed at different places in the line and in different grammatical cases. But the poet's reliance on repetition extends to much larger units as well, including obvious repetition of whole blocks of lines, as when a character reports on an event in the same words in which it was originally narrated, and more subtle uses of repeated sequences of actions to describe such circumstances as a host welcoming a guest or one character visiting another in search of important information.

Because repeated elements such as epithets have such a clear usefulness as aids to oral composition, it is hard to be sure how much further significance they are meant to bear in any particular context, although they certainly are meaningful as general expressions of a character's nature. For example, two of the epithets most frequently applied to Odysseus are *polumêtis* (having much *mêtis*) and *polutlas* (enduring much), which clearly pertain to his most defining characteristics, but that does not mean that he is acting especially cleverly at the points at which he is called *polumêtis* or that he is being particularly patient when he is called *polutlas*. The question of how integral these repeated elements are to the meaning of Homeric poetry is especially pressing for the translator, who has to decide whether to carry this stylistic feature over into a new language and a poetic form that does not have the same strict metrical rules as Homer's hexameters. The modern translator is also involved in a different relationship between the poem and the audience—not a live performance at which all parties were present at once and at which the conventions of Homeric style were familiar and unremarkable, but a less direct form of communication over large stretches of time and space, mediated through the printed page.

Stanley Lombardo has played down the repetitive dimension of the Greek original more than some other translators do for the

sake of a swift narrative pace and of making the characters speak in English as real people do. He has also taken advantage of some of Homer's repetitions for a creative solution to one of the most difficult problems of translation, the way in which there is almost never a single word or phrase that captures what is in the original. The fact that the same expressions occur over and over again gives him a chance to try a range of different versions that cumulatively add up to what is in the Greek. For example, one of the most famous lines in Homeric poetry describes the coming of dawn. This is a routine building block of Homeric poetry, which appears twenty times in the *Odyssey* and twice in the *Iliad*, a convenient, efficient way of marking a new phase in the action that comes with a new day. But the announcement of dawn's appearance is made to fill an entire line through the addition of two epithets, which mean "early born" and "rosy-fingered." By offering us several different versions of this line, Lombardo is able to bring out much more fully the many meanings of these wonderfully suggestive adjectives: "Dawn's pale rose fingers brushed across the sky" (2.1); "Dawn came early, touching the sky with rose" (5.228); "Dawn spread her roselight over the sky" (8.1); "Dawn came early, with palmettoes of rose" (9.146); "Light blossomed like roses in the eastern sky" (12.8); "At the first blush of Dawn . . ." (half of 12.324).

We have no reliable information about Homer that would allow us to decide whether, for example, he really was responsible for both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* or just what role he played in the process by which the poems we have come into being. A key step in that process was the point at which the traditions of oral performance intersected with the new practice of writing, and the epics took on the written form in which we now know them. One of the main challenges now facing Homeric scholars is that of figuring out to what extent the distinctive qualities of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are due to the use of writing. On the one hand, the poems bear all the marks of oral style, which tend to disappear quickly once a poet learns to write. On the other hand, they are far too long to have ever been performed on a single occasion like the ones depicted in the *Odyssey*, and there is considerable debate about whether the large-scale design and complex structure exhibited by both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* could have been produced without the aid of writing. And, while most scholars believe that the poems were written down



in the eighth century B.C.E., when writing first became available, others argue that this happened later, possibly in Athens in the sixth century B.C.E., where we know that official versions of both epics were produced.

Whenever they were actually written down and however much they may have been shaped by writing, the Homeric epics were still primarily oral works, in the sense that they were regularly performed and were known to their audiences through performance, well into the Classical Period. The process of transmission by which the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* became what they are today, poems experienced almost exclusively through reading, whether in Greek or in translation, is a long and complicated one. It starts with that still mysterious moment when the epics were first written down and encompasses many stages of editing and copying: by ancient scholars, especially those working in Alexandria in the third century B.C.E., who were responsible, for example, for the division of both poems into twenty-four books; by medieval scribes, who copied out the manuscripts on which our modern editions are based; and, finally, by modern scholars who have produced the texts from which translations like this one are made.

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# A Note on the Translation and on the Abridgment

The poetics of this translation of Homer's *Odyssey* are easily and briefly stated: rhythms and language drawn from natural speech, in the tradition of American poetry; emphasis on the physicality, rapidity, and suppleness of the verse; varied treatment of epithets and formulae, often heightening their effect as poetic events; treatment of similes as partially independent poetic moments, indicated by italics and indentation; close attention to presentation of the text on the page; commitment to the poetic line. Above all, this translation reflects the nature of the original poems as oral performance. The translation began as scripts for performance, and it has been shaped by the complementary pressures of poetic composition and oral performance. Throughout the period of composing the translation as poetry on the page, I continued reciting it to audiences, voicing the text as I crafted it and crafting it to capture the voice that I heard.

Homer's *Odyssey* is presented here in a version approximately one-half as long as the original poem. The passages that have been retained appear exactly as in my original unabridged translation and have not been condensed or digested in any way. Omitted passages are indicated by book and line number and are summarized very briefly. The selections have been made with an eye toward keeping the major characters, events, and themes in clear focus.

Stanley Lombardo  
University of Kansas



# ODYSSEY 1

**S**PEAK, MEMORY—

**O**f the cunning hero,  
The wanderer, blown off course time and again  
After he plundered Troy's sacred heights.

**S**peak  
Of all the cities he saw, the minds he grasped,  
The suffering deep in his heart at sea 5  
As he struggled to survive and bring his men home  
But could not save them, hard as he tried—  
The fools—destroyed by their own recklessness  
When they ate the oxen of Hyperion the Sun,  
And that god snuffed out their day of return. 10

**O**f these things,  
**S**peak, Immortal **O**ne,  
And tell the tale once more in our time.

**B**y now, all the others who had fought at Troy—  
At least those who had survived the war and the sea—  
Were safely back home. Only Odysseus 15  
Still longed to return to his home and his wife.  
The nymph Calypso, a powerful goddess—  
And beautiful—was clinging to him  
In her caverns and yearned to possess him.  
The seasons rolled by, and the year came 20  
In which the gods spun the thread  
For Odysseus to return home to Ithaca,  
Though not even there did his troubles end,  
Even with his dear ones around him.  
All the gods pitied him, except Poseidon, 25

Who stormed against the godlike hero  
Until he finally reached his own native land.

But Poseidon was away now, among the Ethiopians,  
Those burnished people at the ends of the earth—  
Some near the sunset, some near the sunrise— 30  
To receive a grand sacrifice of rams and bulls.  
There he sat, enjoying the feast.

The other gods

Were assembled in the halls of Olympian Zeus,  
And the Father of Gods and Men was speaking.  
He couldn't stop thinking about Aegisthus, 35  
Whom Agamemnon's son, Orestes, had killed:

“Mortals! They are always blaming the gods  
For their troubles, when their own witlessness  
Causes them more than they were destined for!  
Take Aegisthus now. He marries Agamemnon's 40  
Lawful wife and murders the man on his return  
Knowing it meant disaster—because we did warn him,  
Sent our messenger, quicksilver Hermes,  
To tell him not to kill the man and marry his wife,  
Or Agamemnon's son, Orestes, would pay him back 45  
When he came of age and wanted his inheritance.  
Hermes told him all that, but his good advice  
Meant nothing to Aegisthus. Now he's paid in full.”

Athena glared at him with her owl-grey eyes:

“Yes, O our Father who art most high— 50  
That man got the death he richly deserved,  
And so perish all who would do the same.  
But it's Odysseus I'm worried about,  
That discerning, ill-fated man. He's suffered  
So long, separated from his dear ones, 55  
On an island that lies in the center of the sea,  
A wooded isle that is home to a goddess,  
The daughter of Atlas, whose dread mind knows  
All the depths of the sea and who supports

The tall pillars that keep earth and heaven apart. 60  
His daughter detains the poor man in his grief,  
Sweet-talking him constantly, trying to charm him  
Into forgetting Ithaca. But Odysseus,  
Longing to see even the smoke curling up  
From his land, simply wants to die. And yet you 65  
Never think of him, Olympian. Didn't Odysseus  
Please you with sacrifices beside the Greek ships  
At Troy? Why is Odysseus so odious, Zeus?"

Zeus in his thunderhead had an answer for her:

"Quite a little speech you've let slip through your teeth, 70  
Daughter. How could I forget godlike Odysseus?  
No other mortal has a mind like his, or offers  
Sacrifice like him to the deathless gods in heaven.  
But Poseidon is stiff and cold with anger  
Because Odysseus blinded his son, the Cyclops 75  
Polyphemus, the strongest of all the Cyclopes,  
Nearly a god. The nymph Thoösa bore him,  
Daughter of Phorcys, lord of the barren brine,  
After mating with Poseidon in a scalloped sea-cave.  
The Earthshaker has been after Odysseus 80  
Ever since, not killing him, but keeping him away  
From his native land. But come now,  
Let's all put our heads together and find a way  
To bring Odysseus home. Poseidon will have to  
Put aside his anger. He can't hold out alone 85  
Against the will of all the immortals."

And Athena, the owl-eyed goddess, replied:

"Father Zeus, whose power is supreme,  
If the blessed gods really do want  
Odysseus to return to his home, 90  
We should send Hermes, our quicksilver herald,  
To the island of Ogygia without delay  
To tell that nymph of our firm resolve  
That long-suffering Odysseus gets to go home.

I myself will go to Ithaca 95  
 To put some spirit into his son—  
 Have him call an assembly of the long-haired Greeks  
 And rebuke the whole lot of his mother's suitors.  
 They have been butchering his flocks and herds.  
 I'll escort him to Sparta and the sands of Pylos 100  
 So he can make inquiries about his father's return  
 And win for himself a name among men."

**A**thena spoke, and she bound on her feet  
 The beautiful sandals, golden, immortal,  
 That carry her over landscape and seascape 105  
 On a puff of wind. And she took the spear,  
 Bronze-tipped and massive, that the Daughter uses  
 To level battalions of heroes in her wrath.  
 She shot down from the peaks of Olympus  
 To Ithaca, where she stood on the threshold 110  
 Of Odysseus' outer porch. Holding her spear,  
 She looked like Mentès, the Taphian captain,  
 And her eyes rested on the arrogant suitors.

They were playing dice in the courtyard,  
 Enjoying themselves, seated on the hides of oxen 115  
 They themselves had slaughtered. They were attended  
 By heralds and servants, some of whom were busy  
 Blending water and wine in large mixing bowls,  
 Others wiping down the tables with sponges  
 And dishing out enormous servings of meat. 120

Telemachus spotted her first.  
 He was sitting with the suitors, nursing  
 His heart's sorrow, picturing in his mind  
 His noble father, imagining he had returned  
 And scattered the suitors, and that he himself, 125  
 Telemachus, was respected at last.  
 Such were his reveries as he sat with the suitors.  
 And then he saw Athena.

He went straight to the porch,  
 Indignant that a guest had been made to wait so long.

Going up to her he grasped her right hand in his  
And took her spear, and his words had wings: 130

“Greetings, stranger. You are welcome here.  
After you’ve had dinner, you can tell us what you need.”

Telemachus spoke, and Pallas Athena  
Followed him into the high-roofed hall. 135

When they were inside he placed her spear  
In a polished rack beside a great column  
Where the spears of Odysseus stood in a row.  
Then he covered a beautifully wrought chair  
With a linen cloth and had her sit on it 140

With a stool under her feet. He drew up  
An intricately painted bench for himself  
And arranged their seats apart from the suitors  
So that his guest would not lose his appetite  
In their noisy and uncouth company— 145

And so he could inquire about his absent father.  
A maid poured water from a silver pitcher  
Into a golden basin for them to wash their hands  
And then set up a polished table nearby.

Another serving woman, grave and dignified, 150  
Set out bread and generous helpings  
From the other dishes she had. A carver set down  
Cuts of meat by the platter and golden cups.  
Then a herald came by and poured them wine.

Now the suitors swaggered in. They sat down 155  
In rows on benches and chairs. Heralds  
Poured water over their hands, maidservants  
Brought around bread in baskets, and young men  
Filled mixing bowls to the brim with wine.

The suitors helped themselves to all this plenty, 160  
And when they had their fill of food and drink,  
They turned their attention to the other delights,  
Dancing and song, that round out a feast.

A herald handed a beautiful zither  
To Phemius, who sang for the suitors, 165



Though against his will. Sweeping the strings  
 He struck up a song. And Telemachus,  
 Putting his head close to Pallas Athena's  
 So the others wouldn't hear, said this to her:

"Please don't take offense if I speak my mind. 170  
 It's easy for them to enjoy the harper's song,  
 Since they are eating another man's stores  
 Without paying anything—the stores of a man  
 Whose white bones lie rotting in the rain  
 On some distant shore, or still churn in the waves. 175  
 If they ever saw him make landing on Ithaca  
 They would pray for more foot speed  
 Instead of more gold or fancy clothes.  
 But he's met a bad end, and it's no comfort to us  
 When some traveler tells us he's on his way home. 180  
 The day has long passed when he's coming home.  
 But tell me this, and tell me the truth:  
 Who are you, and where do you come from?  
 Who are your parents? What kind of ship  
 Brought you here? How did your sailors 185  
 Guide you to Ithaca, and how large is your crew?  
 I don't imagine you came here on foot.  
 And tell me this, too. I'd like to know,  
 Is this your first visit here, or are you  
 An old friend of my father's, one of the many 190  
 Who have come to our house over the years?"

Athena's seagrey eyes glinted as she said:

"I'll tell you nothing but the unvarnished truth.  
 I am Mentès, son of Anchialus, and proud of it.  
 I am also captain of the seafaring Taphians. 195  
 I just pulled in with my ship and my crew,  
 Sailing the deep purple to foreign ports.  
 We're on our way to Cyprus with a cargo of iron  
 To trade for copper. My ship is standing  
 Offshore of wild country away from the city, 200  
 In Rheithron harbor under Neion's woods.

You and I have ties of hospitality,  
 Just as our fathers did, from a long way back.  
 Go and ask old Laertes. They say he never  
 Comes to town any more, lives out in the country, 205  
 A hard life with just an old woman to help him.  
 She gets him his food and drink when he comes in  
 From the fields, all worn out from trudging across  
 The ridge of his vineyard plot.

I have come

Because they say your father has returned, 210  
 But now I see the gods have knocked him off course.  
 He's not dead, though, not godlike Odysseus,  
 No way in the world. No, he's alive all right.  
 It's the sea keeps him back, detained on some island  
 In the middle of the sea, held captive by savages. 215  
 And now I will prophesy for you, as the gods  
 Put it in my heart and as I think it will be,  
 Though I am no soothsayer or reader of birds.  
 Odysseus will not be gone much longer  
 From his native land, not even if iron chains 220  
 Hold him. He knows every trick there is  
 And will think of some way to come home.  
 But now tell me this, and I want the truth:  
 Tall as you are, are you Odysseus' son?  
 You bear a striking resemblance to him, 225  
 Especially in the head and those beautiful eyes.  
 We used to spend quite a bit of time together  
 Before he sailed for Troy with the Argive fleet.  
 Since then, we haven't seen each other at all."

Telemachus took a deep breath and said: 230

"You want the truth, and I will give it to you.  
 My mother says that Odysseus is my father.  
 I don't know this myself. No one witnesses  
 His own begetting. If I had my way, I'd be the son  
 Of a man fortunate enough to grow old at home. 235  
 But it's the man with the most dismal fate of all  
 They say I was born from—since you want to know."

Athena's seagrey eyes glinted as she said:

"Well, the gods have made sure your family name  
 Will go on, since Penelope has borne a son like you. 240  
 But there is one other thing I want you to tell me.  
 What kind of a party is this? What's the occasion?  
 Some kind of banquet? A wedding feast?  
 It's no neighborly potluck, that's for sure,  
 The way this rowdy crowd is carrying on 245  
 All through the house. Any decent man  
 Would be outraged if he saw this behavior."

Telemachus breathed in the salt air and said:

"Since you ask me these questions as my guest—  
 This, no doubt, was once a perfect house, 250  
 Wealthy and fine, when its master was still home.  
 But the gods frowned and changed all that  
 When they whisked him off the face of the earth.  
 I wouldn't grieve for him so much if he were dead,  
 Gone down with his comrades in the town of Troy, 255  
 Or died in his friends' arms after winding up the war.  
 The entire Greek army would have buried him then,  
 And great honor would have passed on to his son.  
 But now the whirlwinds have snatched him away  
 Without a trace. He's vanished, gone, and left me 260  
 Pain and sorrow. And he's not the only cause  
 I have to grieve. The gods have given me other trials.  
 All of the nobles who rule the islands—  
 Doulichium, Samê, wooded Zacynthus—  
 And all those with power on rocky Ithaca 265  
 Are courting my mother and ruining our house.  
 She refuses to make a marriage she hates  
 But can't stop it either. They are eating us  
 Out of house and home, and will kill me someday."

And Pallas Athena, with a flash of anger: 270

"Damn them! You really do need Odysseus back.

Just let him lay his hands on these mangy dogs!  
 If only he would come through that door now  
 With a helmet and shield and a pair of spears,  
 Just as he was when I saw him first, 275  
 Drinking and enjoying himself in our house  
 On his way back from Ephyre. Odysseus  
 Had sailed there to ask Mermerus' son, Ilus,  
 For some deadly poison for his arrowheads.  
 Ilus, out of fear of the gods' anger, 280  
 Would not give him any, but my father  
 Gave him some, because he loved him dearly.  
 That's the Odysseus I want the suitors to meet.  
 They wouldn't live long enough to get married!  
 But it's on the knees of the gods now 285  
 Whether he comes home and pays them back  
 Right here in his halls, or doesn't.

So it's up to you

To find a way to drive them out of your house.  
 Now pay attention and listen to what I'm saying.  
 Tomorrow you call an assembly and make a speech 290  
 To these heroes, with the gods as witnesses.  
 The suitors you order to scatter, each to his own.  
 Your mother—if in her heart she wants to marry—  
 Goes back to her powerful father's house.  
 Her kinfolk and he can arrange the marriage, 295  
 And the large dowry that should go with his daughter.  
 And my advice for you, if you will take it,  
 Is to launch your best ship, with twenty oarsmen,  
 And go make inquiries about your long-absent father.  
 Someone may tell you something, or you may hear 300  
 A rumor from Zeus, which is how news travels best.  
 Sail to Pylos first and ask godly Nestor,  
 Then go over to Sparta and red-haired Menelaus.  
 He was the last home of all the bronzeclad Greeks.  
 If you hear your father's alive and on his way home, 305  
 You can grit your teeth and hold out one more year.  
 If you hear he's dead, among the living no more,  
 Then come home yourself to your ancestral land,  
 Build him a barrow and celebrate the funeral

Your father deserves. Then marry off your mother. 310  
 After you've done all that, think up some way  
 To kill the suitors in your house either openly  
 Or by setting a trap. You've got to stop  
 Acting like a child. You've outgrown that now.  
 Haven't you heard how Orestes won glory 315  
 Throughout the world when he killed Aegisthus,  
 The shrewd traitor who murdered his father?  
 You have to be aggressive, strong—look at how big  
 And well-built you are—so you will leave a good name.  
 Well, I'm off to my ship and my men, 320  
 Who are no doubt wondering what's taking me so long.  
 You've got a job to do. Remember what I said."

And Telemachus, in his clear-headed way:

"My dear guest, you speak to me as kindly 325  
 As a father to his son. I will not forget your words.  
 I know you're anxious to leave, but please stay  
 So you can bathe and relax before returning  
 To your ship, taking with you a costly gift,  
 Something quite fine, a keepsake from me,  
 The sort of thing a host gives to his guest." 330

And Athena, her eyes grey as saltwater:

"No, I really do want to get on with my journey.  
 Whatever gift you feel moved to make,  
 Give it to me on my way back home,  
 Yes, something quite fine. It will get you as good." 335

**W**ith these words the Grey-eyed One was gone,  
 Flown up and away like a seabird. And as she went  
 She put courage in Telemachus' heart  
 And made him think of his father even more than before.  
 Telemachus' mind soared. He knew it had been a god, 340  
 And like a god himself he rejoined the suitors.

They were sitting hushed in silence, listening

To the great harper as he sang the tale  
Of the hard journeys home that Pallas Athena  
Ordained for the Greeks on their way back from Troy. 345

His song drifted upstairs, and Penelope,  
Wise daughter of Icarius, took it all in.  
She came down the steep stairs of her house—  
Not alone, two maids trailed behind—  
And when she had come among the suitors 350  
She stood shawled in light by a column  
That supported the roof of the great house,  
Hiding her cheeks behind her silky veils,  
Grave handmaidens standing on either side.  
And she wept as she addressed the brilliant harper: 355

“Phemius, you know many other songs  
To soothe human sorrows, songs of the exploits  
Of gods and men. Sing one of those  
To your enraptured audience as they sit  
Sipping their wine. But stop singing this one, 360  
This painful song that always tears at my heart.  
I am already sorrowful, constantly grieving  
For my husband, remembering him, a man  
Renowned in Argos and throughout all Hellas.”

And Telemachus said to her coolly: 365

“Mother, why begrudge our singer  
Entertaining us as he thinks best?  
Singers are not responsible; Zeus is,  
Who gives what he wants to every man on earth.  
No one can blame Phemius for singing the doom 370  
Of the Danaans: it’s always the newest song  
An audience praises most. For yourself,  
You’ll just have to endure it and listen.  
Odysseus was not the only man at Troy  
Who didn’t come home. Many others perished. 375  
You should go back upstairs and take care of your work,  
Spinning and weaving, and have the maids do theirs.

Speaking is for men, for all men, but for me  
Especially, since I am the master of this house.”

Penelope was stunned and turned to go, 380  
Her son’s masterful words pressed to her heart.  
She went up the stairs to her room with her women  
And wept for Odysseus, her beloved husband,  
Until grey-eyed Athena cast sleep on her eyelids.

All through the shadowy halls the suitors 385  
Broke into an uproar, each of them praying  
To lie in bed with her. Telemachus cut them short:

“Suitors of my mother—you arrogant pigs—  
For now, we’re at a feast. No shouting, please!  
There’s nothing finer than hearing 390  
A singer like this, with a voice like a god’s.  
But in the morning we will sit in the meeting ground,  
So that I can tell all of you in broad daylight  
To get out of my house. Fix yourselves feasts  
In each others’ houses, use up your own stockpiles. 395  
But if it seems better and more profitable  
For one man to be eaten out of house and home  
Without compensation—then eat away!  
For my part, I will pray to the gods eternal  
That Zeus grant me requital: Death for you 400  
Here in my house. With no compensation.”

Thus Telemachus. And they all bit their lips  
And marveled at how boldly he had spoken to them.  
Then Antinous, son of Eupeithes, replied:

“Well, Telemachus, it seems the gods, no less, 405  
Are teaching you how to be a bold public speaker.  
May the son of Cronus never make you king  
Here on Ithaca, even if it is your birthright.”

And Telemachus, taking in a breath:

“It may make you angry, Antinous, 410  
But I’ll tell you something. I wouldn’t mind a bit  
If Zeus granted me this—if he made me king.  
You think this is the worst fate a man can have?  
It’s not so bad to be king. Your house grows rich,  
And you’re held in great honor yourself. But, 415  
There are many other lords on seawashed Ithaca,  
Young and old, and any one of them  
Could get to be king, now that Odysseus is dead.  
But I will be master of my own house  
And of the servants that Odysseus left me.” 420

Then Eurymachus, Polybus’ son, responded:

“It’s on the knees of the gods, Telemachus,  
Which man of Greece will rule this island.  
But you keep your property and rule your house,  
And may no man ever come to wrest them away 425  
From you by force, not while men live in Ithaca.  
But I want to ask you, sir, about your visitor.  
Where did he come from, what port  
Does he call home, where are his ancestral fields?  
Did he bring news of your father’s coming 430  
Or was he here on business of his own?  
He sure up and left in a hurry, wouldn’t stay  
To be known. Yet by his looks he was no tramp.”

And Telemachus, with a sharp response:

“Eurymachus, my father is not coming home. 435  
I no longer trust any news that may come,  
Or any prophecy my mother may have gotten  
From a seer she has summoned up to the house.  
My guest was a friend of my father’s from Taphos.  
He says he is Mentès, son of Anchialus 440  
And captain of the seafaring Taphians.”

Thus Telemachus. But in his heart he knew  
It was an immortal goddess.



And now

The young men plunged into their entertainment,  
Singing and dancing until the twilight hour. 445  
They were still at it when the evening grew dark,  
Then one by one went to their own houses to rest.

Telemachus' room was off the beautiful courtyard,  
Built high and with a surrounding view.  
There he went to his bed, his mind teeming, 450  
And with him, bearing blazing torches,  
Went true-hearted Eurycleia, daughter of Ops  
And Peisenor's granddaughter. Long ago,  
Laertes had bought her for a small fortune  
When she was still a girl. He paid twenty oxen 455  
And honored her in his house as he honored  
His wedded wife, but he never slept with her  
Because he would rather avoid his wife's wrath.  
Of all the women, she loved Telemachus the most  
And had nursed him as a baby. Now she bore 460  
The blazing torches as Telemachus opened  
The doors to his room and sat on his bed.  
He pulled off his soft tunic and laid it  
In the hands of the wise old woman, and she  
Folded it and smoothed it and hung it on a peg 465  
Beside the corded bed. Then she left the room,  
Pulled the door shut by its silver handle,  
And drew the bolt home with the strap.

There Telemachus

Lay wrapped in a fleece all the night through,  
Pondering the journey Athena had shown him. 470

*[Books 2 and 3 are omitted. Telemachus calls an assembly and announces his intention to sail abroad in search of news of his father. Athena, now disguised as Mentor, an old family friend, helps him procure a ship and a crew. They sail to Pylos, where they are entertained by Nestor, who then sends Telemachus, accompanied by his son Peisistratus, overland by chariot to Sparta to visit Menelaus.]*

# ODYSSEY 4

*[Lines 1–124 are omitted. Menelaus welcomes Telemachus and entertains him but does not yet know his identity. When Menelaus mentions Odysseus, Telemachus begins to weep.]*

While Menelaus pondered this, 125  
 Helen came from her fragrant bedroom  
 Like gold-spindled Artemis.Adraste,  
 Her attendant, drew up a beautiful chair for her,  
 And Alcippe brought her a soft wool rug.  
 Another maid, Phylo, brought a silver basket— 130  
 A gift from Alcandre, wife of Polybus,  
 Who lived in Thebes, the city in Egypt  
 That has the wealthiest houses in the world.  
 Polybus had given Menelaus two silver baths,  
 Two tripods, and ten bars of gold. 135  
 And his wife, Alcandre, gave to Helen  
 Beautiful gifts of her own—a golden spindle  
 And a silver basket with gold-rimmed wheels.  
 This basket Phylo now placed beside her, 140  
 Filled with fine-spun yarn, and across it  
 Was laid the spindle, twirled with violet wool.  
 Helen sat upon the chair, a footstool  
 Under her feet, and questioned her husband:  
  
 “Do we know, Menelaus, who our guests 145  
 Claim to be? Shall I speak my mind or not?  
 My heart urges me to speak. I have never seen  
 Such a resemblance between any two people,  
 Man or woman, as between this man  
 And Odysseus’ son—as I imagine him now—  
 Telemachus, who was a newborn baby 150  
 When for my sake, shameless thing that I was,  
 The Greeks came to Troy with war in their hearts.”

And Menelaus, the red-haired king:

“Now that you mention it, I see  
 The resemblance myself—the feet, the hands, 155  
 The way he looks at you, that head of hair.  
 And just now when I was talking about Odysseus,  
 Saying how much he went through for my sake,  
 Tears welled up in his eyes, bitter tears,  
 And he covered his face with his purple cloak.” 160

At this Nestor’s son Peisistratus spoke up:

“Menelaus, son of Atreus, Zeus-bred king,  
 This is indeed, as you say, Odysseus’ son.  
 But he is prudent and would not think it proper,  
 When he just got here, to make a big speech 165  
 Before you—whose voice delights us as a god’s.  
 Nestor of Gerenia sent me with him as a guide,  
 For he was eager to see you, hoping that  
 You could suggest something he could do or say.  
 A son has many problems to face at home 170  
 When his father is gone and there is no one else  
 To help him. So it is now with Telemachus,  
 Whose father is gone, and there is no one else  
 Among the people to keep him from harm.”

And Menelaus, the red-haired king: 175

“What’s this? Here in my house, the son  
 Of my dear friend who did so much for me!  
 I used to think that if he came back  
 I would give him a welcome no other Greek  
 Could ever hope to have—if Olympian Zeus 180  
 Had brought us both home from over the sea  
 In our swift ships. I would have given him  
 A city of his own in Argos, built him a house,  
 Brought him over from Ithaca with his goods,  
 His son and all of his people—a whole city 185  
 Cleared out just for him! We would have been together,

Enjoying each other's company, and nothing  
 Would have parted us until death's black cloud  
 Finally enfolded us. But I suppose Zeus himself  
 Begrudged us this, for Odysseus alone, 190  
 That unlucky man, was never brought home."

His words aroused in all of them  
 A longing for lamentation. Argive Helen,  
 A child of Zeus, wept; Telemachus wept;  
 And Menelaus wept, the son of Atreus. 195  
 Nor could Nestor's son keep his eyes dry,  
 For he remembered Antilochus,  
 His flawless brother, who had been killed  
 By Memnon, Dawn's resplendent son,  
 And this memory gave wings to his words: 200

"Son of Atreus, old Nestor used to say,  
 Whenever we talked about things like this,  
 That no one could match your understanding.  
 So please understand me when I say  
 That I do not enjoy weeping after supper— 205  
 And it will be dawn before we know it.  
 Not that I think it's wrong to lament the dead.  
 This is all we can do—cut our hair  
 And shed some tears. I lost someone myself  
 At Troy, my brother, not the least hero there. 210  
 You probably knew him. I am too young  
 Ever to have seen him, but men say Antilochus  
 Could run and fight as well as any man alive."

And Menelaus, the red-haired king:

"No one could have put that better, my friend, 215  
 Not even someone much older. Your speech,  
 Wise and clear, shows the sort of father you have.  
 It's easy to spot a man for whom Zeus  
 Has spun out happiness in marriage and children,  
 As he has done for Nestor throughout his life. 220  
 And now he has reached a sleek old age in his halls,

And his sons are wise and fight with the best.  
 So we will stop this weeping, and once more  
 Think of supper. Let the servants pour water  
 Over our hands. Telemachus and I will have 225  
 Much to say to each other come morning.”

So he spoke, and Asphalion,  
 Menelaus' attendant, poured water  
 Over their hands, and they reached out  
 For all the good cheer spread out before them. 230

**B**ut Helen, child of Zeus, had other ideas.  
 She threw a drug into the wine bowl  
 They were drinking from, a drug  
 That stilled all pain, quieted all anger  
 And brought forgetfulness of every ill. 235  
 Whoever drank wine laced with this drug  
 Would not be sad or shed a tear that day,  
 Not even if his own father and mother  
 Should lie there dead, or if someone killed  
 His brother, or son, before his eyes. 240  
 Helen had gotten this potent, cunning drug  
 From Polydamna, the wife of Thon,  
 A woman in Egypt, where the land  
 Proliferates with all sorts of drugs,  
 Many beneficial, many poisonous. 245  
 Men there know more about medicines  
 Than any other people on earth,  
 For they are of the race of Paeon, the Healer.  
 When she had slipped the drug into the wine,  
 Helen ordered another round to be poured, 250  
 And then she turned to the company and said:

“Menelaus, son of Atreus in the line of Zeus,  
 And you sons of noble fathers, it is true  
 That Zeus gives easy lives to some of us  
 And hard lives to others—he can do anything, after all— 255  
 But you should sit now in the hall and feast  
 And entertain yourselves by telling stories.

I'll start you off. I couldn't begin to tell you  
 All that Odysseus endured and accomplished,  
 But listen to what that hero did once 260  
 In the land of Troy, where the Achaeans suffered.  
 First, he beat himself up—gave himself some nasty bruises—  
 Then put on a cheap cloak so he looked like a slave,  
 And in this disguise he entered the wide streets  
 Of the enemy city. He looked like a beggar, 265  
 Far from what he was back in the Greek camp,  
 And fooled everyone when he entered Troy.  
 I alone recognized him in his disguise  
 And questioned him, but he cleverly put me off.  
 It was only after I had bathed him 270  
 And rubbed him down with oil and clothed him  
 And had sworn a great oath not to tell the Trojans  
 Who he really was until he got back to the ships,  
 That he told me, at last, what the Achaeans planned.  
 He killed many Trojans before he left 275  
 And arrived back at camp with much to report.  
 The other women in Troy wailed aloud,  
 But I was glad inside, for my heart had turned  
 Homeward, and I rued the infatuation  
 Aphrodite gave me when she led me away 280  
 From my native land, leaving my dear child,  
 My bridal chamber, and my husband,  
 A man who lacked nothing in wisdom or looks.”

And Menelaus, the red-haired king:

“A very good story, my wife, and well told. 285  
 By now I have come to know the minds  
 Of many heroes, and have traveled far and wide,  
 But I have never laid eyes on anyone  
 Who had an enduring heart like Odysseus.  
 Listen to what he did in the wooden horse, 290  
 Where all we Argive chiefs sat waiting  
 To bring slaughter and death to the Trojans.  
 You came there then, with godlike Deiphobus.  
 Some god who favored the Trojans

Must have lured you on. Three times you circled 295  
 Our hollow hiding place, feeling it  
 With your hands, and you called out the names  
 Of all the Argive leaders, making your voice  
 Sound like each of our wives' in turn.  
 Diomedes and I, sitting in the middle 300  
 With Odysseus, heard you calling  
 And couldn't take it. We were frantic  
 To come out, or answer you from inside,  
 But Odysseus held us back and stopped us.  
 Then everyone else stayed quiet also, 305  
 Except for Anticlus, who wanted to answer you,  
 But Odysseus saved us all by clamping  
 His strong hands over Anticlus' mouth  
 And holding them there until Athena led you off."

Then Telemachus said in his clear-headed way: 310

"Menelaus, son of Atreus in the line of Zeus,  
 It is all the more unbearable then, isn't it?  
 My father may have had a heart of iron,  
 But it didn't do him any good in the end.  
 Please send us to bed now. It is time 315  
 We rested and enjoyed some sweet sleep."

He spoke, and Helen of Argos told her maids  
 To place beds on the porch and spread upon them  
 Beautiful purple blankets and fleecy cloaks.  
 The maids went out of the hall with torches 320  
 And made up the beds, and a herald  
 Led the guests out to them. So they slept there  
 On the palace porch, the hero Telemachus  
 And Nestor's glorious son. But Menelaus slept  
 In the innermost chamber of that high house 325  
 Next to Helen, Zeus' brightness upon her.

Dawn brushed her pale rose fingers across the sky,  
 And Menelaus got out of bed and dressed.  
 He slung his sharp sword around his shoulder,

Tied oiled leather sandals onto his feet, 330  
And walked out of the bedroom like a god.  
Then he sat down next to Telemachus and said:

“Tell me, Telemachus, what has brought you here  
To gleaming Sparta over the sea’s broad back?  
Public business or private? Tell me the truth.” 335

Telemachus took a deep breath and said:

“Menelaus, son of Atreus in the line of Zeus,  
I came to see if you could tell me anything  
About my father. My land is in ruin.  
I’m being eaten out of house and home 340  
By hostile men who constantly throng my halls  
Slaughtering my sheep and horned cattle  
In their arrogant courtship of my mother.  
And so I am at your knees. Tell me  
How my father, Odysseus, met his end, 345  
Whether you saw it with your own eyes,  
Or heard about it from someone else,  
Some wanderer. He was born to sorrow,  
More than any man on earth. And do not,  
Out of pity, spare me the truth, but tell me 350  
Whatever you have seen, whatever you know.  
I beseech you, if my father, noble Odysseus,  
Ever fulfilled a promise he made to you  
In the land of Troy, where the Achaeans suffered,  
Remember it now, and tell me the truth.” 355

And Menelaus, deeply troubled by this:

“Those dogs! Those puny weaklings,  
Wanting to sleep in the bed of a hero!  
A doe might as well bed her suckling fawns  
In the lair of a lion, leaving them there 360  
In the bush and then going off over the hills  
Looking for grassy fields. When the lion  
Comes back, the fawns die an ugly death.



That's the kind of death these men will die  
 When Odysseus comes back. O Father Zeus, 365  
 And Athena and Apollo, bring Odysseus back  
 With the strength he showed in Lesbos once  
 When he wrestled a match with Philomeleides  
 And threw him hard, making all of us cheer—  
 That's the Odysseus I want the suitors to meet! 370  
 They'd get married all right—to bitter death.  
 But, as to what you ask me about,  
 I will not stray from the point or deceive you.  
 No, I will tell you all that the infallible  
 Old Man of the Sea told me, and hide nothing. 375

I was in Egypt, held up by the gods  
 Because I failed to offer them sacrifice.  
 The gods never allow us to forget them.  
 There is an island in the whitecapped sea  
 Just north of Egypt. Men call it Pharos, 380  
 And it lies one hard day's sailing offshore.  
 There is a good harbor there where ships  
 Take on fresh water before heading out to sea.  
 The gods kept me stuck in that harbor  
 For twenty days. A good sailing breeze 385  
 Never rose up, and all my supplies  
 Would have been exhausted, and my crew spent,  
 Had not one of the gods taken pity on me  
 And saved me. This was Eidothea,  
 Daughter of Proteus, the Old Man of the Sea. 390  
 Somehow I had moved her heart. She met me  
 As I wandered alone, apart from my crew,  
 Who roamed the island continually, fishing  
 With bent hooks, their bellies cramped with hunger.  
 She came close to me and spoke: 395

'Are you completely out of your mind, stranger,  
 Or do you actually like suffering like this?  
 You've been marooned on this island a long time  
 With no end in sight, and your crew's fading fast.'

"She spoke like this, and I answered her: 400

'I tell you, goddess—whichever goddess you are—  
 That I am not stranded here of my own free will.  
 I must have offended one of the immortals.  
 But you tell me—for gods know everything—  
 Which of the immortals is pinning me down here 405  
 And won't let me go. And tell me how  
 I can sail back home over the teeming sea.'

“And the shining goddess answered me:

'Well, all right, stranger, since you ask.  
 This is the haunt of an unerring immortal, 410  
 Egyptian Proteus, the Old Man of the Sea,  
 Who serves Poseidon and knows all the deeps.  
 They say he's my father. If you can  
 Somehow catch him in ambush here,  
 He will tell you the route, and the distance too, 415  
 Of your journey home over the teeming sea.  
 And he will tell you, prince, if you so wish,  
 What has been done in your house for better or worse  
 While you have been gone on your long campaign.'

“So she spoke, and I answered her: 420

'Show me yourself how to ambush  
 The old god, or he may give me the slip.  
 It's hard for a mortal to master a god.'

“And the shining goddess answered me:

'I'll tell you exactly what you need to know. 425  
 When the sun is at high noon, the unerring  
 Old Man of the Sea comes from the saltwater,  
 Hidden in dark ripples the West Wind stirs up,  
 And then lies down to sleep in the scalloped caves.  
 All around him seals, the brine-spirit's brood, 430  
 Sleep in a herd. They come out of the grey water  
 With breath as fetid as the depths of the sea.  
 I will lead you there at break of day

And lay you in a row, you and three comrades  
 Chosen by you as the best on your ship. 435  
 Now I'll tell you all the old man's wiles.  
 First, he will go over the seals and count them,  
 And when he has counted them off by fives,  
 He will lie down like a shepherd among them.  
 As soon as you see him lying down to rest, 440  
 Screw up your courage to the sticking point  
 And pin him down, no matter how he struggles  
 And tries to escape. He will try everything,  
 And turn into everything that moves on the earth,  
 And into water also, and a burning flame. 445  
 Just hang on and grip him all the more tightly.  
 When he finally speaks to you of his own free will  
 In the shape you saw him in when he lay down to rest,  
 Then ease off, hero, and let the old man go,  
 And ask him which of the gods is angry with you, 450  
 And how you can sail home over the teeming sea.'

"And with that she slipped into the surging sea.  
 I headed for my ships where they stood on the sand  
 And brooded on many things as I went.  
 When I had come down to the ships and the sea, 455  
 We made supper, and when night came on,  
 We lay down to take our rest on the beach.  
 When dawn came, a palmetto of rose,  
 I went along the shore of the open sea  
 Praying over and over to the immortal gods, 460  
 Taking with me the three of my crew  
 I trusted the most for any adventure.

"The goddess, meanwhile, dove underwater  
 And now came back with the skins of four seals,  
 All newly flayed. She was out to trick her father. 465  
 She scooped out hiding places for us in the sand  
 And sat waiting as we cautiously drew near.  
 Then she had us lie down in a row, and threw  
 A seal skin over each of us. It would have been  
 A gruesome ambush—the stench of the seals 470

Was unbearable—but the goddess saved us  
 By putting ambrosia under each man's nose,  
 Drowning out the stench with its immortal fragrance.  
 So we waited patiently all morning long,  
 And then the seals came from the water in throngs. 475

They lay down in rows along the seashore,  
 And at noon the Old One came from the sea.  
 He found the fat seals and went over the herd,  
 Counting them up. He counted us first,  
 Never suspecting any kind of trick, 480

And then he lay down. We rushed him  
 With a shout and got our hands on him,  
 And the Old One didn't forget his wiles,  
 Turning first into a bearded lion,  
 Then a serpent, a leopard, and a huge boar. 485  
 He even turned into flowing water,  
 And into a high, leafy tree. But we  
 Held on, gritting our teeth, and at last  
 The wily Old One grew weary, and said to me:

'Which god have you plotted with, son of Atreus,  
 To catch me off-guard? What do you want?' 490

"He spoke, and I answered him:

'You know, old man—don't try to put me off—  
 How long I have been stuck on this island  
 With no end in sight. I'm losing heart. 495  
 Just tell me this—you gods know everything—  
 Which of the immortals has marooned me here?  
 How can I sail home over the teeming sea?'

"When I said this, he answered:

'You should have offered noble sacrifice to Zeus 500  
 And the other gods before embarking  
 If you wanted a speedy journey home  
 Over the deep purple sea. It is not your fate  
 To come home to your friends and native land

Until you go once more to the waters of the Aegyptus, 505  
 The sky-fed river, and offer holy hecatombs  
 To the immortal gods who hold high heaven.  
 Only then will they grant the journey you desire.'

"When he said this my spirit was crushed.  
 It was a long, hard pull over the misty deep 510  
 Back to the Aegyptus. Still, I answered:

'I will do all these things, just as you say.  
 But tell me this, and tell me the truth:  
 Did all the Achaeans make it home in their ships,  
 All those whom Nestor and I left at Troy? 515  
 Or did any die on shipboard, or in their friends' arms,  
 After winding up the war?'

"To which Proteus said:

'Why, son of Atreus, ask me about this?  
 You don't need to know. Nor do I think  
 You will be free from tears once you have heard it. 520  
 Many were killed in the war. You were there  
 And know who they were. Many, too, survived.  
 On the homeward journey two heroes died.  
 Another still lives, perhaps, held back by the sea.

'Ajax went down among his long-oared ships. 525  
 Poseidon had driven him onto Gyrae's rocks  
 But saved him from the sea. He would have escaped,  
 Despite Athena's hatred, but he lost his wits  
 And boasted loudly that he had survived the deep  
 In spite of the gods. Poseidon heard this boast, 530  
 And with his trident he struck Gyrae's rock  
 And broke it asunder. One part held firm,  
 But the other part, upon which Ajax sat  
 In his blind arrogance, fell into the gulf  
 And took Ajax with it. And so he perished, 535  
 His lungs full of saltwater.

Your brother, though,

Outran the fates in his hollow ships,  
 With the help of Hera. But when he was nearing  
 Malea's heights, a stormwind caught him  
 And carried him groaning over the teeming sea 540  
 To the frontier of the land where Thyestes once lived  
 And after him Thyestes' son, Aegisthus.  
 Then the gods gave him a following wind  
 And safe passage homeward. Agamemnon  
 Rejoiced to set foot on his ancestral land. 545  
 He fell to the ground and kissed the good earth  
 And hot tears of joy streamed from his eyes,  
 So glad was he to see his homeland again.  
 But from a high lookout a watchman saw him.  
 Aegisthus had treacherously posted him there 550  
 And promised a reward of two bars of gold.  
 He had been keeping watch for a year by then  
 So that Agamemnon would not slip by unseen  
 And unleash his might, and now he reported  
 His news to Aegisthus, who acted quickly 555  
 And set a trap. He chose his twenty best men  
 And had them wait in ambush. Opposite them,  
 On the hall's farther side, he had a feast prepared,  
 And then he drove off in his chariot,  
 Brooding darkly, to invite Agamemnon. 560  
 So he brought Agamemnon up to the palace  
 Unaware of his doom and slaughtered him  
 The way an ox is slaughtered at the stall.  
 None of Agamemnon's men was left alive,  
 Nor any of Aegisthus'. All were slain in the hall.' 565

"Proteus spoke, and my heart was shattered.  
 I wept and wept as I sat on the sand, losing  
 All desire to live and see the light of the sun.  
 When I could not weep or flail about any more,  
 The unerring Old Man of the Sea addressed me: 570

'Weep no more, son of Atreus. We gain nothing  
 By such prolonged bouts of grief. Instead,  
 Go as quickly as you can to your native land.

Either Aegisthus will still be alive, or  
 Orestes may have beat you to it and killed him, 575  
 And you may happen to arrive during his funeral.'

"These words warmed my heart, although  
 I was still in shock. Then I asked him:

'I know now what became of these two,  
 But who is the third man, the one who's alive, 580  
 But held back by the sea, or perhaps is dead.  
 I want to hear about him, despite my grief.'

"Proteus answered me without hesitation:

'It is Laertes' son, whose home is in Ithaca.  
 I saw him on an island, shedding salt tears, 585  
 In the halls of Calypso, who keeps him there  
 Against his will. He has no way to get home  
 To his native land. He has no ships left,  
 No crew to row him over the sea's broad back.  
 As for you, Menelaus, Zeus' cherished king, 590  
 You are not destined to die and to meet your fate  
 In bluegrass Argos. The immortals will take you  
 To the ends of the earth and the Elysian Fields,  
 Where Rhadamanthus lives and life is easiest.  
 No snow, nor storm, nor heavy rain comes there, 595  
 But a sighing wind from the West always blows  
 Off the Ocean, a cooling breeze for men.  
 For Helen is your wife, and in the gods' eyes  
 You are the son-in-law of great Zeus himself.'

"And with that he dove into the surging sea. 600  
 I went back to the ships with my godlike companions  
 And brooded on many things as I went.  
 When we had come down to the ships and the sea,  
 And had made supper, immortal night came on,  
 And we lay down to take our rest on the beach. 605  
 When dawn came with palmettoes of rose,  
 We hauled our ships down to the shining water,

And set up the masts and sails in the hulls.  
 The crews came aboard, and sitting in rows  
 They beat the sea white with their churning oars. 610  
 And so I sailed back to the rain-fed Aegyptus,  
 Moored my ships, and offered perfect sacrifice.  
 When I had appeased the everlasting gods  
 I heaped up a barrow for Agamemnon  
 So that his memory would not fade. Only then 615  
 Did I set sail for home, and the gods gave me  
 A following wind that brought me back swiftly.”

*[The rest of Book 4 (lines 618–907) is omitted. The suitors discover that Telemachus has set sail, and they prepare an ambush for him at sea.]*

## ODYSSEY 5

Dawn reluctantly  
 Left Tithonus in her rose-shadowed bed,  
 Then shook the morning into flakes of fire.

Light flooded the halls of Olympus  
 Where Zeus, high Lord of Thunder, 5  
 Sat with the other gods, listening to Athena  
 Reel off the tale of Odysseus' woes.  
 It galled her that he was still in Calypso's cave:

“Zeus, my father—and all you blessed immortals—  
 Kings might as well no longer be gentle and kind 10  
 Or understand the correct order of things.  
 They might as well be tyrannical butchers  
 For all that any of Odysseus' people  
 Remember him, a godly king as kind as a father.  
 No, he's still languishing on that island, detained 15



Against his will by that nymph Calypso,  
 No way in the world for him to get back to his land.  
 His ships are all lost, he has no crew left  
 To row him across the sea's crawling back.  
 And now the islanders are plotting to kill his son 20  
 As he heads back home. He went for news of his father  
 To sandy Pylos and white-bricked Sparta."

Storm Cloud Zeus had an answer for her:

"Quite a little speech you've let slip through your teeth,  
 Daughter. But wasn't this exactly your plan 25  
 So that Odysseus would make them pay for it later?  
 You know how to get Telemachus  
 Back to Ithaca and out of harm's way  
 With his mother's suitors sailing in a step behind."

Zeus turned then to his son Hermes and said: 30

"Hermes, you've been our messenger before.  
 Go tell that ringleted nymph it is my will  
 To let that patient man Odysseus go home.  
 Not with an escort, mind you, human or divine,  
 But on a rickety raft—tribulation at sea— 35  
 Until on the twentieth day he comes to Scheria  
 In the land of the Phaeacians, our distant relatives,  
 Who will treat Odysseus as if he were a god  
 And take him on a ship to his own native land  
 With gifts of bronze and clothing and gold, 40  
 More than he ever would have taken back from Troy  
 Had he come home safely with his share of the loot.  
 That's how he's destined to see his dear ones again  
 And return to his high-gabled Ithacan home."

Thus Zeus, and the quicksilver messenger 45  
 Laced on his feet the beautiful sandals,  
 Golden, immortal, that carry him over  
 Landscape and seascape on a puff of wind.  
 And he picked up the wand he uses to charm

Mortal eyes to sleep and make sleepers awake. 50

Holding this wand the tough quicksilver god  
Took off, bounded onto Pieria  
And dove through the ether down to the sea,

*Skimming the waves like a cormorant,  
The bird that patrols the saltwater billows  
Hunting for fish, seaspume on its plumage,* 55

Hermes flying low and planing the whitecaps.

When he finally arrived at the distant island  
He stepped from the violet-tinctured sea  
On to dry land and proceeded to the cavern 60  
Where Calypso lived. She was at home.  
A fire blazed on the hearth, and the smell  
Of split cedar and arbor vitae burning  
Spread like incense across the whole island.  
She was seated inside, singing in a lovely voice 65  
As she wove at her loom with a golden shuttle.  
Around her cave the woodland was in bloom,  
Alder and poplar and fragrant cypress.  
Long-winged birds nested in the leaves,  
Horned owls and larks and slender-throated shorebirds 70  
That screech like crows over the bright saltwater.  
Tendrils of ivy curled around the cave's mouth,  
The glossy green vine clustered with berries.  
Four separate springs flowed with clear water, criss-  
Crossing channels as they meandered through meadows 75  
Lush with parsley and blossoming violets.  
It was enough to make even a visiting god  
Enraptured at the sight. Quicksilver Hermes  
Took it all in, then turned and entered  
The vast cave.

Calypso knew him at sight. 80  
The immortals have ways of recognizing each other,  
Even those whose homes are in outlying districts.  
But Hermes didn't find the great hero inside.

Odysseus was sitting on the shore,  
 As ever those days, honing his heart's sorrow, 85  
 Staring out to sea with hollow, salt-rimmed eyes.

Calypso, sleek and haloed, questioned Hermes  
 Politely, as she seated him on a lacquered chair:

“My dear Hermes, to what do I owe  
 The honor of this unexpected visit? Tell me 90  
 What you want, and I'll oblige you if I can.”

The goddess spoke, and then set a table  
 With ambrosia and mixed a bowl of rosy nectar.  
 The quicksilver messenger ate and drank his fill,  
 Then settled back from dinner with heart content 95  
 And made the speech she was waiting for:

“You ask me, goddess to god, why I have come.  
 Well, I'll tell you exactly why. Remember, you asked.  
 Zeus ordered me to come here; I didn't want to.  
 Who would want to cross this endless stretch 100  
 Of deserted sea? Not a single city in sight  
 Where you can get a decent sacrifice from men.  
 But you know how it is: Zeus has the aegis,  
 And none of us gods can oppose his will.  
 He says you have here the most woebegone hero 105  
 Of the whole lot who fought around Priam's city  
 For nine years, sacked it in the tenth, and started home.  
 But on the way back they offended Athena,  
 And she swamped them with hurricane winds and waves.  
 His entire crew was wiped out, and he 110  
 Drifted along until he was washed up here.  
 Anyway, Zeus wants you to send him back home. Now.  
 The man's not fated to rot here far from his friends.  
 It's his destiny to see his dear ones again  
 And return to his high-gabled Ithacan home.” 115

He finished, and the nymph's aura stiffened.  
 Words flew from her mouth like screaming hawks:

“You gods are the most jealous bastards in the universe—  
 Persecuting any goddess who ever openly takes  
 A mortal lover to her bed and sleeps with him. 120  
 When Dawn caressed Orion with her rosy fingers,  
 You celestial layabouts gave her nothing but trouble  
 Until Artemis finally shot him on Ortygia—  
 Gold-throned, holy, gentle-shafted assault goddess!  
 When Demeter followed her heart and unbound 125  
 Her hair for Iasion and made love to him  
 In a late-summer field, Zeus was there taking notes  
 And executed the man with a cobalt lightning blast.  
 And now you gods are after me for having a man.  
 Well, I was the one who saved his life, unprying him 130  
 From the spar he came floating here on, sole survivor  
 Of the wreck Zeus made of his streamlined ship,  
 Slivering it with lightning on the wine-dark sea.  
 I loved him, I took care of him, I even told him  
 I’d make him immortal and ageless all of his days. 135  
 But you said it, Hermes: Zeus has the aegis  
 And none of us gods can oppose his will.  
 So all right, he can go, if it’s an order from above,  
 Off on the sterile sea. How I don’t know.  
 I don’t have any oared ships or crewmen 140  
 To row him across the sea’s broad back.  
 But I’ll help him. I’ll do everything I can  
 To get him back safely to his own native land.”

The quicksilver messenger had one last thing to say:

“Well send him off now and watch out for Zeus’ temper. 145  
 Cross him and he’ll really be rough on you later.”

With that the tough quicksilver god made his exit.

Calypso composed herself and went to Odysseus,  
 Zeus’ message still ringing in her ears.  
 She found him sitting where the breakers rolled in. 150  
 His eyes were perpetually wet with tears now,  
 His life draining away in homesickness.

The nymph had long since ceased to please.  
 He still slept with her at night in her cavern,  
 An unwilling lover mated to her eager embrace. 155  
 Days he spent sitting on the rocks by the breakers,  
 Staring out to sea with hollow, salt-rimmed eyes.  
 She stood close to him and started to speak:

“You poor man. You can stop grieving now  
 And pining away. I’m sending you home. 160  
 Look, here’s a bronze axe. Cut some long timbers  
 And make yourself a raft fitted with topdecks,  
 Something that will get you across the sea’s misty spaces.  
 I’ll stock it with fresh water, food, and red wine—  
 Hearty provisions that will stave off hunger—and 165  
 I’ll clothe you well and send you a following wind  
 To bring you home safely to your own native land,  
 If such is the will of the gods of high heaven,  
 Whose minds and powers are stronger than mine.”

Odysseus’ eyes shone with weariness. He stiffened, 170  
 And shot back at her words fletched like arrows:

“I don’t know what kind of send-off you have in mind,  
 Goddess, telling me to cross all that open sea on a raft,  
 Painful, hard sailing. Some well-rigged vessels  
 Never make it across with a stiff wind from Zeus. 175  
 You’re not going to catch me setting foot on any raft  
 Unless you agree to swear a solemn oath  
 That you’re not planning some new trouble for me.”

Calypso’s smile was like a shower of light.  
 She touched him gently, and teased him a little: 180

“Blasphemous, that’s what you are—but nobody’s fool!  
 How do you manage to say things like that?  
 All right. I swear by Earth and Heaven above  
 And the subterranean water of Styx—the greatest  
 Oath and the most awesome a god can swear— 185  
 That I’m not planning more trouble for you, Odysseus.

I'll put my mind to work for you as hard as I would  
 For myself, if ever I were in such a fix.  
 My heart is in the right place, Odysseus,  
 Nor is it a cold lump of iron in my breast." 190

With that the haloed goddess walked briskly away  
 And the man followed in the deity's footsteps.  
 The two forms, human and divine, came to the cave  
 And he sat down in the chair which moments before  
 Hermes had vacated, and the nymph set out for him 195  
 Food and drink such as mortal men eat.  
 She took a seat opposite godlike Odysseus  
 And her maids served her ambrosia and nectar.  
 They helped themselves to as much as they wanted,  
 And when they had their fill of food and drink 200  
 Calypso spoke, an immortal radiance upon her:

"Son of Laertes in the line of Zeus, my wily Odysseus,  
 Do you really want to go home to your beloved country  
 Right away? Now? Well, you still have my blessings.  
 But if you had any idea of all the pain 205  
 You're destined to suffer before getting home,  
 You'd stay here with me, deathless—  
 Think of it, Odysseus!—no matter how much  
 You missed your wife and wanted to see her again.  
 You spend all your daylight hours yearning for her. 210  
 I don't mind saying she's not my equal  
 In beauty, no matter how you measure it.  
 Mortal beauty cannot compare with immortal."

Odysseus, always thinking, answered her this way:

"Goddess and mistress, don't be angry with me. 215  
 I know very well that Penelope,  
 For all her virtues, would pale beside you.  
 She's only human, and you are a goddess,  
 Eternally young. Still, I want to go back.  
 My heart aches for the day I return to my home. 220  
 If some god hits me hard as I sail the deep purple,

I'll weather it like the sea-bitten veteran I am.  
 God knows I've suffered and had my share of sorrows  
 In war and at sea. I can take more if I have to."

The sun set on his words, and the shadows darkened. 225  
 They went to a room deep in the cave, where they made  
 Sweet love and lay side by side through the night.

Dawn came early, touching the sky with rose.

Odysseus put on a shirt and cloak,  
 And the nymph slipped on a long silver robe 230  
 Shimmering in the light, cinched it at the waist  
 With a golden belt and put a veil on her head.  
 What to do about sending Odysseus off?  
 She handed him an axe, bronze, both edges honed.  
 The olive-wood haft felt good in his palms. 235  
 She gave him a sharp adze, too, then led the way  
 To the island's far side where the trees grew tall,  
 Alder and poplar and silver fir, sky-topping trees  
 Long-seasoned and dry that would keep him afloat.  
 Calypso showed him where the trees grew tall 240  
 Then went back home, a glimmer in the woods,  
 While Odysseus cut timber.

Working fast,  
 He felled twenty trees, cut them to length,  
 Smoothed them skillfully and trued them to the line.  
 The glimmer returned—Calypso with an auger— 245  
 And he drilled the beams through, fit them up close  
 And hammered them together with joiners and pegs.  
 About the size of a deck a master shipwright  
 Chisels into shape for a broad-bowed freighter  
 Was the size Odysseus made his wide raft. 250  
 He fit upright ribs close-set in the decking  
 And finished them with long facing planks.  
 He built a mast and fit in a yardarm,  
 And he made a rudder to steer her by.  
 Then he wove a wicker-work barrier 255  
 To keep off the waves, plaiting it thick.

Calypso brought him a large piece of cloth  
To make into a sail, and he fashioned that, too.  
He rigged up braces and halyards and lines,  
Then levered his craft down to the glittering sea. 260

Day four, and the job was finished.  
Day five, and Calypso saw him off her island,  
After she had bathed him and dressed him  
In fragrant clothes. She filled up a skin  
With wine that ran black, another large one 265  
With water, and tucked into a duffel  
A generous supply of hearty provisions.  
And she put a breeze at his back, gentle and warm.

Odysseus' heart sang as he spread sail to the wind,  
And he steered with the rudder, a master mariner 270  
Aboard his craft. Sleep never fell on his eyelids  
As he watched the Pleiades and slow-setting Boötes  
And the Bear (also known as the Wagon)  
That pivots in place and chases Orion  
And alone is aloof from the wash of Ocean. 275  
Calypso, the glimmering goddess, had told him  
To sail with the stars of the Bear on his left.  
Seventeen days he sailed the deep water,  
And on the eighteenth day the shadowy mountains  
Of the Phaeacians' land loomed on the horizon, 280  
To his eyes like a shield on the misty sea.

And Poseidon saw him.  
From the far Solymi Mountains  
The Lord of Earthquake, returning from Ethiopia,  
Saw him, an image in his mind bobbing on the sea.  
Angrier than ever, he shook his head 285  
And cursed to himself:

“Damn it all, the gods  
Must have changed their minds about Odysseus  
While I was away with the Ethiopians.  
He's close to Phaeacia, where he's destined to escape



The great ring of sorrow that has closed around him. 290  
But I'll bet I can still blow some trouble his way."

He gathered the clouds, and gripping his trident  
He stirred the sea. And he raised all the blasts  
Of every wind in the world and covered with clouds  
Land and sea together. Night rose in the sky. 295  
The winds blew hard from every direction,  
And lightning-charged Boreas rolled in a big wave.  
Odysseus felt his knees and heart weaken.  
Hunched over, he spoke to his own great soul:

"Now I'm in for it. 300  
I'm afraid that Calypso was right on target  
When she said I would have my fill of sorrow  
On the open sea before I ever got home.  
It's all coming true. Look at these clouds  
Zeus is piling like flowers around the sky's rim, 305  
And he's roughened the sea, and every wind  
In the world is howling around me.  
Three times, four times luckier than I  
Were the Greeks who died on Troy's wide plain!  
If only I had gone down on that day 310  
When the air was whistling with Trojan spears  
In the desperate fight for Achilles' dead body.  
I would have had burial then, honored by the army.  
As it is I am doomed to a wretched death at sea."

His words weren't out before a huge cresting wave 315  
Crashed on his raft and shivered its timbers.  
He was pitched clear of the deck. The rudder flew  
From his hands, the mast cracked in two  
Under the force of the hurricane winds,  
And the yardarm and sail hove into the sea. 320  
He was under a long time, unable to surface  
From the heaving swell of the monstrous wave,  
Weighed down by the clothes Calypso had given him.  
At last he came up, spitting out saltwater,  
Seabrine gurgling from his nostrils and mouth. 325

For all his distress, though, he remembered his raft,  
Lunged through the waves, caught hold of it  
And huddled down in its center shrinking from death.

An enormous wave rode the raft into cross-currents.

*The North Wind in autumn sweeps through a field  
Rippling with thistles and swirls them around.* 330

So the winds swirled the raft all over the sea,  
South Wind colliding at times with the North,  
East Wind shearing away from the West.

And the White Goddess saw him, Cadmus' daughter  
Ino, once a human girl with slim, beautiful ankles  
Who had won divine honors in the saltwater gulfs.  
She pitied Odysseus his wandering, his pain,  
And rose from the water like a flashing gull,  
Perched on his raft, and said this to him: 340

“Poor man. Why are you so odious to Poseidon,  
Odysseus, that he sows all this grief for you?  
But he'll not destroy you, for all of his fury.  
Now do as I say—you're in no way to refuse:  
Take off those clothes and abandon your raft 345  
To the winds' will. Swim for your life  
To the Phaeacians' land, your destined safe harbor.  
Here, wrap this veil tightly around your chest.  
It's immortally charmed: Fear no harm or death.  
But when with your hands you touch solid land 350  
Untie it and throw it into the deep blue sea  
Clear of the shore so it can come back to me.”

With these words the goddess gave him the veil  
And slipped back into the heavy seas  
Like a silver gull. The black water swallowed her. 355  
Godlike Odysseus brooded on his trials  
And spoke these words to his own great soul:

“Not this. Not another treacherous god  
 Scheming against me, ordering me to abandon my raft.  
 I will not obey. I’ve seen with my own eyes 360  
 How far that land is where she says I’ll be saved.  
 I’ll play it the way that seems best to me.  
 As long as the timbers are still holding together  
 I’ll hang on and gut it out right here where I am.  
 When and if a wave shatters my raft to pieces, 365  
 Then I’ll swim for it. What else can I do?”

As he churned these thoughts in the pit of his stomach  
 Poseidon Earthshaker raised up a great wave—  
 An arching, cavernous, sensational tsunami—  
 And brought it crashing down on him. 370

*As storm winds blast into a pile of dry chaff  
 And scatter the stuff all over the place,*

So the long beams of Odysseus’ raft were scattered.  
 He went with one beam and rode it like a stallion,  
 Stripping off the clothes Calypso had given him 375  
 And wrapping the White Goddess’s veil round his chest.  
 Then he dove into the sea and started to swim  
 A furious breaststroke. The Lord of Earthquake saw him  
 And said to himself with a slow toss of his head:

“That’s right. Thrash around in misery on the open sea 380  
 Until you come to human society again.  
 I hope that not even then will you escape from evil.”

With these words he whipped his sleek-coated horses  
 And headed for his fabulous palace on Aegae.

But Zeus’ daughter Athena had other ideas. 385  
 She barricaded all the winds but one  
 And ordered them to rest and fall asleep.  
 Boreas, though, she sent cracking through the waves,  
 A tailwind for Odysseus until he was safe on Phaeacia,  
 And had beaten off the dark birds of death. 390

Two nights and two days the solid, mitered waves  
 Swept him on, annihilation all his heart could foresee.  
 But when Dawn combed her hair in the third day's light,  
 The wind died down and there fell  
 A breathless calm. Riding a swell 395  
 He peered out and saw land nearby.

*You know how precious a father's life is  
 To children who have seen him through a long disease,  
 Gripped by a malevolent spirit and melting away,  
 But then released from suffering in a spasm of joy.* 400

The land and woods were that welcome a sight  
 To Odysseus. He kicked hard for the shoreline,  
 But when he was as close as a shout would carry  
 He heard the thud of waves on the rocks,  
 Thundering surf that pounded the headland 405  
 And bellowed eerily. The sea churned with foam.  
 There were no harbors for ships, no inlets or bays,  
 Only jutting cliffs and rocks and barnacled crags.  
 Odysseus' heart sank and his knees grew weak.  
 With a heavy sigh he spoke to his own great soul: 410

“Ah, Zeus has let me see land I never hoped to see  
 And I've cut my way to the end of this gulf,  
 But there's no way to get out of the grey saltwater.  
 Only sharp rocks ahead, laced by the breakers,  
 And beyond them slick stone rising up sheer 415  
 Right out of deep water, no place for a foothold,  
 No way to stand up and wade out of trouble.  
 If I try to get out here a wave might smash me  
 Against the stone cliff. Some mooring that would be!  
 If I swim around farther and try to find 420  
 A shelving shore or an inlet from the sea,  
 I'm afraid that a squall will take me back out  
 Groaning deeply on the teeming dark water,  
 Or some monster will attack me out of the deep  
 From the swarming brood of great Amphitritê. 425  
 I know how odious I am to the Earthshaker.”

As these thoughts welled up from the pit of his stomach  
 A breaker bore him onto the rugged coast.  
 He would have been cut to ribbons and his bones crushed  
 But grey-eyed Athena inspired him. 430  
 Slammed onto a rock he grabbed it with both hands  
 And held on groaning until the breaker rolled by.  
 He had no sooner ducked it when the backwash hit him  
 And towed him far out into open water again.

*It was just like an octopus pulled out of its hole  
 With pebbles stuck to its tentacles,* 435

Odysseus' strong hands clinging to the rocks  
 Until the skin was ripped off. The wave  
 Pulled him under, and he would have died  
 Then and there. But Athena was with him. 440  
 He surfaced again: the wave spat him up landwards,  
 And he swam along parallel to the coast, scanning it  
 For a shelving beach, an inlet from the sea,  
 And when he swam into the current of a river delta  
 He knew he had come to the perfect spot, 445  
 Lined with smooth rocks and sheltered from the wind.  
 He felt the flowing of the rivergod, and he prayed:

“Hear me, Riverlord, whoever you are  
 And however men pray to you:  
 I am a fugitive from the sea 450  
 And Poseidon's persecution,  
 A wandering mortal, pitiful  
 To the gods, I come to you,  
 To your water and your knees.  
 I have suffered much, O Lord, 455  
 Lord, hear my prayer.”

At these words the god stopped his current,  
 Made his waters calm and harbored the man  
 In his river's shallows. Odysseus crawled out  
 On hands and knees. The sea had broken his spirit. 460  
 His whole body was swollen, and saltwater trickled

From his nose and mouth. Breath gone, voice gone,  
 He lay scarcely alive, drained and exhausted.  
 When he could breathe again and his spirit returned  
 He unbound the goddess' veil from his body 465  
 And threw it into the sea-melding river  
 Where it rode the crest of a wave down the current  
 And into Ino's own hands. He turned away from the river,  
 Sank into a bed of rushes, and kissed the good earth.  
 Huddled over he spoke to his own great soul: 470

"What am I in for now? How will this end?  
 If I keep watch all night here by the river  
 I'm afraid a hard frost—or even a gentle dew—  
 Will do me in, as weak as I am.  
 The wind blows cold from a river toward dawn. 475  
 But if I climb the bank to the dark woods up there  
 And fall asleep in a thicket, even if I survive  
 Fatigue and cold and get some sweet sleep,  
 I'm afraid I'll fall prey to some prowling beast."

He thought it over and decided it was better 480  
 To go to the woods. They were near the water  
 On an open rise. He found two olive trees there,  
 One wild, one planted, their growth intertwined,  
 Proof against blasts of the wild, wet wind,  
 The sun unable to needle light through, 485  
 Impervious to rain, so thickly they grew  
 Into one tangle of shadows. Odysseus burrowed  
 Under their branches and scraped out a bed.  
 He found a mass of leaves there, enough to keep warm  
 Two or three men on the worst winter day. 490  
 The sight of these leaves was a joy to Odysseus,  
 And the godlike survivor lay down in their midst  
 And covered himself up.

*A solitary man*

*Who lives on the edge of the wilderness  
 And has no neighbors, will hide a charred log  
 Deep in the black embers and so keep alive* 495

*The fire's seed and not have to rekindle it  
From who knows where.*

So Odysseus buried  
Himself in the leaves. And Athena sprinkled  
His eyes with sleep for quickest release 500  
From pain and fatigue.  
And she closed his eyelids.

## ODYSSEY 6

So Odysseus slept, the godlike survivor  
Overwhelmed with fatigue.  
But the goddess Athena  
Went off to the land of the Phaeacians,  
A people who had once lived in Hypereia,  
Near to the Cyclopes, a race of savages 5  
Who marauded their land constantly. One day  
Great Nausithous led his people  
Off to Schería, a remote island,  
Where he walled off a city, built houses  
And shrines, and parceled out fields. 10  
After he died and went to the world below,  
Alcinous ruled, wise in the gods' ways.  
Owl-eyed Athena now came to his house  
To devise a passage home for Odysseus.  
She entered a richly decorated bedroom 15  
Where a girl as lovely as a goddess was sleeping,  
Nausicaa, daughter of noble Alcinous.  
Two maids, blessed with the beauty of Graces,  
Slept on either side of the closed, polished doors.  
Athena rushed in like a breath of wind, 20  
Stood over Nausicaa's head, and spoke to her

In the guise of her friend, the daughter  
Of the famed mariner Dymas. Assuming  
This girl's form, the owl-eyed goddess spoke:

"Nausicaa, how could your mother have raised  
Such a careless child? Your silky clothes  
Are lying here soiled, and your wedding is near!  
You'll have to dress yourself and your party well,  
If you want the people to speak highly of you  
And make your mother and father glad. 25  
We'll wash these clothes at the break of dawn.  
I'll go with you and help so you'll get it done quickly.  
You're not going to be a virgin for long, you know!  
All the best young men in Phaeacia are eager  
To marry you—as well they should be. 30  
Wake up now, and at dawn's first blush  
Ask your father if he will hitch up the mulecart  
To carry all these sashes and robes and things.  
It'll be much more pleasant than going on foot.  
The laundry pools are a long way from town." 35 40

The grey-eyed goddess spoke and was gone,  
Off to Olympus, which they say is forever  
The unmoving abode of the gods, unshaken  
By winds, never soaked by rain, and where the snow  
Never drifts, but the brilliant sky stretches  
Cloudless away, and brightness streams through the air. 45  
There, where the gods are happy all the world's days,  
Went the Grey-eyed One after speaking to the girl.

**D**awn came throned in light, and woke Nausicaa,  
Who wondered at the dream as it faded away. 50  
She went through the house to tell her parents,  
Her dear father and mother. She found them within,  
Her mother sitting by the hearth with her women,  
Spinning sea-blue yarn. Her father she met  
As he headed for the door accompanied by elders 55  
On his way to a council the nobles had called.  
She stood very close to her father and said:



“Daddy, would you please hitch up a wagon for me—  
 A high one that rolls well—so I can go to the river  
 And wash our good clothes that are all dirty now. 60  
 You yourself should wear clean clothes  
 When you sit among the first men in council.  
 And you have five sons who live in the palace,  
 Two married and three still bachelors.  
 They always want freshly washed clothes 65  
 To wear to the dances. This has been on my mind.”

She was too embarrassed to mention marriage  
 To her father, but he understood and said:

“Of course you can have the mules, child,  
 And anything else. Go on. The servants will rig up 70  
 A high, smooth-rolling wagon fitted with a trunk.”

He called the servants, and they got busy  
 Rolling out a wagon and hitching up mules.  
 Nausicaa brought out a pile of laundry  
 And loaded it into the polished cart, 75  
 While her mother packed a picnic basket  
 With all sorts of food and filled a goatskin with wine.  
 The girl put these up on the cart, along with  
 A golden flask of oil her mother gave her  
 For herself and her maids to rub on their skin. 80  
 She took the lash and the glossy reins  
 And had the mules giddyup. They jangled along  
 At a steady pace, pulling the clothes and the girl,  
 While the other girls, her maids, ran alongside.

They came to the beautiful, running river 85  
 And the laundry pools, where the clear water  
 Flowed through strongly enough to clean  
 Even the dirtiest clothes. They unhitched the mules  
 And shooed them out along the swirling river's edge  
 To munch the sweet clover. Then they unloaded 90  
 The clothes, brought them down to the water,  
 And trod them in the trenches, working fast

And making a game of it. When the clothes were washed  
 They spread them out neatly on the shore of the sea  
 Where the waves scoured the pebbled beach clean. 95  
 Then they bathed themselves and rubbed rich olive oil  
 Onto their skin, and had a picnic on the river's banks  
 While they waited for the sun to dry the clothes.  
 When the princess and her maids had enough to eat  
 They began to play with a ball, their hair streaming free. 100

*Artemis sometimes roams the mountains—  
 Immense Taygetus, or Erymanthus—  
 Showering arrows upon boars or fleet antelope,  
 And with her play the daughters of Zeus  
 Who range the wild woods—and Leto is glad 105  
 That her daughter towers above them all  
 With her shining brow, though they are beautiful all—*

So the unwed princess among her attendants.

But when she was about to fold the clothes,  
 Yoke the mules, and head back home, 110  
 The Grey-eyed One sprung her plan:  
 Odysseus would wake up, see the lovely girl,  
 And she would lead him to the Phaeacians' city.  
 The princess threw the ball to one of the girls,  
 But it sailed wide into deep, swirling water. 115  
 The girls screamed, and Odysseus awoke.  
 Sitting up, he tried to puzzle it out:

“What kind of land have I come to now?  
 Are the natives wild and lawless savages,  
 Or godfearing men who welcome strangers? 120  
 That sounded like girls screaming, or the cry  
 Of the spirit women who hold the high peaks,  
 The river wells, and the grassy meadows.  
 Can it be I am close to human voices?  
 I'll go have a look and see for myself.” 125

With that Odysseus emerged from the bushes.

He broke off a leafy branch from the undergrowth  
And held it before him to cover himself.

*A weathered mountain lion steps into a clearing,  
Confident in his strength, eyes glowing. 130*  
*The wind and rain have let up, and he's hunting  
Cattle, sheep, or wild deer; but is hungry enough  
To jump the stone walls of the animal pens.*

So Odysseus advanced upon these ringleted girls,  
Naked as he was. What choice did he have? 135  
He was a frightening sight, disfigured with brine,  
And the girls fluttered off to the jutting beaches.  
Only Alcinous' daughter stayed. Athena  
Put courage in her heart and stopped her trembling.  
She held her ground, and Odysseus wondered 140  
How to approach this beautiful girl. Should he  
Fall at her knees, or keep his distance  
And ask her with honeyed words to show him  
The way to the city and give him some clothes?  
He thought it over and decided it was better 145  
To keep his distance and not take the chance  
Of offending the girl by touching her knees.  
So he started this soft and winning speech:

“I implore you, Lady: Are you a goddess  
Or mortal? If you are one of heaven's divinities 150  
I think you are most like great Zeus' daughter  
Artemis. You have her looks, her stature, her form.  
If you are a mortal and live on this earth,  
Thrice blest is your father, your queenly mother,  
Thrice blest your brothers! Their hearts must always 155  
Be warm with happiness when they look at you,  
Just blossoming as you enter the dance.  
And happiest of all will be the lucky man  
Who takes you home with a cartload of gifts.  
I've never seen anyone like you, 160  
Man or woman. I look upon you with awe.  
Once, on Delos, I saw something to compare—

A palm shoot springing up near Apollo's altar.  
 I had stopped there with the troops under my command  
 On what would prove to be a perilous campaign. 165  
 I marveled long and hard when I saw that tree,  
 For nothing like it had ever grown from the earth.  
 And I marvel now, Lady, and I am afraid  
 To touch your knees. Yet my pain is great.  
 Yesterday, after twenty days, I pulled myself out 170  
 Of the wine-dark sea. All that time, wind and wave  
 Bore me away from Ogygia Island,  
 And now some spirit has cast me up here  
 To suffer something new. I do not think  
 My trials will end soon. The gods have much more 175  
 In store for me before that ever happens.  
 Pity me, mistress. After all my hardships  
 It is to you I have come first. I don't know  
 A soul who lives here, not a single one.  
 Show me the way to town, and give me 180  
 A rag to throw over myself, some piece of cloth  
 You may have brought along to bundle the clothes.  
 And for yourself, may the gods grant you  
 Your heart's desire, a husband and a home,  
 And the blessing of a harmonious life. 185  
 For nothing is greater or finer than this,  
 When a man and woman live together  
 With one heart and mind, bringing joy  
 To their friends and grief to their foes."

And white-armed Nausicaa answered him: 190

"Stranger, you do not seem to be a bad man  
 Or a fool. Zeus himself, the Olympian god,  
 Sends happiness to good men and bad men both,  
 To each as he wills. To you he has given these troubles,  
 Which you have no choice but to bear. But now, 195  
 Since you have come to our country,  
 You shall not lack clothing, nor anything needed  
 By a sore-tried suppliant who presents himself.  
 I will show you where the city is and tell you

That the people here are called Phaeacians. 200  
 This is their country, and I am the daughter  
 Of great-hearted Alcinous, the Phaeacians' lord."

Then the princess called to the ringleted girls:

"Stop this now. Running away at the sight of a man!  
 Do you think he is part of an enemy invasion? 205  
 There is no man on earth, nor will there ever be,  
 Slippery enough to invade Phaeacia,  
 For we are very dear to the immortal gods,  
 And we live far out in the surging sea,  
 At the world's frontier, out of all human contact. 210  
 This poor man comes here as a wanderer,  
 And we must take care of him now. All strangers,  
 All beggars, are under the protection of Zeus,  
 And even small gifts are welcome. So let's feed  
 This stranger, give him something to drink, 215  
 And bathe him in the river, out of the wind."

The girls stopped, turned, and urged each other on.  
 They took Odysseus to a sheltered spot,  
 As Nausicaa, Alcinous' daughter, had ordered.  
 They set down a mantle and a tunic, 220  
 Gave him a golden flask of olive oil,  
 And told him to wash in the river.  
 Then sunlit Odysseus said to them:

"Stay off a ways there, girls, and let me  
 Wash the brine off my shoulders myself 225  
 And rub myself down. It's been a long time  
 Since my skin has felt oil. But I don't want  
 To wash in front of you. I'd be ashamed  
 To come out naked in front of young girls."

The girls went off and talked with Nausicaa, 230  
 And Odysseus rinsed off with river water  
 All the brine that caked his shoulders and back,  
 And he scrubbed the salty scurf from his scalp.

He finished his bath, rubbed himself down with oil,  
 And put on the clothes the maiden had given him. 235  
 Then Athena, born from Zeus, made him look  
 Taller and more muscled, and made his hair  
 Tumble down his head like hyacinth flowers.

*Imagine a craftsman overlaying silver  
 With pure gold. He has learned his art 240  
 From Pallas Athena and Lord Hephaestus,  
 And creates works of breathtaking beauty.*

So Athena herself made Odysseus' head and shoulders  
 Shimmer with grace. He walked down the beach  
 And sat on the sand. The princess was dazzled, 245  
 And she said to her white-armed serving girls:

“Listen, this man hasn't come to Phaeacia  
 Against the will of the Olympian gods.  
 Before, he was a terrible sight, but now,  
 He's like one of the gods who live in the sky. 250  
 If only such a man would be called my husband,  
 Living here, and content to stay here.  
 Well, go on, give him something to eat and drink.”

They were only too glad to do what she said.  
 They served Odysseus food and drink, 255  
 And the long-suffering man ate and drank  
 Ravenously. It had been a long fast.

Nausicaa had other things on her mind.  
 She folded the clothes and loaded the wagon,  
 Hitched up the mules and climbed aboard. 260  
 Then she called to Odysseus and said:

“Get ready now, stranger, to go to the city,  
 So I can show you the way to my father's house,  
 Where I promise you will meet the best of the Phaeacians.  
 Now this is what you must do—and I think you understand: 265  
 As long as we're going through countryside and farms,

Keep up with my handmaidens behind the wagon.  
 Just jog along with them. I'll lead the way,  
 And we'll soon come to the city. It has a high wall  
 Around it, and a harbor on each side. 270

The isthmus gets narrow, and the upswept hulls  
 Are drawn up to the road. Every citizen  
 Has his own private slip. The market's there, too,  
 Surrounding Poseidon's beautiful temple  
 And bounded by stones set deep in the earth. 275

There men are always busy with their ships' tackle,  
 With cables and sails, and with planing their oars.  
 Phaeacians don't care for quivers and bows  
 But for oars and masts and streamlined ships  
 In which they love to cross the grey, salt sea. 280

It's their rude remarks I would rather avoid.  
 There are some insolent louts in this town,  
 And I can just hear one of them saying:  
 'Well, who's this tall, handsome stranger trailing along  
 Behind Nausicaa? Where'd she pick him up? 285

She'll probably marry him, some shipwreck she's taken in  
 From parts unknown. He's sure not local.  
 Maybe a god has come to answer her prayers,  
 Dropped out of the sky for her to have and to hold.  
 It's just as well she's found herself a husband 290

From somewhere else, since she turns up her nose  
 At the many fine Phaeacians who woo her.'  
 That's what they'll say, and it will count against me.  
 I myself would blame anyone who acted like this,  
 A girl who, with her father and mother to tell her better, 295

Kept the company of men before her wedding day.  
 No, stranger, be quick to understand me,  
 So that you can win from my father an escort home,  
 And soon at that.

Close by the road you will find

A grove of Athena, beautiful poplars 300  
 Surrounded by a meadow. A spring flows through it.  
 Right there is my father's estate and vineyard,  
 About as far from the city as a shout would carry.  
 Sit down there and wait for a while, until

We reach the city and arrive at my house. 305  
 When you think we've had enough time to get there,  
 Go into the city and ask any Phaeacian  
 For the house of my father, Lord Alcinous.  
 It's very easy to spot, and any child  
 Can lead you there. There's no other house 310  
 In all Phaeacia built like the house  
 Of the hero Alcinous. Once you're safely within  
 The courtyard, go quickly though the hall  
 Until you come to my mother. She'll be sitting  
 By the hearth in the firelight, spinning 315  
 Sea-blue yarn—a sight worth seeing—  
 As she leans against a column, her maids behind her.  
 Right beside her my father sits on his throne,  
 Sipping his wine like an immortal god.  
 Pass him by and throw your arms 320  
 Around my mother's knees, if you want to see  
 Your homeland soon, however far it may be.  
 If she smiles upon you, there is hope that you will  
 Return to your home and see your loved ones again.”

And she smacked the mules with the shining lash. 325  
 They trotted on smartly, leaving the river behind.  
 She drove so that Odysseus and the girls  
 Could keep up, and used the lash with care.  
 The sun had set when they reached the grove  
 Sacred to Athena. Odysseus sat down there 330  
 And said this prayer to great Zeus' daughter:

“Hear me, mystic child of the Storm God,  
 O hear me now, as you heard me not  
 When I was shattered by the Earthshaker's blows.  
 Grant that I come to Phaeacia pitied and loved.” 335

Thus his prayer, and Pallas Athena heard it  
 But did not appear to him face to face, not yet,  
 Out of respect for her uncle, who would rage against  
 Godlike Odysseus until he reached home.



# ODYSSEY 8

*[Book 7 and lines 1–286 of Book 8 are omitted. Odysseus is welcomed by Queen Arete and King Alcinous, who entertain him with feasting, dancing, and athletic competitions. Challenged by a young Phaeacian and aided by Athena, Odysseus throws the discus much farther than anyone else. Phaeacian dancers then perform for Odysseus, forming a ring around the bard Demodocus, for whom a lyre has been fetched.]*

Then Demodocus swept the strings of his lyre  
 And began his song. He sang of the passion  
 Between Ares and gold-crowned Aphrodite,  
 How they first made love in Hephaestus' house, 290  
 Sneaking around, and how the War God Ares  
 Showered her with gifts and shamed the bed  
 Of her husband, Hephaestus. But it wasn't long  
 Before Hephaesus found out. Helios told him  
 That he had seen them lying together in love. 295  
 When Hephaestus heard this heart-wrenching news  
 He went to his forge, brooding on his wrongs,  
 And set the great anvil up on its block  
 And hammered out a set of unbreakable bonds,  
 Bonds that couldn't loosen, bonds meant to stay put. 300  
 When he had wrought this snare, furious with Ares,  
 He went to his bedroom and spread the bonds  
 All around the bedposts, and hung many also  
 From the high roofbeams, as fine as cobwebs,  
 So fine not even the gods could see them. 305  
 When he had spread this cunning snare  
 All around the bed, he pretended to leave  
 On a trip to Lemnos, his favorite city.  
 Ares wasn't blind, and when he saw Hephaestus  
 On his way out, he headed for the house 310  
 Of the glorious smith, itching to make love  
 To the Cytherean goddess. She had been visiting  
 Her father, Zeus, and was just sitting down

When Ares came in, took her hand, and said:

“Let’s go to bed, my love, and lie down together. 315  
 Hephaestus has left town, off to Lemnos no doubt  
 To visit the barbarous Sintians.”

This suggestion appealed to the goddess,  
 And they climbed into bed. They were settling in  
 When the chains Hephaestus had cunningly wrought 320  
 Fell all around them. They couldn’t move an inch,  
 Couldn’t lift a finger, and by the time it sank in  
 That there was no escape, there was Hephaestus,  
 Gimp-y-legged and glorious, coming in the door.  
 He had turned back on his way to Lemnos 325  
 as soon as Helios, his spy, gave him the word.  
 He stood in the doorway, seething with anger,  
 And with an ear-splitting yell called to the gods:

“Father Zeus and all you blessed gods eternal,  
 Come see something that is as ridiculous 330  
 As it is unendurable, how Aphrodite,  
 Daughter of Zeus, scorns me for being lame  
 And loves that marauder Ares instead  
 Because he is handsome and well-knit, whereas I  
 Was born misshapen, which is no one’s fault 335  
 But my parents’, who should have never begotten me!  
 Come take a look at how these two  
 Have climbed into my bed to make love and lie  
 In each other’s arms. It kills me to see it!  
 But I don’t think they will want to lie like this 340  
 Much longer, not matter how loving they are.  
 No, they won’t want to sleep together for long,  
 But they’re staying put in my little snare  
 Until her father returns all of the gifts  
 I gave him to marry this bitch-faced girl 345  
 His beautiful, yes, but faithless daughter.”

Thus Hephaestus, and the gods gathered  
 At his bronze threshold.

Poseidon came,  
 The God of Earthquake, and Hermes the Guide,  
 And the Archer Apollo. The goddesses 350  
 All stayed home, out of modesty; but the gods  
 Stood in the doorway and laughed uncontrollably  
 When they saw Hephaestus' cunning and craft.  
 One of them would look at another and snigger:  
 "Crime doesn't pay."

"The slow catches the swift. 355  
 Slow as he is, old Gimpy caught Ares,  
 The fastest god on Olympus."  
 "Ares has to pay the fine for adultery."

That was the general drift of their jibes.  
 And then Apollo turned to Hermes and said: 360

"Tell me, Hermes, would you be willing  
 To be pinched in chains if it meant you could lie  
 Side by side with golden Aphrodite?"

And the quicksilver messenger shot back:

"I tell you what, Apollo. Tie me up 365  
 With three times as many unbreakable chains,  
 And get all the gods and goddesses, too,  
 To come here and look, if it means I can sleep  
 Side by side with golden Aphrodite."

The gods roared with laughter, except Poseidon 370  
 Who did not think it was funny. He kept  
 Pleading that Ares should be released,  
 And his words winged their way to Hephaestus:

"Let him go, and I will ensure he will pay you 375  
 Fair compensation before all the gods."

And the renowned god, lame in both legs:

"Do not ask me to do this, Poseidon.

Worthless is the surety assured for the worthless.  
 How could I ever hold you to your promise  
 If Ares slipped out of the bonds and the debt?" 380

Poseidon the Earthshaker did not back off:

"Hephaestus, if Ares gets free and disappears  
 Without paying the debt, I will pay it myself."

And the renowned god, lame in both legs:

"I cannot refuse you. It wouldn't be right." 385

And with that the strong smith undid the bonds,  
 And the two of them, free at last from their crimp,  
 Shot out of there, Ares to Thrace,  
 And Aphrodite, who loves laughter and smiles,  
 To Paphos on Cyprus, and her precinct there 390  
 With its smoking altar. There the Graces  
 Bathed her and rubbed her with the ambrosial oil  
 That glistens on the skin of the immortal gods.  
 And then they dressed her in beautiful clothes,  
 A wonder to see.

This was the song 395

The renowned bard sang, and Odysseus  
 Was glad as he listened, as were the Phaeacians,  
 Men who are famed for their long-oared ships.

*[Lines 399–489 are omitted. Clothes and other gifts are presented to Odysseus. Then Odysseus, who has not yet told the Phaeacians his name, is given a bath.]*

**W**hen the women had bathed him, rubbed him with oil, 490  
 And clothed him in a beautiful tunic and cloak,  
 Odysseus strode from the bath and was on his way  
 To join the men drinking wine.

Nausicaa,

Beautiful as only the gods could make her,  
 Stood by the doorpost of the great hall. 495  
 Her eyes went wide when she saw Odysseus,  
 And her words beat their way to him on wings:

“Farewell, stranger, and remember me  
 In your own native land. I saved your life.”

And Odysseus, whose thoughts ran deep: 500

“Nausicaa, daughter of great Alcinous,  
 So may Zeus, Hera’s thundering lord,  
 Grant that I see my homeland again.  
 There I will pray to you, as to a god,  
 All of my days. I owe you my life.” 505

And he took his seat next to Lord Alcinous.  
 They were serving food and mixing the wine  
 When the herald came up leading the bard,  
 Honored Demodocus, and seated him on a chair  
 Propped against a tall pillar in the middle of the hall. 510  
 Odysseus, with great presence of mind,  
 Cut off part of a huge chine of roast pork  
 Glistening with fat, and said to the herald:

“Herald, take this cut of meat to Demodocus  
 For him to eat. And I will greet him 515  
 Despite my grief. Bards are revered  
 By all men upon earth, for the Muse  
 Loves them well and has taught them the songways.”

The herald brought the cut of meat to Demodocus  
 And placed it in his hands, much to the bard’s delight. 520  
 Then everyone reached out to the feast before them,  
 And when they had eaten and drunk to their hearts’ content,  
 Odysseus spoke to Demodocus:

“I don’t know whether it was the Muse  
 Who taught you, or Apollo himself, 525  
 But I praise you to the skies, Demodocus.  
 When you sing about the fate of the Greeks  
 Who fought at Troy, you have it right,  
 All that they did and suffered, all they endured.  
 It’s as if you had been there yourself, 530  
 Or heard a first-hand account. But now,  
 Switch to the building of the wooden horse  
 Which Epeius made with Athena’s help,  
 The horse which Odysseus led up to Troy  
 As a trap, filled with men who would 535  
 Destroy great Ilion. If you tell me this story  
 Just as it happened, I will tell the whole world  
 That some god must have opened his heart  
 And given to you the divine gift of song.”

So he spoke, and the bard, moved by the god, 540  
 Began to sing. He made them see it happen,  
 How the Greeks set fire to their huts on the beach  
 And were sailing away, while Odysseus  
 And the picked men with him sat in the horse,  
 Which the Trojans had dragged into their city. 545  
 There the horse stood, and the Trojans sat around it  
 And could not decide what they should do.  
 There were three ways of thinking:  
 Hack open the timbers with pitiless bronze,  
 Or throw it from the heights to the rocks below, 550  
 Or let it stand as an offering to appease the gods.  
 The last was what would happen, for it was fated  
 That the city would perish once it enclosed  
 The great wooden horse, in which now sat  
 The Greek heroes who would spill Troy’s blood. 555  
 The song went on. The Greeks poured out  
 Of their hollow ambush and sacked the city.  
 He sang how one hero here and another there  
 Ravaged tall Troy, but how Odysseus went,  
 Like the War God himself, with Menelaus 560  
 To the house of Deiphobus, and there, he said,

Odysseus fought his most daring battle  
And won with the help of Pallas Athena.

This was his song. And Odysseus wept. Tears  
Welled up in his eyes and flowed down his cheeks. 565

*A woman wails as she throws herself upon  
Her husband's body. He has fallen in battle  
Before the town walls, fighting to the last  
To defend his city and protect his children.  
As she sees him dying and gasping for breath 570  
She clings to him and shrieks, while behind her  
Soldiers prod their spears into her shoulders and back,  
And as they lead her away into slavery  
Her tear-drenched face is a mask of pain.*

So too Odysseus, pitiful in his grief. 575  
He managed to conceal his tears from everyone  
Except Alcinous, who sat at his elbow  
And could not help but hear his heavy sighs.  
Alcinous acted quickly and said to his guests:

“Hear me, Phaeacian counselors and lords— 580  
Demodocus should stop playing his lyre.  
His song is not pleasing to everyone here.  
Ever since dinner began and the divine bard  
Rose up to sing, our guest has not ceased  
From lamentation. He is overcome with grief. 585  
Let the lyre stop. It is better if we all,  
Host and guest alike, can enjoy the feast.  
All that we are doing we are doing on behalf  
Of the revered stranger, providing him  
With passage home and gifts of friendship. 590  
A stranger and suppliant is as dear as a brother  
To anyone with even an ounce of good sense.  
So there is no need, stranger, for you to withhold  
What I am about to ask for, no need to be crafty  
Or think of gain. Better to speak the plain truth. 595

Tell me your name, the one you were known by  
 To your mother and father and your people back home.  
 No one is nameless, rich man or poor.  
 Parents give names to all of their children  
 When they are born. And tell me your country, 600  
 Your city, and your land, so that our ships  
 May take you there, finding their way by their wits.  
 For Phaeacian ships do not have pilots,  
 Nor steering oars, as other ships have.  
 They know on their own their passengers' thoughts, 605  
 And know all the cities and rich fields in the world,  
 And they cross the great gulfs with the greatest speed,  
 Hidden in mist and fog, with never a fear  
 Of damage or shipwreck.

But I remember hearing

My father, Nausithous, say how Poseidon 610  
 Was angry with us because we always give  
 Safe passage to men. He said that one day  
 Poseidon would smite a Phaeacian ship  
 As it sailed back home over the misty sea,  
 And would encircle our city within a mountain. 615  
 The old man used to say that, and either the god  
 Will bring it to pass or not, as suits his pleasure.  
 But tell me this, and tell me the truth.  
 Where have you wandered, to what lands?  
 Tell me about the people and cities you saw, 620  
 Which ones are cruel and without right and wrong,  
 And which are godfearing and kind to strangers.  
 And tell me why you weep and grieve at heart  
 When you hear the fate of the Greeks and Trojans.  
 This was the gods' doing. They spun that fate 625  
 So that in later times it would turn into song.  
 Did some kinsman of yours die at Troy,  
 A good, loyal man, your daughter's husband  
 Or your wife's father, someone near and dear,  
 Or perhaps even a relative by blood? 630  
 Or was it a comrade, tried and true?  
 A friend like that is no less than a brother."



# ODYSSEY 9

And Odysseus, his great mind teeming:

“My Lord Alcinous, what could be finer  
 Than listening to a singer of tales  
 Such as Demodocus, with a voice like a god’s?

5

Nothing we do is sweeter than this—  
 A cheerful gathering of all the people  
 Sitting side by side throughout the halls,  
 Feasting and listening to a singer of tales,  
 The tables filled with food and drink,  
 The server drawing wine from the bowl

10

And bringing it around to fill our cups.  
 For me, this is the finest thing in the world.  
 But you have a mind to draw out of me  
 My pain and sorrow, and make me feel it again.  
 Where should I begin, where end my story?

15

Heaven has sent me many tribulations.  
 I will tell you my name first, so that you, too,  
 Will know who I am, and when I escape  
 The day of my doom, I will always be  
 Your friend and host, though my home is far.

20

I am Odysseus, great Laertes’ son,  
 Known for my cunning throughout the world,  
 And my fame reaches even to heaven.  
 My native land is Ithaca, a sunlit island  
 With a forested peak called Neriton,

25

Visible for miles. Many other islands  
 Lie close around her—Doullichion, Samê,  
 And wooded Zacynthus—off toward the sunrise,  
 But Ithaca lies low on the evening horizon,  
 A rugged place, a good nurse of men.

30

No sight is sweeter to me than Ithaca. Yes,  
 Calypso, the beautiful goddess, kept me  
 In her caverns, yearning to possess me;

And Circe, the witch of Aeaëa, held me  
 In her halls and yearned to possess me; 35  
 But they could not persuade me or touch my heart.  
 Nothing is sweeter than your own country  
 And your own parents, not even living in a rich house—  
 Not if it's far from family and home.  
 But let me tell you of the hard journey homeward 40  
 Zeus sent me on when I sailed from Troy.

**F**rom Ilion the wind took me to the Cicones  
 In Ismaros. I pillaged the town and killed the men.  
 The women and treasure that we took out  
 I divided as fairly as I could among all hands 45  
 And then gave the command to pull out fast.  
 That was my order, but the fools wouldn't listen.  
 They drank a lot of wine and slaughtered  
 A lot of sheep and cattle on the shore.  
 Some of the town's survivors got away inland 50  
 And called their kinsmen. There were more of them,  
 And they were braver, too, men who knew how to fight  
 From chariots and on foot. They came on as thick  
 As leaves and flowers in spring, attacking  
 At dawn. We were out of luck, cursed by Zeus 55  
 To suffer heavy losses. The battle-lines formed  
 Along our beached ships, and bronze spears  
 Sliced through the air. As long as the day's heat  
 Climbed toward noon, we held our ground  
 Against superior numbers. But when the sun 60  
 Dipped down, the Cicones beat us down, too.  
 We lost six fighting men from each of our ships.  
 The rest of us cheated destiny and death.

We sailed on in shock, glad to get out alive  
 But grieving for our lost comrades. 65  
 I wouldn't let the ships get under way  
 Until someone had called out three times  
 For each mate who had fallen on the battlefield.  
 And then Zeus hit us with a norther,  
 A freak hurricane. The clouds blotted out 70

Land and sea, and night climbed up the sky.  
 The ships pitched ahead. When their sails  
 Began to shred in the gale-force winds,  
 We lowered them and stowed them aboard,  
 Fearing the worst, and rowed hard for the mainland. 75  
 We lay offshore two miserable days and nights.  
 When Dawn combed her hair in the third day's light,  
 We set up the masts, hoisted the white sails,  
 And took our seats. The wind and the helmsmen  
 Steered the ships, and I would have made it home 80  
 Unscathed, but as I was rounding Cape Malea  
 The waves, the current, and wind from the North  
 Drove me off course past Cythera Island.

Nine days of bad winds blew us across  
 The teeming seas. On the tenth day we came 85  
 To the land of the Lotus-Eaters.

We went ashore,

And the crews lost no time in drawing water  
 And preparing a meal beside their ships.  
 After they had filled up on food and drink,  
 I sent out a team—two picked men and a herald— 90  
 To reconnoiter and sound out the locals.  
 They headed out and made contact with the Lotus-Eaters,  
 Who meant no harm but did give my men  
 Some lotus to eat. Whoever ate that sweet fruit  
 Lost the will to report back, preferring instead 95  
 To stay there, munching lotus, oblivious of home.  
 I hauled them back wailing to the ships,  
 Bound them under the benches, then ordered  
 All hands to board their ships on the double  
 Before anyone else tasted the lotus. 100  
 They were aboard in no time and at their benches,  
 Churning the sea white with their oars.

We sailed on, our morale sinking,  
 And we came to the land of the Cyclopes,  
 Lawless savages who leave everything 105  
 Up to the gods. These people neither plow nor plant,

But everything grows for them unsown:  
 Wheat, barley, and vines that bear  
 Clusters of grapes, watered by rain from Zeus.  
 They have no assemblies or laws but live 110  
 In high mountain caves, ruling their own  
 Children and wives and ignoring each other.

A fertile island slants across the harbor's mouth,  
 Neither very close nor far from the Cyclopes' shore.  
 It's well-wooded and populated with innumerable 115  
 Wild goats, uninhibited by human traffic.  
 Not even hunters go there, tramping through the woods  
 And roughing it on the mountainsides.  
 It pastures no flocks, has no tilled fields—  
 Unplowed, unsown, virgin forever, bereft 120  
 Of men, all it does is support those bleating goats.  
 The Cyclopes do not sail and have no craftsmen  
 To build them benched, red-prowed ships  
 That could supply all their wants, crossing the sea  
 To other cities, visiting each other as other men do. 125  
 These same craftsmen would have made this island  
 Into a good settlement. It's not a bad place at all  
 And would bear everything in season. Meadows  
 Lie by the seashore, lush and soft,  
 Where vines would thrive. It has level plowland 130  
 With deep, rich soil that would produce bumper crops  
 Season after season. The harbor's good, too,  
 No need for moorings, anchor-stones, or tying up.  
 Just beach your ship until the wind is right  
 And you're ready to sail. At the harbor's head 135  
 A spring flows clear and bright from a cave  
 Surrounded by poplars.

There we sailed in,  
 Some god guiding us through the murky night.  
 We couldn't see a thing. A thick fog  
 Enveloped the ships, and the moon 140  
 Wasn't shining in the cloud-covered sky.  
 None of us could see the island, or the long waves  
 Rolling toward the shore, until we ran our ships

Onto the sandy beach. Then we lowered sail,  
Disembarked, and fell asleep on the sand. 145

Dawn came early, with palmettoes of rose,  
And we explored the island, marveling at it.  
The spirit-women, daughters of Zeus,  
Roused the mountain goats so that my men  
Could have a meal. We ran to the ships, 150  
Got our javelins and bows, formed three groups  
And started to shoot. The god let us bag our game,  
Nine goats for each of the twelve ships,  
Except for my ship, which got ten.

So all day long until the sun went down 155  
We feasted on meat and sweet wine.  
The ships had not yet run out of the dark red  
Each crew had taken aboard in large jars  
When we ransacked the Cicones' sacred city.  
And we looked across at the Cyclopes' land. 160  
We could see the smoke from their fires  
And hear their voices, and their sheep and goats.  
When the sun set, and darkness came on  
We went to sleep on the shore of the sea.  
As soon as dawn brightened in the rosy sky, 165  
I assembled all the crews and spoke to them:

'The rest of you will stay here while I go  
With my ship and crew on reconnaissance.  
I want to find out what those men are like,  
Wild savages with no sense of right or wrong 170  
Or hospitable folk who fear the gods.'

With that, I boarded ship and ordered my crew  
To get on deck and cast off. They took their places  
And were soon whitening the sea with their oars.  
As we pulled in over the short stretch of water, 175  
There on the shoreline we saw a high cave  
Overhung with laurels. It was a place  
Where many sheep and goats were penned at night.

Around it was a yard fenced in by stones  
 Set deep in the earth, and by tall pines and crowned oaks. 180  
 This was the lair of a huge creature, a man  
 Who pastured his flocks off by himself,  
 And lived apart from others and knew no law.  
 He was a freak of nature, not like men who eat bread,  
 But like a lone wooded crag high in the mountains. 185

I ordered part of my crew to stay with the ship  
 And counted off the twelve best to go with me.  
 I took along a goatskin filled with red wine,  
 A sweet vintage I had gotten from Maron,  
 Apollo's priest on Ismaros, when I spared both him 190  
 And his wife and child out of respect for the god.  
 He lived in a grove of Phoebus Apollo  
 And gave me splendid gifts: seven bars of gold,  
 A solid-silver bowl, and twelve jars of wine,  
 Sweet and pure, a drink for the gods. 195  
 Hardly anyone in his house, none of the servants,  
 Knew about this wine—just Maron, his wife,  
 And a single housekeeper. Whenever he drank  
 This sweet dark red wine, he would fill one goblet  
 And pour it into twenty parts of water, 200  
 And the bouquet that spread from the mixing bowl  
 Was so fragrant no one could hold back from drinking.  
 I had a large skin of this wine, a sack  
 Of provisions—and a strong premonition  
 That we had a rendezvous with a man of great might, 205  
 A savage with no notion of right and wrong.

We got to the cave quickly. He was out,  
 Tending his flocks in the rich pastureland.  
 We went inside and had a good look around.  
 There were crates stuffed with cheese, and pens 210  
 Crammed with lambs and kids—firstlings,  
 Middlings, and newborns in separate sections.  
 The vessels he used for milking—pails and bowls  
 Of good workmanship—were brimming with whey.  
 My men thought we should make off with some cheese 215

And then come back for the lambs and kids,  
 Load them on board, and sail away on the sea.  
 But I wouldn't listen. It would have been far better  
 If I had! But I wanted to see him, and see  
 If he would give me a gift of hospitality. 220  
 When he did come he was not a welcome sight.

We lit a fire and offered sacrifice  
 And helped ourselves to some of the cheese.  
 Then we sat and waited in the cave  
 Until he came back, herding his flocks. 225  
 He carried a huge load of dry wood  
 To make a fire for his supper and heaved it down  
 With a crash inside the cave. We were terrified  
 And scurried back into a corner.  
 He drove his fat flocks into the wide cavern, 230  
 At least those that he milked, leaving the males—  
 The rams and the goats—outside in the yard.  
 Then he lifted up a great doorstone,  
 A huge slab of rock, and set it in place.  
 Two sturdy wagons—twenty sturdy wagons— 235  
 Couldn't pry it from the ground—that's how big  
 The stone was he set in the doorway. Then,  
 He sat down and milked the ewes and bleating goats,  
 All in good order, and put the sucklings  
 Beneath their mothers. Half of the white milk 240  
 He curdled and scooped into wicker baskets,  
 The other half he let stand in the pails  
 So he could drink it later for his supper.  
 He worked quickly to finish his chores,  
 And as he was lighting the fire he saw us and said: 245

'Who are you strangers? Sailing the seas, huh?  
 Where from, and what for? Pirates, probably,  
 Roaming around causing people trouble.'

He spoke, and it hit us like a punch in the gut—  
 His booming voice and the sheer size of the monster— 250  
 But even so I found the words to answer him:

'We are Greeks, blown off course by every wind  
 In the world on our way home from Troy, traveling  
 Sea routes we never meant to, by Zeus' will no doubt.  
 We are proud to be the men of Agamemnon, 255  
 Son of Atreus, the greatest name under heaven,  
 Conquerer of Troy, destroyer of armies.  
 Now we are here, suppliants at your knees,  
 Hoping you will be generous to us  
 And give us the gifts that are due to strangers. 260  
 Respect the gods, sir. We are your suppliants,  
 And Zeus avenges strangers and suppliants,  
 Zeus, god of strangers, who walks at their side.'

He answered me from his pitiless heart:

'You're dumb, stranger, or from far away, 265  
 If you ask me to fear the gods. Cyclopes  
 Don't care about Zeus or his aegis  
 Or the blessed gods, since we are much stronger.  
 I wouldn't spare you or your men  
 Out of fear of Zeus. I would spare them only 270  
 If I myself wanted to. But tell me,  
 Where did you leave your ship? Far  
 Down the coast, or close? I'd like to know.'

Nice try, but I knew all the tricks and said:

'My ship? Poseidon smashed it to pieces 275  
 Against the rocks at the border of your land.  
 He pushed her in close and the wind did the rest.  
 These men and I escaped by the skin of our teeth.'

This brought no response from his pitiless heart 280  
 But a sudden assault upon my men. His hands  
 Reached out, seized two of them, and smashed them  
 To the ground like puppies. Their brains splattered out  
 And oozed into the dirt. He tore them limb from limb  
 To make his supper, gulping them down  
 Like a mountain lion, leaving nothing behind— 285



Guts, flesh, or marrowy bones.  
 Crying out, we lifted our hands to Zeus  
 At this outrage, bewildered and helpless.  
 When the Cyclops had filled his huge belly  
 With human flesh, he washed it down with milk, 290  
 Then stretched out in his cave among his flocks.  
 I crept up close and was thinking about  
 Drawing my sharp sword and driving it home  
 Into his chest where the lungs hide the liver.  
 I was feeling for the spot when another thought 295  
 Checked my hand: we would die to a man in that cave,  
 Unable to budge the enormous stone  
 He had set in place to block the entrance. And so,  
 Groaning through the night, we waited for dawn.

As soon as dawn came, streaking the sky red, 300  
 He rekindled the fire and milked his flocks,  
 All in good order, placing the sucklings  
 Beneath their mothers. His chores done,  
 He seized two of my men and made his meal.  
 After he had fed he drove his flocks out, 305  
 Easily lifting the great stone, which he then set  
 Back in place as lightly as if he were setting  
 A lid upon a quiver. And then, with loud whistling,  
 The Cyclops turned his fat flocks toward the mountain,  
 And I was left there, brooding on how 310  
 I might make him pay and win glory from Athena.

This was the best plan I could come up with:  
 Beside one of the sheep pens lay a huge pole  
 Of green olive which the Cyclops had cut  
 To use as a walking stick when dry. Looking at it 315  
 We guessed it was about as large as the mast  
 Of a black ship, a twenty-oared, broad-beamed  
 Freighter that crosses the wide gulfs.  
 That's how long and thick it looked. I cut off  
 About a fathom's length from this pole 320  
 And handed it over to my men. They scraped it  
 And made it smooth, and I sharpened the tip

And took it over to the fire and hardened it.  
 Then I hid it, setting it carefully in the dung  
 That lay in piles all around the cave. 325  
 And I told my men to draw straws to decide  
 Which of them would have to share the risk with me—  
 Lift that stake and grind it in his eye  
 While he was asleep. They drew straws and came up with  
 The very men I myself would have chosen. 330  
 There were four of them, and I made five.

At evening he came, herding his fleecy sheep.  
 He drove them straight into the cave, drove in  
 All his flocks in fact. Maybe he had some  
 Foreboding, or maybe some god told him to. 335  
 Then he lifted the doorstone and set it in place,  
 And sat down to milk the goats and bleating ewes,  
 All in good order, setting the sucklings  
 Beneath their mothers. His chores done,  
 Again he seized two of my men and made his meal. 340  
 Then I went up to the Cyclops and spoke to him,  
 Holding an ivy-wood bowl filled with dark wine.

‘Cyclops, have some wine, now that you have eaten  
 Your human flesh, so you can see what kind of drink  
 Was in our ship’s hold. I was bringing it to you 345  
 As an offering, hoping you would pity me  
 And help me get home. But you are a raving  
 Maniac! How do you expect any other man  
 Ever to visit you after acting like this?’

He took the bowl and drank it off, relishing 350  
 Every last, sweet drop. And he asked me for more:

‘Be a pal and give me another drink. And tell me  
 Your name, so I can give you a gift you’ll like.  
 Wine grapes grow in the Cyclopes’ land, too.  
 Rain from the sky makes them grow from the earth. 355  
 But this—this is straight ambrosia and nectar.’

So I gave him some more of the ruby-red wine.  
 Three times the fool drained the bowl dry,  
 And when the wine had begun to work on his mind,  
 I spoke these sweet words to him:

‘Cyclops, 360

You ask me my name, my glorious name,  
 And I will tell it to you. Remember now,  
 To give me the gift just as you promised.  
 Noman is my name. They call me Noman—  
 My mother, my father, and all my friends, too.’ 365

He answered me from his pitiless heart:

‘Noman I will eat last after his friends.  
 Friends first, him last. That’s my gift to you.’

He listed as he spoke and then fell flat on his back,  
 His thick neck bent sideways. He was sound asleep, 370  
 Belching out wine and bits of human flesh  
 In his drunken stupor. I swung into action,  
 Thrusting the stake deep in the embers,  
 Heating it up, and all the while talking to my men  
 To keep up their morale. When the olive-wood stake 375  
 Was about to catch fire, green though it was,  
 And was really glowing, I took it out  
 And brought it right up to him. My men  
 Stood around me, and some god inspired us.  
 My men lifted up the olive-wood stake 380  
 And drove the sharp point right into his eye,  
 While I, putting my weight behind it, spun it around  
 The way a man bores a ship’s beam with a drill,  
 Leaning down on it while other men beneath him  
 Keep it spinning and spinning with a leather strap. 385  
 That’s how we twirled the fiery-pointed stake  
 In the Cyclops’ eye. The blood formed a whirlpool  
 Around its searing tip. His lids and brow  
 Were all singed by the heat from the burning eyeball  
 And its roots crackled in the fire and hissed 390

Like an axe-head or adze a smith dips into water  
 When he wants to temper the iron—that's how his eye  
 Sizzled and hissed around the olive-wood stake.  
 He screamed, and the rock walls rang with his voice.  
 We shrank back in terror while he wrenched 395  
 The blood-grimed stake from his eye and flung it  
 Away from him, blundering about and shouting  
 To the other Cyclopes, who lived around him  
 In caverns among the windswept crags.  
 They heard his cry and gathered from all sides 400  
 Around his cave and asked him what ailed him:

'Polyphemus, why are you hollering so much  
 And keeping us up the whole blessed night?  
 Is some man stealing your flocks from you,  
 Or killing you, maybe, by some kind of trick?' 405

And Polyphemus shouted out to them:

'Noman is killing me by some kind of trick!'

They sent their words winging back to him:

'If no man is hurting you, then your sickness  
 Comes from Zeus and can't be helped. 410  
 You should pray to your father, Lord Poseidon.'

They left then, and I laughed in my heart  
 At how my phony name had fooled them so well.  
 Cyclops meanwhile was groaning in agony.  
 Groping around, he removed the doorstone 415  
 And sat in the entrance with his hands spread out  
 To catch anyone who went out with the sheep—  
 As if I could be so stupid. I thought it over,  
 Trying to come up with the best plan I could  
 To get us all out from the jaws of death. 420  
 I wove all sorts of wiles, as a man will  
 When his life is on the line. My best idea

Had to do with the sheep that were there, big,  
 Thick-fleeced beauties with wool dark as violets.  
 Working silently, I bound them together 425  
 With willow branches the Cyclops slept on.  
 I bound them in threes. Each middle sheep  
 Carried a man underneath, protected by  
 The two on either side: three sheep to a man.  
 As for me, there was a ram, the best in the flock. 430  
 I grabbed his back and curled up beneath  
 His shaggy belly. There I lay, hands twined  
 Into the marvelous wool, hanging on for dear life.  
 And so, muffling our groans, we waited for dawn.

When the first streaks of red appeared in the sky, 435  
 The rams started to bolt toward the pasture.  
 The un milked females were bleating in the pens,  
 Their udders bursting. Their master,  
 Worn out with pain, felt along the backs  
 Of all of the sheep as they walked by, the fool, 440  
 Unaware of the men under their fleecy chests.  
 The great ram headed for the entrance last,  
 Heavy with wool—and with me thinking hard.  
 Running his hands over the ram, Polyphemus said:

‘My poor ram, why are you leaving the cave 445  
 Last of all? You’ve never lagged behind before.  
 You were always the first to reach the soft grass  
 With your big steps, first to reach the river,  
 First to want to go back to the yard  
 At evening. Now you’re last of all. Are you sad 450  
 About your master’s eye? A bad man blinded me,  
 Him and his nasty friends, getting me drunk,  
 Noman—but he’s not out of trouble yet!  
 If only you understood and could talk,  
 You could tell me where he’s hiding. I would 455  
 Smash him to bits and spatter his brains  
 All over the cave. Then I would find some relief  
 From the pain this no-good Noman has caused me.’

He spoke, and sent the ram off through the door.  
 When we had gone a little way from the cave, 460  
 I first untangled myself from the ram  
 And then untied my men. Then, moving quickly,  
 We drove those fat, long-shanked sheep  
 Down to the ship, keeping an eye on our rear.  
 We were a welcome sight to the rest of the crew, 465  
 But when they started to mourn the men we had lost  
 I forbade it with an upward nod of my head,  
 Signaling each man like that and ordering them  
 To get those fleecy sheep aboard instead,  
 On the double, and get the ship out to sea. 470  
 Before you knew it they were on their benches  
 Beating the sea to white froth with their oars.  
 When we were offshore but still within earshot,  
 I called out to the Cyclops, just to rub it in:

‘So, Cyclops, it turns out it wasn’t a coward 475  
 Whose men you murdered and ate in your cave,  
 You savage! But you got yours in the end,  
 Didn’t you? You had the gall to eat the guests  
 In your own house, and Zeus made you pay for it.’

He was even angrier when he heard this. 480  
 Breaking off the peak of a huge crag  
 He threw it toward our ship, and it carried  
 To just in front of our dark prow. The sea  
 Billowed up where the rock came down,  
 And the backwash pushed us to the mainland again, 485  
 Like a flood tide setting us down at the shore.  
 I grabbed a long pole and shoved us off,  
 Nodding to the crew to fall on the oars  
 And get us out of there. They leaned into it,  
 And when we were twice as far out to sea as before 490  
 I called to the Cyclops again, with my men  
 Hanging all over me and begging me not to:

‘Don’t do it, man! The rock that hit the water  
 Pushed us in and we thought we were done for.

If he hears any sound from us, he'll heave 495  
 Half a cliff at us and crush the ship and our skulls  
 With one throw. You know he has the range.'

They tried, but didn't persuade my hero's heart—  
 I was really angry—and I called back to him:

'Cyclops, if anyone, any mortal man, 500  
 Asks you how you got your eye put out,  
 Tell him that Odysseus the marauder did it,  
 Son of Laertes, whose home is on Ithaca.'

He groaned, and had this to say in response:

'Oh no! Now it's coming to me, the old prophecy. 505  
 There was a seer here once, a tall handsome man,  
 Telemos Eurymides. He prophesied well  
 All his life to the Cyclopes. He told me  
 That all this would happen some day,  
 That I would lose my sight at Odysseus' hands. 510  
 I always expected a great hero  
 Would come here, strong as can be.  
 Now this puny, little, good-for-nothing runt  
 Has put my eye out—because he got me drunk.  
 But come here, Odysseus, so I can give you a gift, 515  
 And ask Poseidon to help you on your way.  
 I'm his son, you know. He claims he's my father.  
 He will heal me, if he wants. But none  
 Of the other gods will, and no mortal man will.'

He spoke, and I shouted back to him: 520

'I wish I were as sure of ripping out your lungs  
 And sending you to Hell as I am dead certain  
 That not even the Earthshaker will heal your eye.'

I had my say, and he prayed to Poseidon,  
 Stretching his arms out to starry heaven: 525

'Hear me, Poseidon, blue-maned Earth-Holder,  
 If you are the father you claim to be.  
 Grant that Odysseus, son of Laertes,  
 May never reach his home on Ithaca.  
 But if he is fated to see his family again, 530  
 And return to his home and own native land,  
 May he come late, having lost all companions,  
 In another's ship, and find trouble at home.'

He prayed, and the blue-maned sea-god heard him.  
 Then he broke off an even larger chunk of rock, 535  
 Pivoted, and threw it with incredible force.  
 It came down just behind our dark-hulled ship,  
 Barely missing the end of the rudder. The sea  
 Billowed up where the rock hit the water,  
 And the wave pushed us forward all the way 540  
 To the island where our other ships waited  
 Clustered on the shore, ringed by our comrades  
 Sitting on the sand, anxious for our return.  
 We beached the ship and unloaded the Cyclops' sheep,  
 Which I divided up as fairly as I could 545  
 Among all hands. The veterans gave me the great ram,  
 And I sacrificed it on the shore of the sea  
 To Zeus in the dark clouds, who rules over all.  
 I burnt the thigh pieces, but the god did not accept  
 My sacrifice, brooding over how to destroy 550  
 All my benched ships and my trusty crews.

So all the long day until the sun went down  
 We sat feasting on meat and drinking sweet wine.  
 When the sun set and darkness came on  
 We lay down and slept on the shore of the sea. 555  
 Early in the morning, when the sky was streaked red,  
 I roused my men and ordered the crews  
 To get on deck and cast off. They took their places  
 And were soon whitening the sea with their oars.

We sailed on in shock, glad to get away alive 560  
 But grieving for the comrades we had lost."



# ODYSSEY 10

“We came next to the island of Aeolia,  
 Home of Aeolus, son of Hippiotas,  
 Dear to the immortals. Aeolia  
 Is a floating island surrounded by a wall  
 Of indestructible bronze set on sheer stone. 5  
 Aeolus’ twelve children live there with him,  
 Six daughters and six manly sons.  
 He married his daughters off to his boys,  
 And they all sit with their father and mother  
 Continually feasting on abundant good cheer 10  
 Spread out before them. Every day  
 The house is filled with steamy savor  
 And the courtyard resounds. Every night  
 The men sleep next to their high-born wives  
 On blankets strewn on their corded beds. 15  
 We came to their city and their fine palace,  
 And for a full month he entertained me.  
 He questioned me in great detail about Troy,  
 The Greek fleet, and the Greeks’ return home.  
 I told him everything, from beginning to end. 20  
 And when I, in turn, asked if I might leave  
 And requested him to send me on my way,  
 He did not refuse, and this was his send-off:  
 He gave me a bag made of the hide of an ox  
 Nine years old, which he had skinned himself, 25  
 And in this bag he bound the wild winds’ ways,  
 For Zeus had made him keeper of the winds,  
 To still or to rouse whichever he will.  
 He tied this bag down in the hold of my ship  
 With a bright silver cord, so that not a puff 30  
 Could escape. But he let the West Wind out  
 To blow my ships along and carry us home.  
 It was not to be. Our own folly undid us.

For nine days and nights we sailed on.  
 On the tenth day we raised land, our own 35  
 Native fields, and got so close we saw men  
 Tending their fires. Then sleep crept up on me,  
 Exhausted from minding the sail the whole time  
 By myself. I wouldn't let any of my crew  
 Spell me, because I wanted to make good time. 40  
 As soon as I fell asleep, the men started to talk,  
 Saying I was bringing home for myself  
 Silver and gold as gifts from great Aeolus.  
 You can imagine the sort of things they said:

'This guy gets everything wherever he goes. 45  
 First, he's freighting home his loot from Troy,  
 Beautiful stuff, while we, who made the same trip,  
 Are coming home empty-handed. And now  
 Aeolus has lavished these gifts upon him.  
 Let's have a quick look, and see what's here, 50  
 How much gold and silver is stuffed in this bag.'

All malicious nonsense, but it won out in the end,  
 And they opened the bag. The winds rushed out  
 And bore them far out to sea, weeping  
 As their native land faded on the horizon. 55  
 When I woke up and saw what had happened  
 I thought long and hard about whether I should  
 Just go over the side and end it all in the sea  
 Or endure in silence and remain among the living.  
 In the end I decided to bear it and live. 60  
 I wrapped my head in my cloak and lay down on the deck  
 While an evil wind carried the ships  
 Back to Aeolia. My comrades groaned.

We went ashore and drew water  
 And the men took a meal beside the swift ships. 65  
 When we had tasted food and drink  
 I took a herald and one man  
 And went to Aeolus' glorious palace.  
 I found him feasting with his wife and children,

And when we came in and sat on the threshold 70  
 They were amazed and questioned me:

‘What happened, Odysseus? What evil spirit  
 Abused you? Surely we sent you off  
 With all you needed to get back home  
 Or anywhere else your heart desired.’ 75

I answered them from the depths of my sorrow:

‘My evil crew ruined me, that and stubborn sleep.  
 But make it right, friends, for you have the power.’

I made my voice soft and tried to persuade them,  
 But they were silent. And then their father said: 80

‘Begone from this island instantly!  
 You are the most cursed of all living things.  
 It would go against all that is right  
 For me to help or send on his way  
 A man so despised by the blessed gods. 85  
 Begone! You are cursed by heaven!’

And with that he sent me from his house,  
 Groaning heavily. We sailed on from there  
 With grief in our hearts. Because of our folly  
 There was no breeze to push us along, 90  
 And our morale sank because the rowing was hard.

We sailed on for six solid days and nights,  
 And on the seventh we came to Lamus,  
 The lofty city of Telepylus  
 In the land of the Laestrygonians, 95  
 Where a herdsman driving in his flocks at dusk  
 Calls to another driving his out at dawn.

A man could earn a double wage there  
 If he never slept, one by herding cattle  
 And another by pasturing white sheep, 100  
 For night and day make one twilight there.  
 The harbor we came to is a glorious place,

Surrounded by sheer cliffs. Headlands  
 jut out on either side to form a narrow mouth,  
 And there all the others steered in their ships 105  
 And moored them close together in the bay.  
 No wave, large or small, ever rocks a boat  
 In that silvery calm. I alone moored my black ship  
 Outside the harbor, tying her up  
 On the rocks that lie on the border of the land. 110  
 Then I climbed to a rugged lookout point  
 And surveyed the scene. There was no sign  
 Of plowed fields, only smoke rising up from the land.

I sent out a team—two picked men and a herald—  
 To reconnoiter and find out who lived there. 115  
 They went ashore and followed a smooth road  
 Used by wagons to bring wood from the mountains  
 Down to the city. In front of the city  
 They met a girl drawing water. Her father  
 Was named Antiphates, and she had come down 120  
 To the flowing spring Artacia,  
 From which they carried water to the town.  
 When my men came up to her and asked her  
 Who the people there were and who was their king,  
 She showed them her father's high-roofed house. 125  
 They entered the house and found his wife inside,  
 A woman, to their horror, as huge as a mountain top.  
 At once she called her husband, Antiphates,  
 Who meant business when he came. He seized  
 One of my men and made him into dinner. 130  
 The other two got out of there and back to the ships,  
 But Antiphates had raised a cry throughout the city,  
 And when they heard it, the Laestrygonians  
 Came up on all sides, thousands of them,  
 Not like men but like the Sons of the Earth, 135  
 The Giants. They pelted us from the cliffs  
 With rocks too large for a man to lift.  
 The sounds that came from the ships were sickening,  
 Sounds of men dying and boats being crushed.  
 The Laestrygonians speared the bodies like fish, 140

And carried them back for their ghastly meal.  
 While this was happening I drew my sword  
 And cut the cables of my dark-prowed ship,  
 Barking out orders for the crew to start rowing  
 And get us out of there. They rowed for their lives, 145  
 Ripping the sea, and my ship sped joyfully  
 Out and away from the beetling rocks,  
 But all of the others were destroyed as they lay.

We sailed on in shock, glad to get out alive  
 But grieving for the comrades we'd lost. 150  
 And we came to Aeaea, the island that is home  
 To Circe, a dread goddess with richly coiled hair  
 And a human voice. She is the sister  
 Of dark-hearted Aeetes, and they are both sprung  
 From Helios and Perse, daughter of Ocean. 155  
 Some god guided us into a harbor  
 And we put in to shore without a sound.  
 We disembarked and lay there for two days and two nights,  
 Eating our hearts out with weariness and grief.  
 But when Dawn combed her hair in the third day's light, 160  
 I took my sword and spear and went up  
 From the ship to open ground, hoping to see  
 Plowed fields, and to hear human voices.  
 So I climbed to a rugged lookout point  
 And surveyed the scene. What I saw was smoke 165  
 Rising up from Circe's house. It curled up high  
 Through the thick brush and woods, and I wondered  
 Whether I should go and have a closer look.  
 I decided it was better to go back to the ship  
 And give my crew their meal, and then 170  
 Send out a party to reconnoiter.  
 I was on my way back and close to the ship  
 When some god took pity on me,  
 Walking there alone, and sent a great antlered stag  
 Right into my path. He was on his way 175  
 Down to the river from his pasture in the woods,  
 Thirsty and hot from the sun beating down,  
 And as he came out I got him right on the spine

In the middle of his back. The bronze spear bored  
All the way through, and he fell in the dust 180  
With a groan, and his spirit flew away.  
Planting my foot on him, I drew the bronze spear  
Out of the wound and laid it down on the ground.  
Then I pulled up a bunch of willow shoots  
And twisted them together to make a rope 185  
About a fathom long. I used this to tie  
The stag's feet together so I could carry him  
Across my back, leaning on my spear  
As I went back to the ship. There was no way  
An animal that large could be held on one shoulder. 190  
I flung him down by the ship and roused my men,  
Going up to each in turn and saying to them:

'We're not going down to Hades, my friends,  
Before our time. As long as there is still  
Food and drink in our ship, at least 195  
We don't have to starve to death.'

When they heard this, they drew their cloaks  
From their faces, and marveled at the size  
Of the stag lying on the barren seashore.  
When they had seen enough, they washed their hands 200  
And prepared a glorious feast. So all day long  
Until the sun went down we sat there feasting  
On all that meat, washing it down with wine.  
When the sun set and darkness came on,  
We lay down to sleep on the shore of the sea. 205

When Dawn brushed the eastern sky with rose,  
I called my men together and spoke to them:

'Listen to me, men. It's been hard going.  
We don't know east from west right now,  
But we have to see if we have any good ideas left. 210  
We may not. I climbed up to a lookout point.  
We're on an island, ringed by the endless sea.  
The land lies low, and I was able to see

Smoke rising up through the brushy woods.'

This was too much for them. They remembered 215  
 What Antiphates, the Laestrygonian, had done,  
 And how the Cyclops had eaten their comrades.  
 They wailed and cried, but it did them no good.  
 I counted off the crew into two companies  
 And appointed a leader for each. Eurylochus 220  
 Headed up one group and I took the other,  
 And then we shook lots in a bronze helmet.  
 Out jumped the lot of Eurylochus, brave heart,  
 And so off he went, with twenty-two men,  
 All in tears, leaving us behind in no better mood. 225

They went through the woods and found Circe's house  
 In an upland clearing. It was built of polished stone  
 And surrounded by mountain lions and wolves,  
 Creatures Circe had drugged and bewitched.  
 These beasts did not attack my men, but stood 230  
 On their hind legs and wagged their long tails,  
 Like dogs fawning on their master who always brings  
 Treats for them when he comes home from a feast.  
 So these clawed beasts were fawning around my men,  
 Who were terrified all the same by the huge animals. 235  
 While they stood like this in the gateway  
 They could hear Circe inside, singing in a lovely voice  
 As she moved about weaving a great tapestry,  
 The unfading handiwork of an immortal goddess,  
 Finely woven, shimmering with grace and light. 240  
 Polites, a natural leader, and of all the crew  
 The one I loved and trusted most, spoke up then:

'Someone inside is weaving a great web,  
 And singing so beautifully the floor thrums with the sound.  
 Whether it's a goddess or a woman, let's call her out now.' 245

And so they called to her, and she came out  
 And flung open the bright doors and invited them in.

They all filed in naively behind her,  
 Except Eurylochus, who suspected a trap.  
 When she had led them in and seated them 250  
 She brewed up a potion of Pramnian wine  
 With cheese, barley, and pale honey stirred in,  
 And she laced this potion with insidious drugs  
 That would make them forget their own native land.  
 When they had eaten and drunk, she struck them 255  
 With her wand and herded them into the sties outside.  
 Grunting, their bodies covered with bristles,  
 They looked just like pigs, but their minds were intact.  
 Once in the pens, they squealed with dismay,  
 And Circe threw them acorns and berries— 260  
 The usual fare for wallowing swine.

Eurylochus at once came back to the ship  
 To tell us of our comrades' unseemly fate,  
 But, hard as he tried, he could not speak a word.  
 The man was in shock. His eyes welled with tears, 265  
 And his mind was filled with images of horror.  
 Finally, under our impatient questioning,  
 He told us how his men had been undone:

'We went through the woods, as you told us to,  
 Glorious Odysseus, and found a beautiful house 270  
 In an upland clearing, built of polished stone.  
 Someone inside was working a great loom  
 And singing in a high, clear voice, some goddess  
 Or a woman, and they called out to her,  
 And she came out and opened the bright doors 275  
 And invited them in, and they naively  
 Filed in behind her. But I stayed outside,  
 Suspecting a trap. And they all disappeared,  
 Not one came back. I sat and watched  
 For a long, long time, and not one came back.' 280

He spoke, and I threw my silver-studded sword  
 Around my shoulders, slung on my bow,



And ordered Eurylochus to retrace his steps  
 And lead me back there. But he grabbed me by the knees  
 And pleaded with me, wailing miserably: 285

‘Don’t force me to go back there. Leave me here,  
 Because I know that you will never come back yourself  
 Or bring back the others. Let’s just get out of here  
 With those that are left. We might still make it.’

Those were his words, and I answered him: 290

‘All right, Eurylochus, you stay here by the ship.  
 Get yourself something to eat and drink.  
 I’m going, though. We’re in a really tight spot.’

And so I went up from the ship and the sea  
 Into the sacred woods. I was closing in 295  
 On Circe’s house, with all its bewitchment,  
 When I was met by Hermes. He had a golden wand  
 And looked like a young man, a hint of a moustache  
 Above his lip—youth at its most charming.  
 He clasped my hand and said to me: 300

‘Where are you off to now, unlucky man,  
 Alone, and in rough, uncharted terrain?  
 Those men of yours are up in Circe’s house,  
 Pinned like pigs into crowded little sties.  
 And you’ve come to free them? I don’t think so. 305  
 You’ll never return; you’ll have to stay there, too.  
 Oh well, I will keep you out of harm’s way.  
 Take this herb with you when you go to Circe,  
 And it will protect you from her deadly tricks.  
 She’ll mix a potion and spike it with drugs, 310  
 But she won’t be able to cast her spell  
 Because you’ll have a charm that works just as well—  
 The one I’ll give you—and you’ll be forewarned.  
 When Circe strikes you with her magic wand,  
 Draw your sharp sword from beside your thigh 315  
 And rush at her with murder in your eye.

She'll be afraid and invite you to bed.  
 Don't turn her down—that's how you'll get  
 Your comrades freed and yourself well loved.  
 But first make her swear by the gods above 320  
 She will not unsex you when you are nude,  
 Or drain you of your manly fortitude.'

So saying, Hermes gave me the herb,  
 Pulling it out of the ground, and showed it to me.  
 It was black at the root, with a milk-white flower. 325  
 Moly, the gods call it, hard for mortal men to dig up,  
 But the gods can do anything. Hermes rose  
 Through the wooded island and up to Olympus,  
 And I went on to Circe's house, brooding darkly  
 On many things. I stood at the gates 330  
 Of the beautiful goddess's house and gave a shout.  
 She heard me call and came out at once,  
 Opening the bright doors and inviting me in.  
 I followed her inside, my heart pounding.  
 She seated me on a beautiful chair 335  
 Of finely wrought silver, and prepared me a drink  
 In a golden cup, and with evil in her heart  
 She laced it with drugs. She gave me the cup  
 And I drank it off, but it did not bewitch me.  
 So she struck me with her wand and said: 340

'Off to the sty, with the rest of your friends.'

At this, I drew the sharp sword that hung by my thigh  
 And lunged at Circe as if I meant to kill her.  
 The goddess shrieked and, running beneath my blade,  
 Grabbed my knees and said to me wailing: 345

'Who are you, and where do you come from?  
 What is your city and who are your parents?  
 I am amazed that you drank this potion  
 And are not bewitched. No other man  
 Has ever resisted this drug once it's past his lips. 350  
 But you have a mind that cannot be beguiled.

You must be Odysseus, the man of many wiles,  
 Who Quicksilver Hermes always said would come here  
 In his swift black ship on his way home from Troy.  
 Well then, sheath your sword and let's 355  
 Climb into my bed and tangle in love there,  
 So we may come to trust each other.'

She spoke, and I answered her:

'Circe, how can you ask me to be gentle to you  
 After you've turned my men into swine? 360  
 And now you have me here and want to trick me  
 Into going to bed with you, so that you can  
 Unman me when I am naked. No, Goddess,  
 I'm not getting into any bed with you  
 Unless you agree first to swear a solemn oath 365  
 That you're not planning some new trouble for me.'

Those were my words, and she swore an oath at once  
 Not to do me any harm, and when she finished  
 I climbed into Circe's beautiful bed.

**M**eanwhile, her serving women were busy, 370  
 Four maidens who did all the housework,  
 Spirit women born of the springs and groves  
 And of the sacred rivers that flow to the sea.  
 One of them brought rugs with a purple sheen  
 And strewed them over chairs lined with fresh linen. 375  
 Another drew silver tables up to the chairs  
 And set golden baskets upon them. The third  
 Mixed honey-hearted wine in a silver bowl  
 And set out golden cups. The fourth  
 Filled a cauldron with water and lit a great fire 380  
 Beneath it, and when the water was boiling  
 In the glowing bronze, she set me in a tub  
 And bathed me, mixing in water from the cauldron  
 Until it was just how I liked it, and pouring it over  
 My head and shoulders until she washed from my limbs 385  
 The weariness that had consumed my soul.

When she had bathed me and rubbed me  
 With rich olive oil, and had thrown about me  
 A beautiful cloak and tunic, she led me to the hall  
 And had me sit on a silver-studded chair, 390  
 Richly wrought and with a matching footstool.  
 A maid poured water from a silver pitcher  
 Over a golden basin for me to wash my hands  
 And then set up a polished table nearby.  
 And the housekeeper, grave and dignified, 395  
 Set out bread and generous helpings  
 From all the dishes she had. She told me to eat,  
 But nothing appealed. I sat there with other thoughts  
 Occupying my mind, and my mood was dark.  
 When Circe noticed I was just sitting there, 400  
 Depressed, and not reaching out for food,  
 She came up to me and spoke winged words:

‘Why are you just sitting there, Odysseus,  
 Eating your heart out and not touching your food?  
 Are you afraid of some other trick? You need not be. 405  
 I have already sworn I will do you no harm.’

So she spoke, and I answered her:

‘Circe, how could anyone bring himself—  
 Any decent man—to taste food and drink  
 Before seeing his comrades free? 410  
 If you really want me to eat and drink,  
 Set my men free and let me see them.’

So I spoke, and Circe went outside  
 Holding her wand and opened the sty  
 And drove them out. They looked like swine 415  
 Nine or ten years old. They stood there before her  
 And she went through them and smeared each one  
 With another drug. The bristles they had grown  
 After Circe had given them the poisonous drug  
 All fell away, and they became men again, 420  
 Younger than before, taller and far handsomer.

They knew me, and they clung to my hands,  
 And the house rang with their passionate sobbing.  
 The goddess herself was moved to pity.

Then she came to my side and said: 425

‘Son of Laertes in the line of Zeus,  
 My wily Odysseus, go to your ship now  
 Down by the sea and haul it ashore.  
 Then stow all the tackle and gear in caves  
 And come back here with the rest of your crew.’ 430

So she spoke, and persuaded my heart.  
 I went to the shore and found my crew there  
 Wailing and crying beside our sailing ship.  
 When they saw me they were like farmyard calves  
 Around a herd of cows returning to the yard. 435  
 The calves bolt from their pens and run friskily  
 Around their mothers, lowing and mooing.  
 That’s how my men thronged around me  
 When they saw me coming. It was as if  
 They had come home to their rugged Ithaca, 440  
 And wailing miserably they said so to me:

‘With you back, Zeus-born, it is just as if  
 We had returned to our native Ithaca.  
 But tell us what happened to the rest of the crew.’

So they spoke, and I answered them gently: 445

‘First let’s haul our ship onto dry land  
 And then stow all the tackle and gear in caves.  
 Then I want all of you to come along with me  
 So you can see your shipmates in Circe’s house,  
 Eating and drinking all they could ever want.’ 450

They heard what I said and quickly agreed.  
 Eurylochus, though, tried to hold them back,  
 Speaking to them these winged words:

'Why do you want to do this to yourselves,  
Go down to Circe's house? She will turn all of you 455  
Into pigs, wolves, lions, and make you guard her house.  
Remember what the Cyclops did when our shipmates  
Went into his lair? It was this reckless Odysseus  
Who led them there. It was his fault they died.'

When Eurylochus said that, I considered 460  
Drawing my long sword from where it hung  
By my thigh and lopping off his head,  
Close kinsman though he was by marriage.  
But my crew talked me out of it, saying things like:

'By your leave, let's station this man here 465  
To guard the ship. As for the rest of us,  
Lead us on to the sacred house of Circe.'

And so the whole crew went up from the sea,  
And Eurylochus did not stay behind with the ship  
But went with us, in mortal fear of my temper. 470

Meanwhile, back in Circe's house, the goddess  
Had my men bathed, rubbed down with oil,  
And clothed in tunics and fleecy cloaks.  
We found them feasting well in her halls.  
When they recognized each other, they wept openly 475  
And their cries echoed throughout Circe's house.  
Then the shining goddess stood near me and said:

'Lament no more. I myself know  
All that you have suffered on the teeming sea  
And the losses on land at your enemies' hands. 480  
Now you must eat, drink wine, and restore the spirit  
You had when you left your own native land,  
Your rugged Ithaca. You are skin and bones now  
And hollow inside. All you can think of  
Is your hard wandering, no joy in your heart, 485  
For you have, indeed, suffered many woes.'

She spoke, and I took her words to heart.  
 So we sat there day after day for a year,  
 Feasting on abundant meat and sweet wine.  
 But when a year had passed, and the seasons turned, 490  
 And the moons waned and the long days were done,  
 My trusty crew called me out and said:

‘Good god, man, at long last remember your home,  
 If it is heaven’s will for you to be saved  
 And return to your house and your own native land.’ 495

They spoke, and I saw what they meant.  
 So all that long day until the sun went down  
 We sat feasting on meat and sweet red wine.  
 When the sun set and darkness came on,  
 My men lay down to sleep in the shadowy hall, 500  
 But I went up to Circe’s beautiful bed  
 And touching her knees I beseeched the goddess:

‘Circe, fulfill now the promise you made  
 To send me home. I am eager to be gone  
 And so are my men, who are wearing me out 505  
 Sitting around whining and complaining  
 Whenever you happen not to be present.’

So I spoke, and the shining goddess answered:

‘Son of Laertes in the line of Zeus,  
 My wily Odysseus—you need not stay 510  
 Here in my house any longer than you wish.  
 But there is another journey you must make first—  
 To the house of Hades and dread Persephone,  
 To consult the ghost of Theban Tiresias,  
 The blind prophet, whose mind is still strong. 515  
 To him alone Persephone has granted  
 Intelligence even after his death.  
 The rest of the dead are fitting shadows.’

This broke my spirit. I sat on the bed  
 And wept. I had no will to live, nor did I care 520

If I ever saw the sunlight again.  
 But when I had my fill of weeping and writhing,  
 I looked at the goddess and said:

‘And who will guide me on this journey, Circe?  
 No man has ever sailed his black ship to Hades.’ 525

And the goddess, shining, answered at once:

‘Son of Laertes in the line of Zeus,  
 My wily Odysseus—do not worry about  
 A pilot to guide your ship. Just set up the mast,  
 Spread the white sail, and sit yourself down. 530  
 The North Wind’s breath will bear her onwards.  
 But when your ship crosses the stream of Ocean  
 You will see a shelving shore and Persephone’s groves,  
 Tall poplars and willows that drop their fruit.  
 Beach your ship there by Ocean’s deep eddies, 535  
 And go yourself to the dank house of Hades.  
 There into Acheron flow Pyriphlegethon  
 And Cocytus, a branch of the water of Styx.  
 And there is a rock where the two roaring rivers  
 Flow into one. At that spot, hero, gather yourself 540  
 And do as I say.

Dig an ell-square pit,  
 And around it pour libation to all the dead,  
 First with milk and honey, then with sweet wine,  
 And a third time with water. Then sprinkle barley  
 And pray to the looming, feeble death-heads, 545  
 Vowing sacrifice on Ithaca, a barren heifer,  
 The herd’s finest, and rich gifts on the altar,  
 And to Tiresias alone a great black ram.  
 After these supplications to the spirits,  
 Slaughter a ram and a black ewe, turning their heads 550  
 Toward Erebus, yourself turning backward  
 And leaning toward the streams of the river.  
 Then many ghosts of the dead will come forth.  
 Call to your men to flay the slaughtered sheep  
 And burn them as a sacrifice to the gods below, 555



To mighty Hades and dread Persephone.  
 You yourself draw your sharp sword and sit there,  
 Keeping the feeble death-heads from the blood  
 Until you have questioned Tiresias.  
 Then, and quickly, the great seer will come. 560  
 He will tell you the route and how long it will take  
 For you to reach home over the teeming deep.'

Dawn rose in gold as she finished speaking.  
 Circe gave me a cloak and tunic to wear  
 And the nymph slipped on a long silver robe 565  
 Shimmering in the light, cinched it at the waist  
 With a golden belt and put a veil on her head.  
 I went through the halls and roused my men,  
 Going up to each with words soft and sweet:

'Time to get up! No more sleeping late. 570  
 We're on our way. Lady Circe has told me all.'

So I spoke, and persuaded their heroes' hearts.  
 But not even from Circe's house could I lead my men  
 Unscathed. One of the crew, Elpenor, the youngest,  
 Not much of a warrior nor all that smart, 575  
 Had gone off to sleep apart from his shipmates,  
 Seeking the cool air on Circe's roof  
 Because he was heavy with wine.  
 He heard the noise of his shipmates moving around  
 And sprang up suddenly, forgetting to go 580  
 To the long ladder that led down from the roof.  
 He fell headfirst, his neck snapped at the spine,  
 And his soul went down to the house of Hades.

As my men were heading out I spoke to them:

'You think, no doubt, that you are going home, 585  
 But Circe has plotted another course for us,  
 To the house of Hades and dread Persephone,  
 To consult the ghost of Theban Tiresias.'

This broke their hearts. They sat down  
 Right where they were and wept and tore their hair,  
 But no good came of their lamentation. 590

While we were on our way to our swift ship  
 On the shore of the sea, weeping and crying,  
 Circe had gone ahead and tethered a ram and a black ewe  
 By our tarred ship. She had passed us by 595  
 Without our ever noticing. Who could see  
 A god on the move against the god's will?"

## ODYSSEY 11

"When we reached our black ship  
 We hauled her onto the bright saltwater,  
 Set up the mast and sail, loaded on  
 The sheep, and boarded her ourselves,  
 Heartsick and weeping openly by now. 5  
 The dark prow cut through the waves  
 And a following wind bellied the canvas,  
 A good sailing breeze sent by Circe,  
 The dread goddess with a human voice.  
 We lashed everything down and sat tight, 10  
 Leaving the ship to the wind and helmsman.  
 All day long she surged on with taut sail;  
 Then the sun set, and the sea grew dark.

The ship took us to the deep, outermost Ocean  
 And the land of the Cimmerians, a people 15  
 Shrouded in mist. The sun never shines there,  
 Never climbs the starry sky to beam down at them,  
 Nor bathes them in the glow of its last golden rays;  
 Their wretched sky is always racked with night's gloom.

We beached our ship there, unloaded the sheep, 20  
 And went along the stream of Ocean  
 Until we came to the place spoken of by Circe.

There Perimedes and Eurylochus held the victims  
 While I dug an ell-square pit with my sword,  
 And poured libation to all the dead, 25  
 First with milk and honey, then with sweet wine,  
 And a third time with water. Then I sprinkled  
 White barley and prayed to the looming dead,  
 Vowing sacrifice on Ithaca—a barren heifer,  
 The herd's finest, and rich gifts on the altar, 30  
 And to Tiresias alone a great black ram.  
 After these supplications to the spirits,  
 I cut the sheeps' throats over the pit,  
 And the dark blood pooled there.

Then out of Erebus

The souls of the dead gathered, the ghosts 35  
 Of brides and youths and worn-out old men  
 And soft young girls with hearts new to sorrow,  
 And many men wounded with bronze spears,  
 Killed in battle, bearing blood-stained arms.  
 They drifted up to the pit from all sides 40  
 With an eerie cry, and pale fear seized me.  
 I called to my men to flay the slaughtered sheep  
 And burn them as a sacrifice to the gods,  
 To mighty Hades and dread Persephone.  
 Myself, I drew my sharp sword and sat, 45  
 Keeping the feeble death-heads from the blood  
 Until I had questioned Tiresias.

First to come was the ghost of Elpenor,  
 Whose body still lay in Circe's hall,  
 Unmourned, unburied, since we'd been hard pressed. 50  
 I wept when I saw him, and with pity in my heart  
 Spoke to him these feathered words:

'Elpenor, how did you get to the undergloom  
 Before me, on foot, outstripping our black ship?'

I spoke, and he moaned in answer: 55

‘Bad luck and too much wine undid me.  
 I fell asleep on Circe’s roof. Coming down  
 I missed my step on the long ladder  
 And fell headfirst. My neck snapped  
 At the spine and my ghost went down to Hades. 60  
 Now I beg you—by those we left behind,  
 By your wife and the father who reared you,  
 And by Telemachus, your only son,  
 Whom you left alone in your halls—  
 When you put the gloom of Hades behind you 65  
 And beach your ship on the Isle of Aeaëa,  
 As I know you will, remember me, my lord.  
 Do not leave me unburied, unmourned,  
 When you sail for home, or I might become  
 A cause of the gods’ anger against you. 70  
 Burn me with my armor, such as I have,  
 Heap me a barrow on the grey sea’s shore,  
 In memory of a man whose luck ran out.  
 Do this for me, and fix in the mound the oar  
 I rowed with my shipmates while I was alive.’ 75

Thus Elpenor, and I answered him:

‘Pitiful spirit, I will do this for you.’

Such were the sad words we exchanged  
 Sitting by the pit, I on one side holding my sword  
 Over the blood, my comrade’s ghost on the other. 80

Then came the ghost of my dead mother,  
 Anticleia, daughter of the hero Autolycus.  
 She was alive when I left for sacred Ilion.  
 I wept when I saw her, and pitied her,  
 But even in my grief I would not allow her 85  
 To come near the blood until I had questioned Tiresias.

And then he came, the ghost of Theban Tiresias,  
 Bearing a golden staff. He knew me and said:

‘Odysseus, son of Laertes, master of wiles,  
 Why have you come, leaving the sunlight 90  
 To see the dead and this joyless place?  
 Move off from the pit and take away your sword,  
 So I may drink the blood and speak truth to you.’

I drew back and slid my silver-studded sword  
 Into its sheath. After he had drunk the dark blood 95  
 The flawless seer rose and said to me:

‘You seek a homecoming sweet as honey,  
 Shining Odysseus, but a god will make it bitter,  
 For I do not think you will elude the Earthshaker,  
 Who has laid up wrath in his heart against you, 100  
 Furious because you blinded his son. Still,  
 You just might get home, though not without pain,  
 You and your men, if you curb your own spirit,  
 And theirs, too, when you beach your ship  
 On Thrinacia. You will be marooned on that island 105  
 In the violet sea, and find there the cattle  
 Of Helios the Sun, and his sheep, too, grazing.  
 Leave these unharmed, keep your mind on your homecoming,  
 And you may still reach Ithaca, though not without pain.  
 But if you harm them, I foretell doom for you, 110  
 Your ship, and your crew. And even if you  
 Yourself escape, you will come home late  
 And badly, having lost all companions  
 And in another’s ship. And you shall find  
 Trouble in your house, arrogant men 115  
 Devouring your wealth and courting your wife.  
 Yet vengeance will be yours, and when you have slain  
 The suitors in your hall, by ruse or by sword,  
 Then you must go off again, carrying a broad-bladed oar,  
 Until you come to men who know nothing of the sea, 120  
 Who eat their food unsalted, and have never seen  
 Red-prowed ships or oars that wing them along.  
 And I will tell you a sure sign that you have found them,  
 One you cannot miss. When you meet another traveler  
 Who thinks you are carrying a winnowing fan, 125

Then you must fix your oar in the earth  
And offer sacrifice to Lord Poseidon,  
A ram, a bull, and a boar in its prime.  
Then return to your home and offer  
Perfect sacrifice to the immortal gods 130  
Who hold high heaven, to each in turn.  
And death will come to you off the sea,  
A death so gentle, and carry you off  
When you are worn out in sleek old age,  
Your people prosperous all around you. 135  
All this will come true for you as I have told.'

Thus Tiresias. And I answered him:

'All that, Tiresias, is as the gods have spun it.  
But tell me this: I see here the ghost  
Of my dead mother, sitting in silence 140  
Beside the blood, and she cannot bring herself  
To look her son in the eye or speak to him.  
How can she recognize me for who I am?'

And Tiresias, the Theban prophet:

'This is easy to tell you. Whoever of the dead 145  
You let come to the blood will speak truly to you.  
Whoever you deny will go back again.'

With that, the ghost of Lord Tiresias  
Went back into Hades, his soothsaying done.  
But I stayed where I was until my mother 150  
Came up and drank the dark blood. At once  
She knew me, and her words reached me on wings:

'My child, how did you come to the undergloom  
While you are still alive? It is hard for the living 155  
To reach these shores. There are many rivers to cross,  
Great bodies of water, nightmarish streams,  
And Ocean itself, which cannot be crossed on foot  
But only in a well-built ship. Are you still wandering

On your way back from Troy, a long time at sea  
 With your ship and your men? Have you not yet come 160  
 To Ithaca, or seen your wife in your halls?

So she spoke, and I answered her:

'Mother, I came here because I had to,  
 To consult the ghost of the prophet Tiresias.  
 I have not yet come to the coast of Achaea 165  
 Or set foot on my own land. I have had nothing  
 But hard travels from the day I set sail  
 With Lord Agamemnon to go to Ilion,  
 Famed for its horses, to fight the Trojans.  
 But tell me truly, how did you die? 170  
 Was it a long illness, or did Artemis  
 Shoot you suddenly with her gentle arrows?  
 And tell me about my father and my son,  
 Whom I left behind. Does the honor I had  
 Still remain with them, or has it passed 175  
 To some other man, and do they all say  
 I will never return? And what about my wife?  
 What has she decided, what does she think?  
 Is she still with my son, keeping things safe?  
 Or has someone already married her, 180  
 Whoever is now the best of the Achaeans?'

So I spoke, and my mother answered at once:

'Oh, yes indeed, she remains in your halls,  
 Her heart enduring the bitter days and nights.  
 But the honor that was yours has not passed 185  
 To any man. Telemachus holds your lands  
 Unchallenged, and shares in the feasts  
 To which all men invite him as the island's lawgiver.  
 Your father, though, stays out in the fields  
 And does not come to the city. He has no bed 190  
 Piled with bright rugs and soft coverlets  
 But sleeps in the house where the slaves sleep,  
 In the ashes by the fire, and wears poor clothes.'

In summer and autumn his vineyard's slope  
Is strewn with beds of leaves on the ground, 195  
Where he lies in his sorrow, nursing his grief,  
Longing for your return. His old age is hard.  
I died from the same grief. The keen-eyed goddess  
Did not shoot me at home with her gentle shafts,  
Nor did any long illness waste my body away. 200  
No, it was longing for you, my glorious Odysseus,  
For your gentle heart and your gentle ways,  
That robbed me of my honey-sweet life.'

So she spoke, and my heart yearned  
To embrace the ghost of my dead mother. 205  
Three times I rushed forward to hug her,  
And three times she drifted out of my arms  
Like a shadow or a dream. The pain  
That pierced my heart grew ever sharper,  
And my words rose to my mother on wings: 210

'Mother, why do you slip away when I try  
To embrace you? Even though we are in Hades,  
Why can't we throw our arms around each other  
And console ourselves with chill lamentation?  
Are you a phantom sent by Persephone 215  
To make me groan even more in my grief?'

And my mother answered me at once:

'O my child, most ill-fated of men,  
It is not that Persephone is deceiving you.  
This is the way it is with mortals. 220  
When we die, the sinews no longer hold  
Flesh and bones together. The fire destroys these  
As soon as the spirit leaves the white bones,  
And the ghost flutters off and is gone like a dream.  
Hurry now to the light, and remember these things, 225  
So that later you may tell them all to your wife.'

That was the drift of our talk.



Then the women came,  
 Sent by Persephone, all those who had been  
 The wives and daughters of the heroes of old.  
 They flocked together around the dark blood, 230  
 But I wanted to question them one at a time.  
 The best way I could think of to question them  
 Was to draw the sharp sword from beside my thigh,  
 And keep them from drinking the blood all at once.  
 They came up in procession then, and one by one 235  
 They declared their birth, and I questioned them all.

The first one I saw was highborn Tyro,  
 Who said she was born of flawless Salmoneus  
 And was wed to Cretheus, a son of Aeolus.  
 She fell in love with a river, divine Enipeus, 240  
 The most beautiful of all the rivers on earth,  
 And she used to play in his lovely streams.  
 But the Earthshaker took Enipeus' form  
 And lay with her in the swirling eddies  
 Near the river's mouth. And an indigo wave, 245  
 Towering like a mountain, arched over them  
 And hid the god and the mortal woman from view.  
 He unbound the sash that had kept her virgin  
 And shed sleep upon her. And when the god  
 Had finished his lovemaking, he took her hand 250  
 And called her name softly and said to her:

'Be happy in this love, woman. As the year turns  
 You will bear glorious children, for a god's embrace  
 Is never barren. Raise them and care for them.  
 Now go to your house and say nothing of this, 255  
 But I am Poseidon, who makes the earth tremble.'

With that he plunged into the surging sea.  
 And Tyro conceived and bore Pelias and Neleus,  
 Who served great Zeus as strong heroes both,  
 Pelias with his flocks in Iolcus' grasslands, 260  
 And Neleus down in sandy Pylos.  
 She bore other children to Cretheus: Aeson,

Pheres, and the charioteer Amythaon.

Then I saw Antiope, daughter of Asopus,  
Who boasted she had slept in the arms of Zeus 265  
And bore two sons, Amphion and Zethus,  
Who founded seven-gated Thebes and built its walls,  
Since they could not live in the wide land of Thebes  
Without walls and towers, mighty though they were.

Next I saw Alcmene, Amphitryon's wife, 270  
Who bore Heracles, the lionhearted battler,  
After lying in Zeus' almighty embrace.  
And I saw Megara, too, wife of Heracles,  
The hero whose strength never wore out.

I saw Oedipus' mother, beautiful Epicaste, 275  
Who unwittingly did a monstrous deed,  
Marrying her son, who had killed his father.  
The gods soon brought these things to light;  
Yet, for all his misery, Oedipus still ruled  
In lovely Thebes, by the gods' dark designs. 280  
But Epicaste, overcome by her grief,  
Hung a deadly noose from the ceiling rafters  
And went down to implacable Hades' realm,  
Leaving behind for her son all of the sorrows  
A mother's avenging spirits can cause. 285

And then I saw Chloris, the great beauty  
Whom Neleus wedded after courting her  
With myriad gifts. She was the youngest daughter  
Of Amphion, king of Minyan Orchomenus.  
As queen of Pylos, she bore glorious children, 290  
Nestor, Chromius, and lordly Periclymenus,  
And magnificent Pero, a wonder to men.  
Everyone wanted to marry her, but Neleus  
Would only give her to the man who could drive  
The cattle of mighty Iphicles to Pylos, 295  
Spiral-horned, broad-browed, stubborn cattle,  
Difficult to drive. Only Melampus,

The flawless seer, rose to the challenge,  
But he was shackled by Fate. Country herdsmen  
Put him in chains, and months went by 300  
And the seasons passed and the year turned  
Before he was freed by mighty Iphicles,  
After he had told him all of his oracles,  
And so the will of Zeus was fulfilled.

I saw Leda also, wife of Tyndareus, 305  
Who bore to him two stout-hearted sons,  
Castor the horseman and the boxer Polydeuces.  
They are under the teeming earth though alive,  
And have honor from Zeus in the world below,  
Living and dying on alternate days. 310  
Such is the honor they have won from the gods.

After her I saw Iphimedeia,  
Aloeus' wife. She made love to Poseidon  
And bore two sons, who did not live long,  
Godlike Otus and famed Ephialtes, 315  
The tallest men ever reared upon earth  
And the handsomest after gloried Orion.  
At nine years old they measured nine cubits  
Across the chest, and were nine fathoms tall.  
They threatened to wage a furious war 320  
Against the immortal Olympian gods,  
And were bent on piling Ossa on Olympus,  
And forested Pelion on top of Ossa  
And so reach the sky. And they would have done it,  
But the son of Zeus and fair-haired Leto 325  
Destroyed them both before the down blossomed  
Upon their cheeks and their beards had come in.

And I saw Phaedra and Procnis  
And lovely Ariadne, whom Theseus once  
Tried to bring from Crete to sacred Athens 330  
But had no joy of her. Artemis first  
Shot her on Dia, the seagirt island,  
After Dionysus told her he saw her there.

And I saw Maera and Clymene  
 And hateful Eriphyle, who valued gold 335  
 More than her husband's life.

But I could not tell you

All the wives and daughters of heroes I saw.  
 It would take all night. And it is time  
 To sleep now, either aboard ship with the crew  
 Or here in this house. My journey home 340  
 Is up to you, and to the immortal gods."

**H**e paused, and they sat hushed in silence,  
 Spellbound throughout the shadowy hall.  
 And then white-armed Arete began to speak:

"Well, Phaeacians, does this man impress you 345  
 With his looks, stature, and well-balanced mind?  
 He is my guest, moreover, though each of you  
 Shares in that honor. Do not send him off, then,  
 Too hastily, and do not stint your gifts  
 To one in such need. You have many treasures 350  
 Stored in your halls by grace of the gods."

Then the old hero Echeneus spoke up:

"Friends, the words of our wise queen  
 Are not wide of the mark. Give them heed.  
 But upon Alcinous depend both word and deed." 355

And Alcinous answered:

"Arete's word will stand, as long as I live  
 And rule the Phaeacians who love the oar.  
 But let our guest, though he longs to go home,  
 Endure until tomorrow, until I have time 360  
 To make our gift complete. We all have a stake  
 In getting him home, but mine is greatest,  
 For mine is the power throughout the land."

And Odysseus, who missed nothing:

“Lord Alcinous, most renowned of men, 365  
 You could ask me to stay for even a year  
 While you arranged a send-off with glorious gifts,  
 And I would assent. Better far to return  
 With a fuller hand to my own native land.  
 I would be more respected and loved by all 370  
 Who saw me come back to Ithaca.”

Alcinous answered him:

“Odysseus, we do not take you  
 For the sort of liar and cheat the dark earth breeds 375  
 Among men everywhere, telling tall tales  
 No man could ever test for himself.  
 Your words have outward grace and wisdom within,  
 And you have told your tale with the skill of a bard—  
 All that the Greeks and you yourself have suffered.  
 But tell me this, as accurately as you can: 380  
 Did you see any of your godlike comrades  
 Who went with you to Troy and met their fate there?  
 The night is young—and magical. It is not yet time  
 To sleep in the hall. Tell me these wonders.  
 Sit in our hall and tell us of your woes 385  
 For as long as you can bear. I could listen until dawn.”

And Odysseus, his mind teeming:

“Lord Alcinous, most glorious of men,  
 There is a time for words and a time for sleep.  
 But if you still yearn to listen, I will not refuse 390  
 To tell you of other things more pitiable still,  
 The woes of my comrades who died after the war,  
 Who escaped the Trojans and their battle-cry  
 But died on their return through a woman’s evil.

When holy Persephone had scattered 395  
 The women’s ghosts, there came the ghost  
 Of Agamemnon, son of Atreus,  
 Distraught with grief. Around him were gathered

Those who died with him in Aegisthus' house.  
 He knew me as soon as he drank the dark blood. 400  
 He cried out shrilly, tears welling in his eyes,  
 And he stretched out his hands, trying to touch me,  
 But he no longer had anything left of the strength  
 He had in the old days in those muscled limbs.  
 I wept when I saw him, and with pity in my heart 405  
 I spoke to him these winged words:

'Son of Atreus, king of men, most glorious  
 Agamemnon—what death laid you low?  
 Did Poseidon sink your fleet at sea,  
 After hitting you hard with hurricane winds? 410  
 Or were you killed by enemy forces on land,  
 As you raided their cattle and flocks of sheep  
 Or fought to capture their city and women?'

And Agamemnon answered at once:

'Son of Laertes in the line of Zeus, 415  
 My crafty Odysseus—No,  
 Poseidon did not sink my fleet at sea  
 After hitting us hard with hurricane winds,  
 Nor was I killed by enemy forces on land.  
 Aegisthus was the cause of my death. 420  
 He killed me with the help of my cursed wife  
 After inviting me to a feast in his house,  
 Slaughtered me like a bull at a manger.  
 So I died a most pitiable death,  
 And all around me my men were killed 425  
 Relentlessly, like white-tusked swine  
 For a wedding banquet or dinner party  
 In the house of a rich and powerful man.  
 You have seen many men cut down, both  
 In single combat and in the crush of battle, 430  
 But your heart would have grieved  
 As never before at the sight of us lying  
 Around the wine-bowl and the laden tables  
 In that great hall. The floor steamed with blood.

But the most piteous cry I ever heard 435  
 Came from Cassandra, Priam's daughter.  
 She had her arms around me down on the floor  
 When Clytemnestra ran her through from behind.  
 I lifted my hands and beat the ground  
 As I lay dying with a sword in my chest, 440  
 But that bitch, my wife, turned her back on me  
 And would not shut my eyes or close my lips  
 As I was going down to Death. Nothing  
 Is more grim or more shameless than a woman  
 Who sets her mind on such an unspeakable act 445  
 As killing her own husband. I was sure  
 I would be welcomed home by my children  
 And all my household, but she, with her mind set  
 On stark horror, has shamed not only herself  
 But all women to come, even the rare good one.' 450

Thus Agamemnon, and I responded:

'Ah, how broad-browed Zeus has persecuted  
 The house of Atreus from the beginning,  
 Through the will of women. Many of us died  
 For Helen's sake, and Clytemnestra 455  
 Set a snare for you while you were far away.'

And Agamemnon answered me at once:

'So don't go easy on your own wife either,  
 Or tell her everything you know.  
 Tell her some things, but keep some hidden. 460  
 But your wife will not bring about your death,  
 Odysseus. Icarius' daughter,  
 Your wise Penelope, is far too prudent.  
 She was newly wed when we went to war.  
 We left her with a baby boy still at the breast, 465  
 Who must by now be counted as a man,  
 And prosperous. His father will see him  
 When he comes, and he will embrace his father,  
 As is only right. But my wife did not let me

Even fill my eyes with the sight of my son. 470  
She killed me before I could do even that.  
But let me tell you something, Odysseus:  
Beach your ship secretly when you come home.  
Women just can't be trusted any more.  
And one more thing. Tell me truthfully 475  
If you've heard anything about my son  
And where he is living, perhaps in Orchomenus,  
Or in sandy Pylos, or with Menelaus in Sparta.  
For Orestes has not yet perished from the earth.'

So he spoke, and I answered him: 480

'Son of Atreus, why ask me this?  
I have no idea whether he is alive or dead,  
And it is not good to speak words empty as wind.'

Such were the sad words we had for each other 485  
As we stood there weeping, heavy with grief.

Then came the ghost of Achilles, son of Peleus,  
And those of Patroclus and peerless Antilochus  
And Ajax, who surpassed all the Danaans,  
Except Achilles, in looks and build.  
Aeacus' incomparable grandson, Achilles, knew me, 490  
And when he spoke his words had wings:

'Son of Laertes in the line of Zeus,  
Odysseus, you hard rover, not even you  
Can ever top this, this bold foray  
Into Hades, home of the witless dead 495  
And the dim phantoms of men outworn.'

So he spoke, and I answered him:

'Achilles, by far the mightiest of the Achaeans,  
I have come here to consult Tiresias,  
To see if he has any advice for me 500  
On how I might get back to rugged Ithaca.'



I've had nothing but trouble, and have not yet set foot  
 On my native land. But no man, Achilles,  
 Has ever been as blessed as you, or ever will be.  
 While you were alive the army honored you 505  
 Like a god, and now that you are here  
 You rule the dead with might. You should not  
 Lament your death at all, Achilles.'

I spoke, and he answered me at once:

'Don't try to sell me on death, Odysseus. 510  
 I'd rather be a hired hand back up on earth,  
 Slaving away for some poor dirt farmer,  
 Than lord it over all these withered dead.  
 But tell me about that boy of mine.  
 Did he come to the war and take his place 515  
 As one of the best? Or did he stay away?  
 And what about Peleus? What have you heard?  
 Is he still respected among the Myrmidons,  
 Or do they dishonor him in Phthia and Hellas,  
 Crippled by old age in hand and foot? 520  
 And I'm not there for him up in the sunlight  
 With the strength I had in wide Troy once  
 When I killed Ilion's best and saved the army.  
 Just let me come with that kind of strength  
 To my father's house, even for an hour, 525  
 And wrap my hands around his enemies' throats.  
 They would learn what it means to face my temper.'

Thus Achilles, and I answered him:

'I have heard nothing of flawless Peleus,  
 But as for your son, Neoptolemus, 530  
 I'll tell you all I know, just as you ask.  
 I brought him over from Scyros myself,  
 In a fine vessel, to join the Greek army  
 At Troy, and every time we held council there,  
 He was always the first to speak, and his words 535  
 Were never off the mark. Godlike Nestor and I

Alone surpassed him. And every time we fought  
 On Troy's plain, he never held back in the ranks  
 But charged ahead to the front, yielding  
 To no one, and he killed many in combat. 540  
 I could not begin to name them all,  
 All the men he killed when he fought for us,  
 But what a hero he dismantled in Telephus' son,  
 Eurypylos, dispatching him and a crowd  
 Of his Ceteian compatriots. Eurypylos 545  
 Came to Troy because Priam bribed his mother.  
 After Memnon, I've never seen a handsomer man.  
 And then, too, when all our best climbed  
 Into the wooden horse Epeius made,  
 And I was in command and controlled the trapdoor, 550  
 All the other Danaan leaders and counselors  
 Were wiping away tears from their eyes  
 And their legs shook beneath them, but I never saw  
 Neoptolemus blanch or wipe away a tear.  
 No, he just sat there handling his sword hilt 555  
 And heavy bronze spear, and all he wanted  
 Was to get out of there and give the Trojans hell.  
 And after we had sacked Priam's steep city,  
 He boarded his ship with his share of the loot  
 And more for valor. And not a scratch on him. 560  
 He never took a hit from a spear or sword  
 In close combat, where wounds are common.  
 When Ares rages anyone can be hit.'

So I spoke, and the ghost of swift-footed Achilles  
 Went off with huge strides through the fields of asphodel, 565  
 Filled with joy at his son's preeminence.

The other ghosts crowded around in sorrow,  
 And each asked about those who were dear to him.  
 Only the ghost of Telamonian Ajax  
 Stood apart, still furious with me 570  
 Because I had defeated him in the contest at Troy  
 To decide who would get Achilles' armor.  
 His goddess mother had put it up as a prize,

And the judges were the sons of the Trojans  
 And Pallas Athena. I wish I had never won. 575  
 That contest buried Ajax, that brave heart,  
 The best of the Danaans in looks and deeds,  
 After the incomparable son of Peleus.  
 I tried to win him over with words like these:

‘Ajax, son of flawless Telamon, 580  
 Are you to be angry with me even in death  
 Over that accursed armor? The gods  
 Must have meant it to be the ruin of the Greeks.  
 We lost a tower of strength to that armor.  
 We mourn your loss as we mourn the loss 585  
 Of Achilles himself. Zeus alone  
 Is to blame. He persecuted the Greeks  
 Terribly, and he brought you to your doom.  
 No, come back, Lord Ajax, and listen!  
 Control your wrath and rein in your proud spirit.’ 590

I spoke, but he said nothing. He went his way  
 To Erebus, to join the other souls of the dead.  
 He might yet have spoken to me there, or I  
 Might yet have spoken to him, but my heart  
 Yearned to see the other ghosts of the dead. 595

There I saw Minos, Zeus’ glorious son,  
 Scepter in hand, judging the dead  
 As he sat in the wide-gated house of Hades;  
 And the dead sat, too, and asked him for judgments.

And then Orion loomed up before me, 600  
 Driving over the fields of asphodel  
 The beasts he had slain in the lonely hills,  
 In his hands a bronze club, forever unbroken.

And I saw Tityos, a son of glorious Earth,  
 Lying on the ground, stretched over nine acres, 605  
 And two vultures sat on either side of him  
 And tore at his liver, plunging their beaks

Deep into his guts, and he could not beat them off.  
 For Tityos had raped Leto, a consort of Zeus,  
 As she went to Pytho through lovely Panopeus. 610

And I saw Tantalus there in his agony,  
 Standing in a pool with water up to his chin.  
 He was mad with thirst, but unable to drink,  
 For every time the old man bent over  
 The water would drain away and vanish, 615  
 Dried up by some god, and only black mud  
 Would be left at his feet. Above him dangled  
 Treetop fruits, pears and pomegranates,  
 Shiny apples, sweet figs, and luscious olives.  
 But whenever Tantalus reached up for them, 620  
 The wind tossed them high to the shadowy clouds.

And I saw Sisyphus there in his agony,  
 Pushing a monstrous stone with his hands.  
 Digging in hard, he would manage to shove it  
 To the crest of a hill, but just as he was about 625  
 To heave it over the top, the shameless stone  
 Would teeter back and bound down to the plain.  
 Then he would strain every muscle to push it back up,  
 Sweat pouring from his limbs and dusty head.

And then mighty Heracles loomed up before me— 630  
 His phantom that is, for Heracles himself  
 Feasts with the gods and has as his wife  
 Beautiful Hebe, daughter of great Zeus  
 And gold-sandaled Hera. As he moved  
 A clamor arose from the dead around him, 635  
 As if they were birds flying off in terror.  
 He looked like midnight itself. He held his bow  
 With an arrow on the string, and he glared around him  
 As if he were always about to shoot. His belt,  
 A baldric of gold crossing his chest, 640  
 Was stark horror, a phantasmagoria  
 Of Bears, and wild Boars, and green-eyed Lions,  
 Of Battles, and Bloodshed, Murder and Mayhem.

May this be its maker's only masterpiece,  
 And may there never again be another like it. 645  
 Heracles recognized me at once,  
 And his words beat down on me like dark wings:

'Son of Laertes in the line of Zeus,  
 Crafty Odysseus—poor man, do you too  
 Drag out a wretched destiny 650  
 Such as I once bore under the rays of the sun?  
 I was a son of Zeus and grandson of Cronus,  
 But I had immeasurable suffering,  
 Enslaved to a man who was far less than I  
 And who laid upon me difficult labors. 655  
 Once he even sent me here, to fetch  
 The Hound of Hell, for he could devise  
 No harder task for me than this. That hound  
 I carried out of the house of Hades,  
 With Hermes and grey-eyed Athena as guides.' 660

And Heracles went back into the house of Hades.  
 But I stayed where I was, in case any more  
 Of the heroes of yesteryear might yet come forth.  
 And I would have seen some of them—  
 Heroes I longed to meet, Theseus and Peirithous, 665  
 Glorious sons of the gods—but before I could,  
 The nations of the dead came thronging up  
 With an eerie cry, and I turned pale with fear  
 That Persephone would send from Hades' depths  
 The pale head of that monster, the Gorgon. 670

I went to the ship at once and called to my men  
 To get aboard and untie the stern cables.  
 They boarded quickly and sat at their benches.  
 The current bore the ship down the River Ocean.  
 We rowed at first, and then caught a good tailwind." 675

# ODYSSEY 12

“Our ship left the River Ocean  
 And came to the swell of the open sea  
 And the Island of Aeaea,  
 Where Dawn has her dancing grounds  
 And the Sun his risings. We beached our ship 5  
 On the sand, disembarked, and fell asleep  
 On the shore, waiting for daybreak.

Light blossomed like roses in the eastern sky,  
 And I sent some men to the house of Circe  
 To bring back the body of Elpenor. 10  
 We cut wood quickly, and on the headland's point  
 We held a funeral, shedding warm tears.  
 When the body was burned, and the armor with it,  
 We heaped up a mound, dragged a stone onto it,  
 And on the tomb's very top we planted his oar. 15

While we were busy with these things,  
 Circe, aware that we had come back  
 From the Underworld, put on her finest clothes  
 And came to see us. Her serving women  
 Brought meat, bread, and bright red wine, 20  
 And the goddess shone with light as she spoke:

‘So you went down alive to Hades’ house.  
 Most men die only once, but you twice.  
 Come, though, eat and drink wine  
 The whole day through. You sail at dawn. 25  
 I will tell you everything on your route,  
 So that you will not come to grief  
 In some web of evil on land or sea.’

She spoke, and our proud hearts consented.  
 All day long until the sun went down 30

We sat feasting on meat and good red wine.  
 When the sun set and darkness came on  
 My men went to sleep beside the ship's stern-cables.  
 But Circe took me by the hand and had me sit  
 Away from my men. And she lay down beside me 35  
 And asked me about everything. I told her all  
 Just as it happened, and then the goddess spoke:

'So all that is done. But now listen  
 To what I will tell you. One day a god  
 Will remind you of it. First, you will come 40  
 To the Sirens, who bewitch all men  
 Who come near. Anyone who approaches  
 Unaware and hears their voice will never again  
 Be welcomed home by wife and children  
 Dancing with joy at his return— 45  
 Not after the Sirens bewitch him with song.  
 They loll in a meadow, and around them are piled  
 The bones of shriveled and moldering bodies.  
 Row past them, first kneading sweet wax  
 And smearing it into the ears of your crew 50  
 So they cannot hear. But if you yourself  
 Have a mind to listen, have them bind you  
 Hand and foot upright in the mast-step  
 And tie the ends of the rope to the mast.  
 Then you can enjoy the song of the Sirens. 55  
 If you command your crew and plead with them  
 To release you, they should tie you up tighter.  
 After your men have rowed past the Sirens,  
 I will not prescribe which of two ways to go.  
 You yourself must decide. I will tell you both. 60

'One route takes you past beetling crags  
 Pounded by blue-eyed Amphitritê's seas.  
 The blessed gods call these the Wandering Rocks.  
 Not even birds can wing their way through.  
 Even the doves that bring ambrosia to Zeus 65  
 Crash and perish on that slick stone,  
 And the Father has to replenish their numbers.

Ships never get through. Whenever one tries,  
 The sea is awash with timbers and bodies  
 Blasted by the waves and the fiery winds. 70  
 Only one ship has ever passed through,  
 The famous Argo as she sailed from Aetes,  
 And even she would have been hurled onto those crags  
 Had not Hera loved Jason and sent his ship through.

'On the other route there are two rocks. 75  
 One stabs its peak into the sky  
 And is ringed by a dark blue cloud. This cloud  
 Never melts, and the air is never clear  
 During summer or autumn. No mortal man  
 Could ever scale this rock, not even if he had 80  
 Twenty hands and feet. The stone is as smooth  
 As if it were polished. Halfway up the cliff  
 Is a misty cave facing the western gloom.  
 It is there you will sail your hollow ship  
 If you listen to me, glorious Odysseus. 85  
 The strongest archer could not shoot an arrow  
 Up from his ship all the way to the cave,  
 Which is the lair of Scylla. She barks and yelps  
 Like a young puppy, but she is a monster,  
 An evil monster that not even a god 90  
 Would be glad to see. She has—listen to this—  
 Twelve gangly legs and six very long necks,  
 And on each neck is perched a bloodcurdling head,  
 Each with three rows of close-set teeth  
 Full of black death. Up to her middle 95  
 She is concealed in the cave, but her heads dangle  
 Into the abyss, and she fishes by the rock  
 For dolphins and seals or other large creatures  
 That the moaning sea breeds in multitudes.  
 No crew can boast to have sailed past Scylla 100  
 Unscathed. With each head she carries off a man,  
 Snatching him out of his dark-prowed vessel.

'The other rock, as you will see, Odysseus,  
 Lies lower—the two are close enough



That you could shoot an arrow across— 105  
 And on this rock is a large, leafy fig tree.  
 Beneath this tree the divine Charybdis  
 Sucks down the black water. Three times a day  
 She belches it out and three times a day  
 She sucks it down horribly. Don't be there 110  
 When she sucks it down. No one could save you,  
 Not even Poseidon, who makes the earth tremble.  
 No, stay close to Scylla's rock, and push hard.  
 Better to mourn six than the whole crew at once.'

Thus Circe. And I, in a panic: 115

'I beg you, goddess, tell me, is there  
 Any way I can escape from Charybdis  
 And still protect my men from the other?'

And the goddess, in a nimbus of light:

'There you go again, always the hero. 120  
 Won't you yield even to the immortals?  
 She's not mortal, she's an immortal evil,  
 Dread, dire, ferocious, unfightable.  
 There is no defense. It's flight, not fight.  
 If you pause so much as to put on a helmet 125  
 She'll attack again with just as many heads  
 And kill just as many men as before.  
 Just row past as hard as you can. And call upon  
 Crataiis, the mother who bore her as a plague to men.  
 She will stop her from attacking a second time. 130

'Then you will come to Thrinacia,  
 An island that pastures the cattle of the Sun,  
 Seven herds of cattle and seven flocks of sheep,  
 Fifty in each. They are immortal.  
 They bear no young and they never die off, 135  
 And their shepherds are goddesses,  
 Nymphs with gorgeous hair, Phaethusa  
 And Lampetië, whom gleaming Neaera

Bore to Helios, Hyperion the Sun.  
 When she had borne them and reared them 140  
 She sent them to Thrinacia, to live far away  
 And keep their father's spiral-horned cattle.  
 If you leave these unharmed and keep your mind  
 On your journey, you might yet struggle home  
 To Ithaca. But if you harm them, I foretell 145  
 Disaster for your ship and crew, and even if you  
 Escape yourself, you shall come home late  
 And badly, having lost all your companions.'

Dawn rose in gold as she finished speaking,  
 And light played about her as she disappeared 150  
 Up the island.

I went to the ship  
 And got my men going. They loosened  
 The stern cables and were soon in their benches,  
 Beating the water white with their oars.  
 A following wind rose in the wake 155  
 Of our dark-prowed ship, a sailor's breeze  
 Sent by Circe, that dread, beautiful goddess.  
 We tied down the tackling and sat tight,  
 Letting the wind and the helmsman take over.

Then I made a heavy-hearted speech to my men: 160

'Friends, it is not right that one or two alone  
 Should know what the goddess Circe foretold.  
 Better we should all know, live or die.  
 We may still beat death and get out of this alive.  
 First, she told us to avoid the eerie voices 165  
 Of the Sirens and sail past their soft meadows.  
 She ordered me alone to listen. Bind me  
 Hand and foot upright in the mast-step  
 And tie the ends of the rope to the mast.  
 If I command you and plead with you 170  
 To release me, just tie me up tighter.'

Those were my instructions to the crew.

Meanwhile, our good ship was closing fast  
 On the Sirens' island, when the breeze we'd had  
 Tailed off, and we were becalmed—not a breath 175  
 Of wind left—some spirit lulled the waves.  
 My men got up and furled the sails,  
 Stowed them in the ship's hold, then sat down  
 At their oars and whitened the water with pine.  
 Myself, I got out a wheel of wax, cut it up 180  
 With my sharp knife, and kneaded the pieces  
 Until they were soft and warm, a quick job  
 With Lord Helios glaring down from above.  
 Then I went down the rows and smeared the wax  
 Into all my men's ears. They in turn bound me 185  
 Hand and foot upright to the mast,  
 Tied the ends of the rope to the mast, and then  
 Sat down and beat the sea white with their oars.  
 We were about as far away as a shout would carry,  
 Surging ahead, when the Sirens saw our ship 190  
 Looming closer, and their song pierced the air:

'Come hither, Odysseus,  
     glory of the Achaeans,  
 Stop your ship  
     so you can hear our voices.  
 No one has ever sailed  
     his black ship past here  
 Without listening to the honeyed  
     sound from our lips. 195  
 He journeys on delighted  
     and knows more than before.  
 For we know everything  
     that the Greeks and Trojans  
 Suffered in wide Troy  
     by the will of the gods.  
 We know all that happens  
     on the teeming earth.'

They made their beautiful voices carry, 200  
 And my heart yearned to listen. I ordered my men

To untie me, signaling with my brows,  
But they just leaned on their oars and rowed on.  
Perimedes and Eurylochus jumped up,  
Looped more rope around me, and pulled tight. 205  
When we had rowed past, and the Sirens' song  
Had faded on the waves, only then did my crew  
Take the wax from their ears and untie me.

We had no sooner left the island when I saw  
The spray from an enormous wave 210  
And heard its booming. The oars flew  
From my men's frightened hands  
And shirred in the waves, stopping the ship  
Dead in the water. I went down the rows  
And tried to boost the crew's morale: 215

'Come on, men, this isn't the first time  
We've run into trouble. This can't be worse  
Than when the Cyclops with his brute strength  
Had us penned in his cave. We got out  
By my courage and fast thinking. One day 220  
We'll look back on this. Now let's do as I say,  
Every man of you! Stay on your benches  
And beat the deep surf with your oars!  
Zeus may yet deliver us from death.  
Helmsman, here's my command to you, 225  
And make sure you remember it, since  
You're steering this vessel: Keep the ship  
Away from this heavy surf. Hug the cliff,  
Or before you know it she'll swerve  
To starboard and you'll send us all down.' 230

I spoke, they obeyed. But I didn't mention  
Scylla. There was nothing we could do about that,  
And I didn't want the crew to freeze up,  
Stop rowing, and huddle together in the hold.  
Then I forgot Circe's stern warning 235  
Not to arm myself no matter what happened.  
I strapped on my bronze, grabbed two long spears

And went to the foredeck, where I thought  
 Scylla would first show herself from the cliff.  
 But I couldn't see her anywhere, and my eyes  
 Grew weary scanning the misty rock face. 240

We sailed on up the narrow channel, wailing,  
 Scylla on one side, Charybdis on the other  
 Sucking down saltwater. When she belched it up  
 She seethed and bubbled like a boiling cauldron 245  
 And the spray would reach the tops of the cliffs.  
 When she sucked it down you could see her  
 Churning within, and the rock bellowed  
 And roared, and you could see the sea floor  
 Black with sand. My men were pale with fear. 250  
 While we looked at her, staring death in the eyes,  
 Scylla seized six of my men from our ship,  
 The six strongest hands aboard. Turning my eyes  
 To the deck and my crew, I saw above me  
 Their hands and feet as they were raised aloft. 255  
 They cried down to me, calling me by name  
 That one last time in their agony.

You know

How a fisherman on a jutting rock  
 Casts his bait with his long pole. The horned hook  
 Sinks into the sea, and when he catches a fish 260  
 He pulls it writhing and squirming out of the water.  
 Writhing like that my men were drawn up the cliff.  
 And Scylla devoured them at her door, as they shrieked  
 And stretched their hands down to me  
 In their awful struggle. Of all the things 265  
 That I have borne while I scoured the seas,  
 I have seen nothing more pitiable.

When we had fled Charybdis, the rocks,  
 And Scylla, we came to the perfect island  
 Of Hyperion the Sun, where his herds ranged 270  
 And his flocks browsed. While our black ship  
 Was still out at sea I could hear the bleating  
 Of the sheep and the lowing of the cattle

As they were being penned, and I remembered  
 The words of the blind seer, Theban Tiresias, 275  
 And of Circe, who gave me strict warnings  
 To shun the island of the warmth-giving Sun.  
 And so I spoke to my crew with heavy heart:

‘Hear my words, men, for all your pain.  
 So I can tell you Tiresias’ prophecies 280  
 And Circe’s, too, who gave me strict warnings  
 To shun the island of the warmth-giving Sun,  
 For there she said was our gravest peril.  
 No, row our black ship clear of this island.’

This broke their spirits, and at once 285  
 Eurylochus answered me spitefully:

‘You’re a hard man, Odysseus, stronger  
 Than other men, and you never wear out,  
 A real iron-man, who won’t allow his crew,  
 Dead tired from rowing and lack of sleep, 290  
 To set foot on shore, where we might make  
 A meal we could enjoy. No, you just order us  
 To wander on through the swift darkness  
 Over the misty deep, and be driven away  
 From the island. It is at night that winds rise 295  
 That wreck ships. How could we survive  
 If we were hit by a South Wind or a West,  
 Which sink ships no matter what the great gods want?  
 No, let’s give in to black night now  
 And make our supper. We’ll stay by the ship, 300  
 Board her in the morning, and put out to sea.’

Thus Eurylochus, and the others agreed.  
 I knew then that some god had it in for us,  
 And my words had wings:

‘Eurylochus,  
 It’s all of you against me alone. All right, 305  
 But swear me a great oath, every last man:

If we find any cattle or sheep on this island,  
 No man will kill a single cow or sheep  
 In his recklessness, but will be content  
 To eat the food immortal Circe gave us.' 310

They swore they would do just as I said,  
 And when they had finished the words of the oath,  
 We moored our ship in a hollow harbor  
 Near a sweet-water spring. The crew disembarked  
 And skillfully prepared their supper. 315

When they had their fill of food and drink,  
 They fell to weeping, remembering how Scylla  
 Had snatched their shipmates and devoured them.  
 Sweet sleep came upon them as they wept.  
 Past midnight, when the stars had wheeled around, 320

Zeus gathered the clouds and roused a great wind  
 Against us, an ungodly tempest that shrouded  
 Land and sea and blotted out the night sky.  
 At the first blush of Dawn we hauled our ship up  
 And made her fast in a cave where you could see 325  
 The nymphs' beautiful seats and dancing places.  
 Then I called my men together and spoke to them:

'Friends, there is food and drink in the ship.  
 Let's play it safe and keep our hands  
 Off those cattle, which belong to Helios, 330  
 A dread god who hears and sees all.'

So I spoke, and their proud hearts consented.

Then for a full month the South Wind blew,  
 And no other wind but the East and the South.  
 As long as my men had grain and red wine 335  
 They didn't touch the cattle—life was still worth living.

But when all the rations from the ship were gone,  
 They had to roam around in search of game—  
 Hunting for birds and whatever they could catch  
 With fishing hooks. Hunger gnawed at their bellies. 340

I went off by myself up the island  
 To pray to the gods to show me the way.  
 When I had put some distance between myself  
 And the crew, and found a spot  
 Sheltered from the wind, I washed my hands 345  
 And prayed to the gods, but all they did  
 Was close my eyelids in sleep.

Meanwhile,  
 Eurylochus was giving bad advice to the crew:

'Listen to me, shipmates, despite your distress.  
 All forms of death are hateful, but to die 350  
 Of hunger is the most wretched way to go.  
 What are we waiting for? Let's drive off  
 The prime beef in that herd and offer sacrifice  
 To the gods of broad heaven. If we ever  
 Return to Ithaca, we will build a rich temple 355  
 To Hyperion the Sun, and deposit there  
 Many fine treasures. If he becomes angry  
 Over his cattle and gets the other gods' consent  
 To destroy our ship, well, I would rather  
 Gulp down saltwater and die once and for all 360  
 Than waste away slowly on a desert island.'

Thus Eurylochus, and the others agreed.  
 In no time they had driven off the best  
 Of Helios' cattle, pretty, spiral-horned cows  
 That were grazing close to our dark-prowed ship. 365  
 They surrounded these cows and offered prayers  
 To the gods, plucking off tender leaves  
 From a high-crowned oak in lieu of white barley,  
 Of which there was none aboard our benched ship.  
 They said their prayers, cut the cows' throats, 370  
 Flayed the animals and carved out the thigh joints,  
 Wrapped these in a double layer of fat  
 And laid all the raw bits upon them.  
 They had no wine to pour over the sacrifice  
 And so used water as they roasted the entrails. 375



When the thighs were burned and the innards tasted,  
They carved up the rest and skewered it on spits.

That's when I awoke, bolting upright.  
I started down to the shore, and as I got near the ship  
The aroma of sizzling fat drifted up to me. 380  
I groaned and cried out to the undying gods:

'Father Zeus, and you other immortals,  
You lulled me to sleep—and to my ruin—  
While my men committed this monstrous crime!'

Lampetiê rushed in her long robes to Helios 385  
And told him that we had killed his cattle.  
Furious, the Sun God addressed the immortals:

'Father Zeus, and you other gods eternal,  
Punish Odysseus' companions, who have insolently  
Killed the cattle I took delight in seeing 390  
Whenever I ascended the starry heaven  
And whenever I turned back from heaven to earth.  
If they don't pay just atonement for the cows  
I will sink into Hades and shine on the dead.'

And Zeus, who masses the clouds, said: 395

'Helios, you go on shining among the gods  
And for mortal men on the grain-giving earth.  
I will soon strike their ship with sterling lightning  
And shatter it to bits on the wine-purple sea.'

All this I heard from rich-haired Calypso, 400  
Who said she heard it from Hermes the Guide.

When I reached the ship I chewed out my men,  
Giving each one an earful. But there was nothing  
We could do. The cattle were already dead.  
Then the gods showed some portents 405  
Directed at my men. The hides crawled,

And the meat, both roasted and raw,  
Mooed on the spits, like cattle lowing.

Each day for six days my men slaughtered oxen  
From Helios' herd and gorged on the meat. 410  
But when Zeus brought the seventh day,  
The wind tailed off from gale force.  
We boarded ship at once and put out to sea  
As soon as we had rigged the mast and sail.

When we left the island behind, there was 415  
No other land in sight, only sea and sky.  
Then Zeus put a black cloud over our ship  
And the sea grew dark beneath it. She ran on  
A little while, and then the howling West Wind  
Blew in with hurricane force. It snapped 420  
Both forestays, and the mast fell backward  
Into the bilge with all of its tackle.

On its way down the mast struck the helmsman  
And crushed his skull. He fell from the stern  
Like a diver, and his proud soul left his bones. 425  
In the same instant, Zeus thundered  
And struck the ship with a lightning bolt.  
She shivered from stem to stern and was filled  
With sulfurous smoke. My men went overboard,  
Bobbing in the waves like sea crows 430  
Around the black ship, their day of return  
Snuffed out by the Sun God.

I kept pacing the deck until the sea surge  
Tore the sides from the keel. The waves  
Drove the bare keel on and snapped the mast 435  
From its socket; the leather backstay  
Was still attached, and I used this to lash  
The keel to the mast. Perched on these timbers  
I was swept along by deathly winds.

Then the West Wind died down, 440  
And, to my horror, the South Wind rose.  
All that way, back to the whirlpool,

I was swept along the whole night through  
 And at dawn reached Scylla's cliff  
 And dread Charybdis. She was sucking down                   445  
 Seawater, and I leapt up  
 To the tall fig tree, grabbed hold of it  
 And hung on like a bat. I could not  
 Plant my feet or get myself set on the tree  
 Because its roots spread far below                                   450  
 And its branches were high overhead,  
 Long, thick limbs that shaded Charybdis.  
 I just grit my teeth and hung on  
 Until she spat out the mast and keel again.  
 It seemed like forever. Finally,                                   455  
 About the hour a man who has spent the day  
 Judging quarrels that young men bring to him  
 Rises from the marketplace and goes to dinner,  
 My ship's timbers surfaced again from Charybdis.  
 I let go with my hands and feet                                   460  
 And hit the water hard beyond the spars.  
 Once aboard, I rowed away with my hands.  
 As for Scylla, Zeus never let her see me,  
 Or I would have been wiped out completely.

I floated on for nine days. On the tenth night                   465  
 The gods brought me to Ogygia  
 And to Calypso, the dread, beautiful goddess,  
 Who loved me and took care of me.  
 But I have told that tale only yesterday,  
 Here in your hall, to yourself and your wife,                   470  
 And I wouldn't bore you by telling it again."

# ODYSSEY 13

Odysseus finished his story,  
 And they were all spellbound, hushed  
 To silence throughout the shadowy hall,  
 Until Alcinous found his voice and said:

“Odysseus, now that you have come to my house,  
 High-roofed and founded on bronze, I do not think  
 You will be blown off course again  
 Before reaching home. 5

Hear now my command,  
 All who drink the glowing wine of Elders  
 Daily in my halls and hear the harper sing: 10  
 Clothes for our guest lie in a polished sea-chest,  
 Along with richly wrought gold and all the other gifts  
 The Phaeacian lords have brought to the palace.  
 But now each man of us gives him a cauldron, too.  
 We will recoup ourselves later with a general tax. 15  
 It is hard to make such generous gifts alone.”

They were all pleased with what Alcinous said.  
 Each man went to his own house to sleep,  
 And when Dawn’s rosy fingers appeared in the sky  
 They hurried to the ship with their gifts of bronze. 20  
 Alcinous, the sacred king himself, went on board  
 And stowed them away beneath the benches  
 Where they would not hinder the rowers’ efforts.  
 Then they all went back to feast in the palace.

In their honor Alcinous sacrificed an ox 25  
 To Zeus, the Dark Cloud, who rules over all.  
 They roasted the haunches and feasted gloriously  
 While the godlike harper, honored Demodocus,  
 Sang in their midst.

But Odysseus

Kept turning his head toward the shining sun, 30  
 Urging it down the sky. He longed to set forth.

*A man who has been in the fields all day  
 With his wooden plow and wine-faced oxen  
 Longs for supper and welcomes the sunset  
 That sends him homeward with weary knees.* 35

So welcome to Odysseus was the evening sun.  
 As soon as it set he addressed the Phaeacians,  
 Alcinous especially, and his words had wings:

“Lord Alcinous, I bid you and your people  
 To pour libation and send me safely on my way. 40  
 And I bid you farewell. All is now here  
 That my heart has desired—passage home  
 And cherished gifts that the gods in heaven  
 Have blessed me with. When I reach home  
 May I find my wife and loved ones unharmed. 45  
 May you enjoy your wife and children here,  
 May the gods send you everything good,  
 And may harm never come to your island people.”

They all cheered this speech, and demanded  
 That the stranger and guest be given passage home. 50  
 Alcinous then nodded to his herald:

“Pontonous, mix a bowl of wine and serve  
 Cups to all, that we may pray to Lord Zeus  
 And send our guest to his own native land.”

Thus the King, and Pontonous mixed 55  
 The mellow-hearted wine and served it to all.  
 Still seated, they tipped their cups to the gods  
 Who possess wide heaven. Then Odysseus  
 Stood up and placed a two-handled cup  
 In Arete’s hands, and his words rose on wings: 60

“Be well, my queen, all of your days, until age

And death come to you, as they come to all.  
I am leaving now. But you, Lady—enjoy this house,  
Your children, your people, and Lord Alcinous.”

And godlike Odysseus stepped over the threshold. 65  
Alcinous sent a herald along  
To guide him to the shore and the swift ship there,  
And Arete sent serving women with him,  
One carrying a cloak and laundered shirt,  
And another to bring the strong sea-chest. 70  
A third brought along bread and red wine.  
They came down to the sea, and the ship's crew  
Stowed all these things away in the hold,  
The food and drink, too. Then they spread out  
A rug and a linen sheet on the stern deck 75  
For Odysseus to sleep upon undisturbed.  
He climbed on board and lay down in silence  
While they took their places upon the benches  
And untied the cable from the anchor stone.  
As soon as they dipped their oars in the sea, 80  
A deep sleep fell on his eyelids, a sleep  
Sound, and sweet, and very much like death.

*And as four yoked stallions spring all together  
Beneath the lash, leaping high,  
And then eat up the dusty road on the plain,* 85

So lifted the keel of that ship, and in her wake  
An indigo wave hissed and roiled  
As she ran straight ahead. Not even a falcon,  
Lord of the skies, could have matched her pace,  
So light her course as she cut through the waves, 90  
Bearing a man with a mind like the gods',  
A man who had suffered deep in his heart,  
Enduring men's wars and the bitter sea—  
But now he slept, his sorrows forgotten.

**T**he sea turned silver 95  
Under the star that precedes the dawn,

And the great ship pulled up to Ithaca.

Phorcys, the Old Man of the Sea,  
 Has a harbor there. Two fingers of rock  
 Curl out from the island, steep to seaward 100  
 But sloping down to the bay they protect  
 From hurricane winds and high waves outside.  
 Inside, ships can ride without anchor  
 In the still water offshore.  
 At the harbor's head a slender-leaved olive 105  
 Stands near a cave glimmering through the mist  
 And sacred to the nymphs called Naiades.  
 Inside are bowls and jars of stone  
 Where bees store honey, and long stone looms  
 Where the nymphs weave shrouds as dark as the sea. 110  
 Waters flow there forever, and there are two doors,  
 One toward the North Wind, by which humans  
 Go down, the other toward the South Wind,  
 A door for the gods. No men enter there:  
 It is the Way of Immortals.

The Phaeacians 115

Had been here before. In they rowed,  
 And with such force that their ship was propelled  
 Half of its length onto the shelving shore.  
 The crew disembarked, lifting Odysseus  
 Out of the ship—sheet, carpet, and all— 120  
 And laying him down, sound asleep, on the sand.  
 Then they hauled from the ship all of the goods  
 The Phaeacian lords had given him  
 As he was going home—all thanks to Athena.  
 They piled these together near the bole of the olive, 125  
 Away from the path, fearing that someone  
 Might come along before Odysseus awoke  
 And rob him blind. Then the Phaeacians went home.

*[Lines 129–93 are omitted. Poseidon turns the Phaeacian ship to stone as it sails into the harbor and hems in the island with a mountain.]*

Odysseus, meanwhile,  
 Awoke from sleep in his ancestral land— 195  
 And did not recognize it. He had been gone so long,  
 And Pallas Athena had spread haze all around.  
 The goddess wanted to explain things to him,  
 And to disguise him, so that his wife and dear ones  
 Would not know who he was until he had made 200  
 The arrogant suitors pay for their outrage.  
 So everything on Ithaca now looked different  
 To its lord—the winding trails, the harbors,  
 The towering rocks and the trees. Odysseus  
 Sprang to his feet and gazed at his homeland. 205  
 He groaned, smacked his thighs with his hands,  
 And in a voice choked with tears, said:

“What land have I come to now? Who knows  
 What kind of people live here—lawless savages,  
 Or godfearing men who take kindly to strangers? 210  
 Where am I going to take all these things? Where  
 Am I going to go myself? I should have stayed  
 With the Phaeacians until I could go on from there  
 To some other powerful king who would have  
 Entertained me and sent me off homeward bound. 215  
 Now I don’t even know where to put this stuff.  
 I can’t leave it here as easy pickings for a thief.  
 Those Phaeacian lords were not as wise  
 As they seemed, nor as just, bringing me here  
 To this strange land. They said they would bring me 220  
 To Ithaca’s shore, but that’s not what they’ve done.  
 May Zeus pay them back, Zeus, god of suppliants,  
 Who spots transgressors and punishes them.  
 Well, I’d better count my goods and go over them.  
 Those sailors may have made off with some in their ship.” 225

And he set about counting the hammered tripods,  
 The cauldrons, the gold, the finely woven clothes.  
 Nothing was missing. It was his homeland he missed  
 As he paced along the whispering surf-line,  
 Utterly forlorn.



And then Athena was beside him 230  
 In the form of a young man out herding sheep.  
 She had the delicate features of a prince,  
 A fine-spun mantle folded over her shoulders,  
 Sandals on her glistening feet, a spear in her hand.  
 Odysseus' spirits soared when he saw her, 235  
 And he turned to her with these words on his lips:

"Friend—you are the first person I've met here—  
 I wish you well. Now don't turn on me.  
 Help me keep these things safe, and keep me safe,  
 I beg you at your knees as if you were a god. 240  
 And tell me this, so I will know:  
 What land is this, who are the people here?  
 Is this an island, or a rocky arm  
 Of the mainland shore stretching out to sea?"

Athena's eyes glinted with azure light: 245

"Where in the world do you come from, stranger,  
 That you have to ask what land this is?  
 It's not exactly nameless! Men from all over  
 Know this land, sailing in from the sunrise  
 And from far beyond the evening horizon. 250  
 It's got rough terrain, not for driving horses,  
 But it's not at all poor even without wide open spaces.  
 There's abundant grain here, and wine-grapes,  
 Good rainfalls, and rich, heavy dews.  
 Good pasture, too, for goats and for cattle, 255  
 And all sorts of timber, and year-round springs.  
 That's why Ithaca is a name heard even in Troy,  
 Which they say is far from any Greek land."

And Odysseus, who had borne much,  
 Felt joy at hearing his homeland described 260  
 By Pallas Athena, Zeus' own daughter.  
 His words flew out as if on wings—  
 But he did not speak the truth. He checked that impulse,  
 And, jockeying for an advantage, made up this story:

“I’ve heard of Ithaca, of course—even in Crete, 265  
 Far over the sea, and now I’ve just come ashore  
 With my belongings here. I left as much  
 To my sons back home. I’ve been on the run  
 Since killing a man, Orsilochus,  
 Idomeneus’ son, the great sprinter. 270  
 No one in all Crete could match his speed.  
 He wanted to rob me of all of the loot  
 I took out of Troy—stuff I had sweated for  
 In hand-to-hand combat in the war overseas—  
 Because I wouldn’t serve under his father at Troy 275  
 But led my own unit instead. I ambushed him  
 With one of my men, got him with a spear  
 As he came back from the fields. It was night,  
 Pitch-black. No one saw us, and I got away  
 With a clean kill with sharp bronze. Then, 280  
 I found a ship, Phoenician, and made it  
 Worth the crew’s while to take me to Pylos,  
 Or Elis maybe, where the Epeans are in power.  
 Well, the wind pushed us back from those shores—  
 It wasn’t their fault, they didn’t want to cheat me— 285  
 And we were driven here in the middle of the night  
 And rowed like hell into the harbor. Didn’t even  
 Think of chow, though we sure could have used some,  
 Just got off the boat and lay down, all of us.  
 I slept like a baby, dead to the world, 290  
 And they unloaded my stuff from the ship’s hold  
 And set it down next to me where I lay on the sand.  
 Then off they went to Sidonia, the big city,  
 And I was left here, stranded, just aching inside.”

Athena smiled at him, her eyes blue as the sea, 295  
 And her hand brushed his cheek. She was now  
 A tall, beautiful woman, with an exquisite touch  
 For handiwork, and her words had wings:

“Only a master thief, a real con artist, 300  
 Could match your tricks—even a god  
 Might come up short. You wily bastard,

You cunning, elusive, habitual liar!  
 Even in your own land you weren't about  
 To give up the stories and sly deceits  
 That are so much a part of you. 305  
 Never mind about that though. Here we are,  
 The two shrewdest minds in the universe,  
 You far and away the best man on earth  
 In plotting strategies, and I famed among gods  
 For my clever schemes. Not even you 310  
 Recognized Pallas Athena, Zeus' daughter,  
 I who stand by you in all your troubles  
 And who made you dear to all the Phaeacians.  
 And now I've come here, ready to weave  
 A plan with you, and to hide the goods 315  
 The Phaeacians gave you—which was my idea—  
 And to tell you what you still have to endure  
 In your own house. And you do have to endure,  
 And not tell anyone, man or woman,  
 That you have come home from your wanderings. 320  
 No, you must suffer in silence, and take a beating.”

And Odysseus, his mind teeming:

“It would be hard for the most discerning man alive  
 To see through all your disguises, Goddess.  
 I know this, though: you were always kind to me 325  
 When the army fought at Troy.  
 But after we plundered Priam's steep city,  
 And boarded our ships, and a god scattered us,  
 I didn't see you then, didn't sense your presence  
 Aboard my ship or feel you there to help me. 330  
 No, and I suffered in my wanderings  
 Until the gods released me from my troubles.  
 It wasn't until I was on Phaeacia  
 That you comforted me—and led me to the city.  
 Now I beg you, by your Father—I don't believe 335  
 I've come to sunlit Ithaca, but to some other land.  
 I think you're just giving me a hard time,  
 And trying to put one over on me. Tell me

If I've really come to my own native land."

And Athena, her eyes glinting blue: 340

"Ah, that mind of yours! That's why  
I can't leave you when you're down and out:  
Because you're so intelligent and self-possessed.  
Any other man come home from hard travels  
Would rush to his house to see his children and wife. 345  
But you don't even want to hear how they are  
Until you test your wife, who,  
As a matter of fact, just sits in the house,  
Weeping away the lonely days and nights.  
I never lost faith, though. I always knew in my heart 350  
You'd make it home, all your companions lost,  
But I couldn't bring myself to fight my uncle,  
Poseidon, who had it in for you,  
Angry because you blinded his son.  
And now, so you will believe, I will show you 355  
Ithaca from the ground up: There is the harbor  
Of Phorcys, the Old Man of the Sea, and here,  
At its head, is the slender-leaved olive tree  
Standing near a cave that glimmers in the mist  
And is sacred to the nymphs called Naiades. 360  
Under that cavern's arched roof you sacrificed  
Many a perfect victim to the nymphs.  
And there stands Mount Neriton, mantled in forest."

As she spoke, the goddess dispelled the mist.  
The ground appeared, and Odysseus, 365  
The godlike survivor, felt his mind soar  
At the sight of his land. He kissed the good earth,  
And with his palms to the sun, Odysseus prayed:

"Nymphs, Naiades, daughters of Zeus!  
I never thought I would see you again. 370  
Take pleasure in my whispered prayers  
And we will give you gifts as before,  
If Zeus' great daughter Athena

Allows me to live and my son to reach manhood.”

And Athena, her eyes glinting blue: 375

“You don’t have to worry about that.  
Right now, let’s stow these things in a nook  
Of the enchanted cave, where they’ll be safe for you.  
Then we can talk about a happy ending.”

With that, the goddess entered the shadowy cave 380  
And searched out its recesses while Odysseus  
Brought everything closer—the gold, the bronze,  
The well-made clothes the Phaeacians had given him.  
And Zeus’ own daughter stored them away  
And blocked the entrance to the cave with a stone. 385  
Then, sitting at the base of the sacred olive,  
The two plotted death for the insolent suitors.  
Athena began their discussion this way:

“Son of Laertes in the line of Zeus,  
Odysseus, the master tactician—consider how 390  
You’re going to get your hands on the shameless suitors,  
Who for three years now have taken over your house,  
Proposing to your wife and giving her gifts.  
She pines constantly for your return,  
But she strings them along, makes little promises, 395  
Sends messages—while her intentions are otherwise.”

And Odysseus, his mind teeming:

“Ah, I’d be heading for the same pitiful death  
That Agamemnon met in his house  
If you hadn’t told me all this, Goddess. 400  
Weave a plan so I can pay them back!  
And stand by me yourself, give me the spirit I had  
When we ripped down Troy’s shining towers!  
With you at my side, your eyes glinting  
And your mind fixed on battle—I would take on 405  
Three hundred men if your power were with me.”

And Athena, eyes reflecting the blue sea-light:

“Oh, I’ll be there all right, and I’ll keep my eye on you  
 When we get down to business. And I think  
 More than one of these suitors destroying your home 410  
 Will spatter the ground with their blood and brains.  
 Now let’s see about disguising you. First,  
 I’ll shrivel the skin on your gnarly limbs,  
 And wither that tawny hair. A piece of sail-cloth  
 Will make a nice, ugly cloak. Then 415  
 We’ll make those beautiful eyes bleary and dim.  
 You’ll look disgusting to all the suitors, as well as to  
 The wife and child you left behind in your halls.  
 But you should go first to your swineherd.  
 He may only tend your pigs, but he’s devoted to you, 420  
 And he loves your son and Penelope.  
 You’ll find him with the swine. They are feeding  
 By Raven’s Rock and Arethusa’s spring,  
 Gorging on acorns and drinking black water,  
 Which fattens swine up nicely. Stay with him, 425  
 Sit with him a while and ask him about everything,  
 While I go to Lacedaemon, land of lovely women,  
 To summon Telemachus. Your son, Odysseus,  
 Went to Menelaus’ house in Sparta  
 Hoping for news that you are still alive.” 430

And Odysseus, his mind teeming:

“You knew. Why didn’t you tell him?  
 So he could suffer too, roving barren seas  
 While my wife’s suitors eat him out of house and home?”

Athena answered, her eyes glinting blue: 435

“You needn’t worry too much about him.  
 I accompanied him in person. I wanted him  
 To make a name for himself by traveling there.  
 He’s not exactly laboring as he takes his ease  
 In Menelaus’ luxurious palace. 440

Sure, these young louts have laid an ambush for him  
 In a ship out at sea, meaning to kill him  
 Before he reaches home. But I don't think they will.  
 These suitors who have been destroying your home  
 Will be six feet under before that'll ever happen.”

445

So saying, Athena touched him with a wand.  
 She shriveled the flesh on his gnarled limbs,  
 And withered his tawny hair. She wrinkled the skin  
 All over his body so he looked like an old man,  
 And she made his beautiful eyes bleary and dim.  
 Then she turned his clothes into tattered rags,  
 Dirty and smoke-grimed, and cast about him  
 A great deerskin cloak with the fur worn off.  
 And she gave him a staff and a ratty pouch  
 All full of holes, slung by a twisted cord.

450

455

Having laid their plans, they went their own ways,  
 The goddess off to Sparta to fetch Telemachus.

*[Books 14 and 15 are omitted. Odysseus spends a day and a night in the hut of Eumaeus, the faithful servant who tends the swine. Although Eumaeus does not know who Odysseus is, he treats him hospitably, and Odysseus hears from him how the suitors have been ravaging the palace. Telemachus, meanwhile, has traveled from Sparta to Pylos and sailed back to Ithaca, having eluded the suitors' ambush. He has come ashore by himself near the swineherd's hut and has sent the ship on to the harbor.]*

## ODYSSEY 16

Meanwhile, in the hut, Odysseus  
 And the noble swineherd had kindled a fire  
 And were making breakfast in the early light.

They had already sent the herdsmen out  
With the droves of swine.

The dogs fawned 5

Around Telemachus and did not bark at him  
As he approached. Odysseus noticed  
The dogs fawning and heard footsteps.  
His words flew fast to Eumaeus:

“Eumaeus, one of your men must be coming, 10  
Or at least someone you know. The dogs aren’t barking  
And are fawning around him. I can hear his footsteps.”

His words weren’t out when his own son  
Stood in the doorway. Up jumped the swineherd  
In amazement, and from his hands fell the vessels 15  
He was using to mix the wine. He went  
To greet his master, kissing his head  
And his shining eyes and both his hands.

*And as a loving father embraces his own son  
Come back from a distant land after ten long years, 20  
His only son, greatly beloved and much sorrowed for—*

So did the noble swineherd clasp Telemachus  
And kiss him all over—he had escaped from death—  
And sobbing he spoke to him these winged words:

“You have come, Telemachus, sweet light! 25  
I thought I would never see you again  
After you left in your ship for Pylos. But come in,  
Dear child, let me feast my eyes on you  
Here in my house, come back from abroad!  
You don’t visit the farm often, or us herdsmen, 30  
But stay in town. It must do your heart good  
To look at that weeviling crowd of suitors.”

And Telemachus, in his clear-headed way:

“Have it your way, Papa. But it’s for your sake I’ve come,



To see you with my own eyes, and to hear from you 35  
 Whether my mother is still in our house,  
 Or someone else has married her by now,  
 And Odysseus' bed, with no one to sleep in it,  
 Has become a nest of spider webs."

The swineherd answered him: 40

"Yes, she's in your house, waiting and waiting  
 With an enduring heart, poor soul,  
 Weeping away the lonely days and nights."

He spoke, and took the young man's spear.  
 Telemachus went in, and as he crossed 45  
 The stone threshold, Odysseus stood up  
 To offer him his seat, but Telemachus,  
 From across the room, checked him and said:

"Keep your seat, stranger. We'll find another one  
 Around the place. Eumaeus here can do that." 50

He spoke, and Odysseus sat down again.  
 The swineherd piled up some green brushwood  
 And covered it with a fleece, and upon this  
 The true son of Odysseus sat down.  
 Then the swineherd set out platters of roast meat— 55  
 Leftovers from yesterday's meal—  
 And hurried around heaping up bread in baskets  
 And mixing sweet wine in an ivy-wood bowl.  
 Then he sat down opposite godlike Odysseus,  
 And they helped themselves to the fare before them. 60  
 When they had enough to eat and drink,  
 Telemachus spoke to the godlike swineherd:

"Where did this stranger come from, Papa?  
 What kind of sailors brought him to Ithaca?  
 I don't suppose he walked to our island." 65

And you answered, Eumaeus, my swineherd:

“I’ll tell you everything plainly, child.  
 He says he was born somewhere in Crete  
 And that it has been his lot to be a roamer  
 And wander from city to city. But now 70  
 He has run away from a Thesprotian ship  
 And come to my farmstead. I put him in your hands.  
 Do as you wish. He declares he is your suppliant.”

And Telemachus, wise beyond his years:

“This makes my heart ache, Eumaeus. 75  
 How can I welcome this guest in my house?  
 I am still young, and I don’t have the confidence  
 To defend myself if someone picks a fight.  
 As for my mother, her heart is torn.  
 She can’t decide whether to stay here with me 80  
 And keep the house, honoring her husband’s bed  
 And the voice of the people, or to go away  
 With whichever man among her suitors  
 Is the best of the Achaeans, and offers the most gifts.  
 But as to our guest—now that he’s come to your house, 85  
 I will give him a tunic and cloak, fine clothes,  
 And a two-edged sword, and sandals for his feet,  
 And passage to wherever his heart desires.  
 Or keep him here if you wish, at your farmstead  
 And take care of him. I’ll send the clothes 90  
 And all of his food, so it won’t be a hardship  
 For you or your men. What I won’t allow  
 Is for him to come up there among the suitors.  
 They are far too reckless and arrogant,  
 And I fear they will make fun of him, mock him, 95  
 And it would be hard for me to take that.  
 But what could I do? One man, however powerful,  
 Can’t do much against superior numbers.”

Then Odysseus, who had borne much, said:

“My friend—surely it is right for me to speak up— 100  
 It breaks my heart to hear you talk about

The suitors acting like this in your house  
 And going against the will of a man as great as you.  
 It is against your will, isn't it? What happened?  
 Do the people up and down the land all hate you? 105  
 Has a god turned them against you? Or do you blame  
 Your brothers, whom a man has to rely upon  
 In a fight, especially if a big fight comes up?  
 I wish I were as vigorous as I am angry,  
 Or were a son of flawless Odysseus, or Odysseus himself! 110  
 Then I would put my neck on the chopping block  
 If I did not give them hell when I came into  
 The halls of Odysseus, son of Laertes!  
 But if they overwhelmed me with superior numbers,  
 I would rather be dead, killed in my own halls, 115  
 Than have to keep watching these disgraceful deeds,  
 Strangers mistreated, men dragging the women  
 Through the beautiful halls, wine spilled,  
 Bread wasted, and all with no end in sight."

Telemachus answered in his clear-headed way: 120

"Well, stranger, I'll tell you the whole story.  
 It's not that the people have turned against me,  
 Nor do I have any brothers to blame. Zeus  
 Has made our family run in a single line.  
 Laertes was the only son of Arcesius, 125  
 And Laertes had only one son, Odysseus,  
 Who only had me, a son he never knew.  
 And so now our house is filled with enemies,  
 All of the nobles who rule the islands—  
 Dulichium, Samê, wooded Zacynthus— 130  
 And all of those with power on rocky Ithaca  
 Are courting my mother and ruining our house.  
 She neither refuses to make a marriage she hates  
 Or is able to stop it. They are eating us  
 Out of house and home, and will come after me soon. 135  
 But all of this rests on the knees of the gods.  
 Eumaeus, go tell Penelope right away  
 That I'm safe and back from Pylos.

I'll wait for you here. Tell only her  
And don't let any of the suitors find out. 140  
Many of them are plotting against me."

And you answered him, Eumaeus, my swineherd:

"I follow you, Telemachus, I understand.  
But tell me this. Should I go the same way  
To Laertes also, and tell him the news? 145  
Poor man, for a while he still oversaw the fields,  
Although he was grieving greatly for Odysseus,  
And would eat and drink with the slaves in the house  
Whenever he had a notion. But now, since the very day  
You sailed to Pylos, they say he hasn't been 150  
Eating or drinking as before, or overseeing the fields.  
He just sits and groans, weeping his heart out,  
And the flesh is wasting away from his bones."

And Telemachus, in his clear-headed way:

"That's hard, but we will let him be, despite our pain. 155  
If mortals could have all their wishes granted,  
We would choose first the day of my father's return.  
No, just deliver your message and come back,  
And don't go traipsing all through the countryside  
Looking for Laertes. But tell my mother 160  
To send the housekeeper as soon as she can,  
Secretly. She could bring the old man the message."

So the swineherd got going. He tied on his sandals  
And was off to the city.

The swineherd's departure  
Was not unnoticed by Athena. She approached 165  
The farmstead in the likeness of a woman,  
Beautiful, tall, and accomplished in handiwork,  
And stood in the doorway of Eumaeus' hut,  
Showing herself to Odysseus. Telemachus  
Did not see her before him or notice her presence, 170  
For the gods are not visible to everyone.

But Odysseus saw her, and the dogs did, too,  
 And they did not bark, but slunk away whining  
 To the other side of the farmstead. The goddess  
 Lifted her brows, and Odysseus understood. 175  
 He went out of the hut, past the courtyard's great wall,  
 And stood before her. Athena said to him:

“Son of Laertes in the line of Zeus,  
 Tell your son now and do not keep him in the dark,  
 So that you two can plan the suitors' destruction 180  
 And then go into town. As for myself,  
 I will not be gone long. No, I am eager for battle.”

With this, she touched him with her golden wand.  
 A fresh tunic and cloak replaced his rags,  
 And he was taller and younger, his skin tanned, 185  
 His jawline firm, and his beard glossy black.  
 Having worked her magic, the goddess left,  
 And Odysseus went back into the hut.  
 His son was astounded. Shaken and flustered,  
 He turned away his eyes for fear it was a god, 190  
 And words fell from his lips in nervous flurries:

“You look different, stranger, than you did before,  
 And your clothes are different, and your complexion.  
 You must be a god, one of the immortals  
 Who hold high heaven. Be gracious to us 195  
 So we can offer you acceptable sacrifice  
 And finely wrought gold. And spare us, please.”

And godlike Odysseus, who had borne much:

“I am no god. Why liken me to the deathless ones?  
 No, I am your father, on whose account you have suffered 200  
 Many pains and endured the violence of men.”

Saying this, he kissed his son, and let his tears  
 Fall to the ground. He had held them in until now.  
 But Telemachus could not believe

That this was his father, and he blurted out: 205

“You cannot be my father Odysseus.  
 You must be some spirit, enchanting me  
 Only to increase my grief and pain later.  
 No mortal man could figure out how to do this  
 All on his own. Only a god could so easily 210  
 Transform someone from old to young.  
 A while ago you were old and shabbily dressed,  
 And now you are like the gods who hold high heaven.”

And Odysseus, from his mind's teeming depths:

“Telemachus, it does not become you to be so amazed 215  
 That your father is here in this house. You can be sure  
 That no other Odysseus will ever come.  
 But I am here, just as you see, home at last  
 After twenty years of suffering and wandering.  
 So you will know, this is Athena's doing. 220  
 She can make me look like whatever she wants:  
 A beggar sometimes, and sometimes a young man  
 Wearing fine clothes. It's easy for the gods  
 To glorify a man or to make him look poor.”

He spoke, and sat down. And Telemachus 225  
 Threw his arms around his wonderful father  
 And wept. And a longing arose in both of them  
 To weep and lament, and their shrill cries  
 Crowded the air

*like the cries of birds—  
 Sea-eagles or taloned vultures— 230  
 Whose young chicks rough farmers have stolen  
 Out of their nests before they were fledged.*

Their tears were that piteous. And the sun,  
 Its light fading, would have set on their weeping,  
 Had not Telemachus suddenly said to his father: 235

“What ship brought you here, Father,  
 And where did the crew say they were from?  
 I don’t suppose you came here on foot.”

And Odysseus, the godlike survivor:

“I’ll tell you the truth about this, son. 240  
 The Phaeacians brought me, famed sailors  
 Who give passage to all who come their way.  
 They brought me over the sea as I slept  
 In their swift ship, and set me ashore on Ithaca  
 With donations of bronze and clothing and gold, 245  
 Splendid treasures that are now stored in caves  
 By grace of the gods. I have come here now  
 At Athena’s suggestion. You and I must plan  
 How to kill our enemies. List them for me now  
 So I can know who they are, and how many, 250  
 And so I can weigh the odds and decide whether  
 You and I can go up against them alone  
 Or whether we have to enlist some allies.”

Telemachus took a deep breath and said:

“Father, look now, I know your great reputation, 255  
 How you can handle a spear and what a strategist you are,  
 But this is too much for me. Two men  
 Simply cannot fight against such superior numbers  
 And superior force. There are not just ten suitors,  
 Or twice that, but many times more. Here’s the count: 260  
 From Dulichium there are fifty-two—  
 The pick of their young men—and six attendants.  
 From Samê there are twenty-four,  
 From Zacynthus there are twenty,  
 And from Ithaca itself, twelve, all the noblest, 265  
 And with them are Medon the herald,  
 The divine bard, and two attendants who carve.  
 If we go up against all of them in the hall,  
 I fear your vengeance will be bitter indeed.  
 Please try to think of someone to help us, 270

Someone who would gladly be our ally.”

And Odysseus, who had borne much:

“I’ll tell you who will help. Do you think  
That Athena and her father, Zeus,  
Would be help enough? Or should I think of more?” 275

Telemachus answered in his clear-headed way:

“You’re talking about two excellent allies,  
Although they do sit a little high in the clouds  
And have to rule the whole world and the gods as well.”

And Odysseus, who had borne much: 280

“Those two won’t hold back from battle for long.  
They’ll be here, all right, when the fighting starts  
Between the suitors and us in my high-roofed halls.  
For now, go at daybreak up to the house,  
And keep company with these insolent hangers-on. 285  
The swineherd will lead me to the city later  
Looking like an old, broken-down beggar.

If they treat me badly in the house,  
Just endure it. Even if they drag me  
Through the door by my feet, or throw things at me, 290  
Just bear it patiently. Try to dissuade them,

Try to talk them out of their folly, sure,  
But they won’t listen to you at all,  
Because their day of reckoning is near.

And here’s something else for you to keep in mind: 295  
When Athena in her wisdom prompts me,  
I’ll give you a signal. When you see me nod,

Take all the weapons that are in the hall  
Into the lofted storeroom and stow them there.  
When the suitors miss them and ask you 300

Where they are, set their minds at ease, saying:  
‘Oh, I have stored them out of the smoke.  
They’re nothing like they were when Odysseus



Went off to Troy, but are all grimed with soot.  
 Also, a god put this thought into my head, 305  
 That when you men are drinking, you might  
 Start quarreling and someone could get hurt,  
 Which would ruin your feasting and courting.  
 Steel has a way of drawing a man to it.’  
 But leave behind a couple of swords for us, 310  
 And two spears and oxhide shields—leave them  
 Where we can get to them in a hurry.  
 Pallas Athena and Zeus in his cunning  
 Will keep the suitors in a daze for a while.  
 And one more thing before you go. 315  
 If you are really my son and have my blood  
 In your veins, don’t let anyone know  
 That Odysseus is at home—not Laertes,  
 Not the swineherd, not anyone in the house,  
 Not even Penelope. You and I by ourselves 320  
 Will figure out which way the women are leaning.  
 We’ll test more than one of the servants, too,  
 And see who respects us and fears us,  
 And who cares nothing about either one of us  
 And fails to honor you. You’re a man now.” 325

And Odysseus’ resplendent son answered:

“You’ll soon see what I’m made of, Father,  
 And I don’t think you’ll find me lacking.  
 But I’m not sure your plan will work  
 To our advantage. Think about it. 330  
 It’ll take forever for you to make the rounds  
 Testing each man, while back in the house  
 The high-handed suitors are having a good time  
 Eating their way through everything we own.  
 I agree you should find out which of the women 335  
 Dishonor you, and which are innocent.  
 But as for testing the men in the fields,  
 Let’s do that afterward, if indeed you know  
 Something from Zeus, who holds the aegis.”

*[The rest of Book 16 (lines 340–517) is omitted. News is brought to Penelope of Telemachus' safe return. The suitors also learn that he has escaped their trap, but they are still plotting to kill him. Penelope angrily confronts Antinous, the suitors' ringleader, who attempts to appease her.]*

## ODYSSEY 17

*[Lines 1–210 are omitted. Telemachus goes to the palace and tells his mother about his journey. Odysseus and Eumaeus prepare to go to the palace.]*

Odysseus threw around his shoulders  
 His ratty pouch, full of holes and slung  
 By a twisted cord. Eumaeus gave him a staff  
 That suited him, and the two of them set out.  
 The dogs and the herdsmen stayed behind 215  
 To guard the farmstead. And so the swineherd  
 Led his master to the city, looking like  
 An old, broken-down beggar, leaning  
 On a staff and dressed in miserable rags.

They were well along the rugged path 220  
 And near to the city when they came to a spring  
 Where the townspeople got their water.  
 This beautiful fountain had been made  
 By Ithacus, and Neritus, and Polycctor.  
 A grove of poplars encircled it 225  
 And the cold water flowed from the rock above,  
 On top of which was built an altar to the nymphs,  
 Where all wayfarers made offerings.

There

Melanthius, son of Dolius, met them  
 As he was driving his she-goats, the best 230

In the herds, into town for the suitors' dinner.  
 Two herdsmen trailed along behind him.  
 When he saw Eumaeus and his companion,  
 He greeted them with language so ugly  
 It made Odysseus' blood boil to hear it: 235

“Well, look at this, trash dragging along trash.  
 Birds of a feather, as usual. Where  
 Are you taking this walking pile of shit,  
 You miserable hog-tender, this diseased beggar  
 Who will slobber all over our feasts? 240  
 How many doorposts has he rubbed with his shoulders,  
 Begging for scraps? You think he's ever gotten  
 A proper present, a cauldron or sword? Ha!  
 Give him to me and I'll have him sweep out the pens  
 And carry loads of shoots for the goats to eat, 245  
 Put some muscle on his thigh by drinking whey.  
 I'll bet he's never done a hard day's work in his life.  
 No, he prefers to beg his way through town  
 For food to stuff into his bottomless belly.  
 I'll tell you this, though, and you can count on it. 250  
 If he comes to the palace of godlike Odysseus,  
 He'll be pelted with footstools aimed at his head.  
 If he's lucky they'll only splinter on his ribs.”

And as he passed Odysseus, the fool kicked him  
 On the hip, trying to shove him off the path. 255  
 Odysseus absorbed the blow without even quivering—  
 Only stood there and tried to decide whether  
 To jump the man and knock him dead with his staff  
 Or lift him by the ears and smash his head to the ground.  
 In the end, he controlled himself and just took it. 260  
 But the swineherd looked the man in the eye  
 And told him off, and lifted his hands in prayer:

“Nymphs of the spring, daughters of Zeus,  
 If Odysseus ever honored you by burning  
 Thigh bones of lambs and kids wrapped in rich fat, 265  
 Grant me this prayer:

May my master come back,  
 May some god guide him back!

Then,  
 He would scatter all that puffery of yours,  
 All the airs you put on strutting around town  
 While bad herdsmen destroy all the flocks.” 270

Melanthius, the goatherd, came back with this:

“Listen to the dog talk, with his big, bad notions.  
 I’m going to take him off in a black ship someday  
 Far from Ithaca, and sell him for a fortune.  
 You want my prayer? May Apollo with his silver bow 275  
 Strike Telemachus dead today in his halls,  
 Or may the suitors kill him, as surely as Odysseus  
 Is lost for good in some faraway land.”

He left them with that. They walked on slowly,  
 While the goatherd pushed ahead and came quickly 280  
 To the palace. He went right in and sat down  
 Among the suitors, opposite Eurymachus,  
 Whom he liked best of all. The servers  
 Set out for him a helping of meat,  
 And the grave housekeeper brought him bread. 285

Odysseus and the swineherd came up to the house  
 And halted. The sound of the hollow lyre  
 Drifted out to them, for Phemius  
 Was sweeping the strings as he began his song.  
 Odysseus took the swineherd’s hand and said: 290

“Eumaeus, this beautiful house must be Odysseus’.  
 It would stand out anywhere. Look at all the rooms  
 And stories, and the court built with wall and coping,  
 And the well-fenced double gates. No one could scorn it.  
 And I can tell there are many men feasting inside 295  
 From the savor of meat wafting out from it,  
 And the sound of the lyre, which rounds out a feast.”

And you answered him, swineherd Eumaeus:

“You don’t miss a thing, do you? Well,  
 Let’s figure out what we should do here. 300  
 Either you go in first and mingle with the suitors,  
 While I wait here; or you wait here,  
 If you’d rather, and I’ll go in before you.  
 But don’t wait long, or someone might see you  
 And either throw something at you or smack you. 305  
 Think it over. What would you like to do?”

And Odysseus, the godlike survivor:

“I understand. You don’t have to prompt me.  
 You go in before me, and I’ll wait here.  
 I’ve had things thrown at me before, 310  
 And I have an enduring heart, Eumaeus.  
 God knows I’ve had my share of suffering  
 In war and at sea. I can take more if I have to.  
 But no one can hide a hungry belly.  
 It’s our worst enemy. It’s why we launch ships 315  
 To bring war to men across the barren sea.”

And as they talked, a dog that was lying there  
 Lifted his head and pricked up his ears.  
 This was Argus, whom Odysseus himself  
 Had patiently bred—but never got to enjoy— 320  
 Before he left for Ilion. The young men  
 Used to set him after wild goats, deer, and hare.  
 Now, his master gone, he lay neglected  
 In the dung of mules and cattle outside the doors,  
 A deep pile where Odysseus’ farmhands 325  
 Would go for manure to spread on his fields.  
 There lay the hound Argus, infested with lice.  
 And now, when he sensed Odysseus was near,  
 He wagged his tail and dropped both ears  
 But could not drag himself nearer his master. 330  
 Odysseus wiped away a tear, turning his head  
 So Eumaeus wouldn’t notice, and asked him:

“Eumaeus, isn’t it strange that this dog  
 Is lying in the dung? He’s a beautiful animal,  
 But I wonder if he has speed to match his looks,  
 Or if he’s like the table dogs men keep for show.” 335

And you answered him, Eumaeus, my swineherd:

“Ah yes, this dog belonged to a man who has died  
 Far from home. He was quite an animal once.  
 If he were now as he was when Odysseus  
 Left for Troy, you would be amazed 340  
 At his speed and strength. There’s nothing  
 In the deep woods that dog couldn’t catch,  
 And what a nose he had for tracking!  
 But he’s fallen on hard times, now his master  
 Has died abroad. These feckless women 345  
 Don’t take care of him. Servants never do right  
 When their masters aren’t on top of them.  
 Zeus takes away half a man’s worth  
 The day he loses his freedom.”

So saying, 350

Eumaeus entered the great house  
 And the hall filled with the insolent suitors.  
 But the shadow of death descended upon Argus,  
 Once he had seen Odysseus after twenty years.

**G**odlike Telemachus spotted the swineherd first  
 Striding through the hall, and with a nod of his head  
 Signaled him to join him. Eumaeus looked around  
 And took a stool that lay near, one that the carver  
 Ordinarily sat on when he sliced meat for the suitors  
 Dining in the hall. Eumaeus took this stool 360  
 And placed it at Telemachus’ table, opposite him,  
 And sat down. A herald came and served him  
 A portion of meat, and bread from the basket.

Soon after, Odysseus came in, looking like  
 An old, broken-down beggar, leaning  
 On a staff and dressed in miserable rags. 365

He sat down on the ashwood threshold  
 Just inside the doors, leaning back  
 On the cypress doorpost, a post planed and trued  
 By some skillful carpenter in days gone by. 370  
 Telemachus called the swineherd over  
 And taking a whole loaf from the beautiful basket  
 And all the meat his hands could hold, said to him:

“Take this over to the stranger, and tell him  
 To go around and beg from each of the suitors. 375  
 Shame is no good companion for a man in need.”

Thus Telemachus. The swineherd nodded,  
 And going over to Odysseus, said to him:

“Telemachus gives you this, and he tells you  
 To go around and beg from each of the suitors. 380  
 Shame, he says, is not good for a beggar.”

And Odysseus, his mind teeming:

“Lord Zeus, may Telemachus be blessed among men  
 And may he have all that his heart desires.”

And he took the food in both his hands 385  
 And set it down at his feet on his beggar’s pouch.  
 Odysseus ate as long as the bard sang in the hall.  
 When the song came to an end, and the suitors  
 Began to be noisy and boisterous, Athena  
 Drew near to him and prompted him 390  
 To go among the suitors and beg for crusts  
 And so learn which of them were decent men  
 And which were scoundrels—not that the goddess had  
 The slightest intention of sparing any of them.

Odysseus made his rounds from right to left, 395  
 Stretching his hands out to every side,  
 As if he had been a beggar all his life.  
 They all pitied him and gave him something,

And they wondered out loud who he was  
 And where he had come from. To which questions  
 Melanthius, the goatherd, volunteered: 400

“Hear me, suitors of our noble queen.  
 As to this stranger, I have seen him before.  
 The swineherd brought him here, but who he is  
 I have no idea, or where he claims he was born.” 405

At this, Antinous tore into the swineherd:

“Swineherd! Why did you bring this man to town?  
 Don’t we have enough tramps around here without him,  
 This nuisance of a beggar who will foul our feast?  
 I suppose you don’t care that these men are eating away  
 Your master’s wealth, or you wouldn’t have invited him.” 410

The swineherd Eumaeus came back with this:

“You may be a fine gentleman, Antinous,  
 But that’s an ugly thing to say. Who, indeed,  
 Ever goes out of his way to invite a stranger  
 From abroad, unless it’s a prophet, or healer, 415  
 Or a builder, or a singer of tales—someone like that,  
 A master of his craft who benefits everyone.  
 Men like that get invited everywhere on earth.  
 But who would burden himself with a beggar?  
 You’re just plain mean, the meanest of the suitors 420  
 To Odysseus’ servants, and especially to me.  
 But I don’t care, as long as my lady Penelope  
 Lives in the hall, and godlike Telemachus.”

To which Telemachus responded coolly: 425

“Quiet! Don’t waste your words on this man.  
 Antinous is nasty like that—provoking people  
 With harsh words and egging them on.”

And then he had these fletched words for Antinous:



“Why, Antinous, you’re just like a father to me, 430  
 Kindly advising me to kick this stranger out.  
 God forbid that should ever happen. No,  
 Go ahead and give him something. I want you to.  
 Don’t worry about my mother or anyone else  
 In this house, when it comes to giving things away. 435  
 But the truth is that you’re just being selfish  
 And would rather eat more yourself than give any away.”

And Antinous answered him:

“What a high and mighty speech, Telemachus!  
 Look now, if only everyone gave him what I will, 440  
 It would be months before he darkened your door.”

As he spoke he grabbed the stool upon which  
 He propped his shining feet whenever he dined  
 And brandished it beneath the table.  
 But all the rest gave the beggar something 445  
 And filled his pouch with bread and meat.  
 And Odysseus would have had his taste of the suitors  
 Free of charge, but on his way back to the threshold  
 He stopped by Antinous’ place and said:

“Give me something, friend. You don’t look like 450  
 You are the poorest man here—far from it—  
 But the most well off. You look like a king.  
 So you should give me more than the others.  
 If you did, I’d sing your praises all over the earth.  
 I, too, once had a house of my own, a rich man 455  
 In a wealthy house, and I gave freely and often  
 To any and everyone who wandered by.  
 I had slaves, too, more than I could count,  
 And everything I needed to live the good life.  
 But Zeus smashed it all to pieces one day— 460  
 Who knows why?—when he sent me out  
 With roving pirates all the way to Egypt  
 So I could meet my doom.

I moored my ships

In the river Nile, and you can be sure I ordered  
 My trusty mates to stand by and guard them 465  
 While I sent out scouts to look around.  
 Then the crews got cocky and overconfident  
 And started pillaging the Egyptian countryside,  
 Carrying off the women and children  
 And killing the men. The cry came to the city, 470  
 And at daybreak troops answered the call.  
 The whole plain was filled with infantry,  
 War chariots, and the glint of bronze.  
 Thundering Zeus threw my men into a panic,  
 And not one had the courage to stand and fight 475  
 Against odds like that. It was bad.  
 They killed many of us outright with bronze  
 And led the rest to their city to work as slaves.  
 But they gave me to a friend of theirs, from Cyprus,  
 To take me back there and give me to Dmetor, 480  
 Son of Iasus, who ruled Cyprus with an iron hand.  
 From there I came here, with all my hard luck.”

Antinous had this to say in reply:

“What god has brought this plague in here?  
 Get off to the side, away from me, 485  
 Or I’ll show you Egypt and Cyprus,  
 You pushy panhandler! You don’t know your place.  
 You make your rounds and everyone  
 Hands things out recklessly. And why shouldn’t they?  
 It’s easy to be generous with someone else’s wealth.” 490

Odysseus took a step back and answered him:

“It’s too bad your mind doesn’t match your good looks.  
 You wouldn’t give a suppliant even a pinch of salt  
 If you had to give it from your own cupboard.  
 Here you sit at another man’s table 495  
 And you can’t bear to give me a piece of bread  
 From the huge pile that’s right by your hand.”

This made Antinous even angrier,  
And he shot back with a dark scowl:

“That does it. I’m not going to let you just  
Breeze out of here if you’re going to insult me.” 500

As he spoke he grabbed the footstool and threw it,  
Hitting Odysseus under his right shoulderblade.  
Odysseus stood there as solid as a rock  
And didn’t even blink. He only shook his head 505  
In silence, and brooded darkly.  
Then he went back to the threshold and sat down  
With his pouch bulging and spoke to the suitors:

“Hear me, suitors of our glorious queen,  
So I can speak my mind. No one regrets 510  
Being hit while fighting for his own possessions,  
His cattle or sheep. But Antinous struck me  
Because of my belly, that vile growling beast  
That gives us so much trouble. If there are gods  
For beggars, or avenging spirits, 515  
May death come to Antinous before marriage does.”

Antinous, son of Eupeithes, answered:

“Just sit still and eat, stranger—or get the hell out.  
Keep talking like this and some of the young men here  
Will haul you by the feet all through the house 520  
And strip the skin right off your back.”

Thus Antinous. But the other suitors  
Turned on him, one of them saying:

“That was foul, Antinous, hitting a poor beggar.  
You’re done for if he turns out to be a god 525  
Come down from heaven, the way they do,  
Disguised as strangers from abroad or whatever,  
Going around to different cities  
And seeing who’s lawless and who lives by the rules.”

Antinous paid no attention to this. 530  
 Telemachus took it hard that his father was struck  
 But he kept it inside. Not a tear  
 Fell from his eye. He only shook his head  
 In silence, and brooded darkly.

*[The rest of Book 17 (lines 535–662) is omitted. Penelope tells Eumaeus that she would like to speak with the stranger. Odysseus agrees to speak with her later in the evening.]*

## ODYSSEY 18

And now there came the town beggar  
 Making his rounds, known throughout Ithaca  
 For his greedy belly and endless bouts  
 Of eating and drinking. He had no real strength  
 Or fighting power—just plenty of bulk. 5  
 Arnaeus was the name his mother had given him,  
 But the young men all called him Irus  
 Because he was always running errands for someone.  
 He had a mind to drive Odysseus out of his own house  
 And started in on him with words like this: 10

“Out of the doorway, geezer, before I throw you out  
 On your ear! Don’t you see all these people  
 Winking at me to give you the bum’s rush?  
 I wouldn’t want to stoop so low, but if you don’t  
 Get out now, I may have to lay hands on you.” 15

Odysseus gave him a measured look and said:

“What’s wrong with you? I’m not doing  
 Or saying anything to bother you. I don’t mind

If someone gives you a handout, even a large one.  
 This doorway is big enough for both of us. 20  
 There's no need for you to be jealous of others.  
 Now look, you're a vagrant, just like I am.  
 Prosperity is up to the gods. But if I were you,  
 I'd be careful about challenging me with your fists.  
 I might get angry, and old man though I am, 25  
 I just might haul off and bust you in the mouth.  
 I'd have more peace and quiet tomorrow.  
 I don't think you'd come back a second time  
 To the hall of Laertes' son, Odysseus."

This got Irus angry, and he answered: 30

"Listen to the mangy glutton run on,  
 Like an old kitchen woman! I'll fix him good—  
 Hit him with a left and then a right until  
 I knock his teeth out onto the ground,  
 The way we'd do a pig caught eating the crops. 35  
 Put 'em up, and everybody will see how we fight.  
 How are you going to stand up to a younger man?"

That's how they goaded each other on  
 There on the great polished threshold.  
 Antinous took this in and said with a laugh: 40

"How about this, friends? We haven't had  
 This much fun in a long time. Thank God  
 For a little entertainment! The stranger and Irus  
 Are getting into a fight. Let's have them square off!"

They all jumped up laughing and crowded around 45  
 The two tattered beggars. And Antinous said:

"Listen, proud suitors, to my proposal.  
 We've got these goat paunches on the fire,  
 Stuffed with fat and blood, ready for supper.  
 Whichever of the two wins and proves himself 50  
 The better man, gets the stuffed paunch of his choice.

Furthermore, he dines with us in perpetuity  
And to the exclusion of all other beggars.”

Everyone approved of Antinous’ speech.

Then Odysseus, who knew all the moves, said:

55

“Friends, there’s no way a broken-down old man  
Can fight with a younger. Still, my belly,  
That troublemaker, urges me on. So,  
I’ll just have to get beat up. But all of you,  
Swear me an oath that no one, favoring Irus,  
Will foul me and beat me for him.”

60

They all swore that they wouldn’t hit him,  
And then Telemachus, feeling his power, said:

“Stranger, if you have the heart for this fight,  
Don’t worry about the onlookers. If anyone  
Strikes you, he will have to fight us all.  
I guarantee this as your host, and I am joined  
By Antinous and Eurymachus,  
Lords and men of discernment both.”

65

Everyone praised this speech.

Then Odysseus

70

Tied his rags around his waist, revealing  
His sculpted thighs, his broad shoulders,  
His muscular chest and arms. Athena  
Stood near the hero, magnifying his build.  
The suitors’ jaws dropped open.

75

They looked at each other and said things like:

“Irus is history.”

“Brought it on himself, too.”

“Will you look at the thigh on that old man!”

So they spoke. Irus’ heart was in his throat,  
But some servants tucked up his clothes anyway  
And dragged him out, his rolls of fat quivering.

80

Antinous laid into him, saying:

“You big slob. You’ll be sorry  
 You were ever born, if you try to duck  
 This weebegone, broken-down old man. 85  
 I’m going to give it to you straight now.  
 If he gets the better of you and beats you,  
 I’m going to throw you on a black ship  
 And send you to the mainland to King Echetus,  
 The maimer, who will slice off your nose and ears 90  
 With cold bronze, and tear out your balls  
 And give them raw to the dogs to eat.”

This made Irus tremble even more.  
 They shoved him out into the middle,  
 And both men put up their fists. Odysseus, 95  
 The wily veteran, thought it over.  
 Should he knock the man stone cold dead,  
 Or ease up on the punch and just lay him out flat?  
 Better to go easy and just flatten him, he thought,  
 So that the crowd won’t get suspicious. 100  
 The fighters stood tall, circling each other,  
 And as Irus aimed a punch at his right shoulder,  
 Odysseus caught him just beneath the ear,  
 Crushing his jawbone. Blood ran from his mouth,  
 And he fell in the dust snorting like an ox 105  
 And gnashing his teeth, his heels kicking the ground.  
 The suitors lifted their hands and died  
 With laughter. Odysseus took Irus by one fat foot  
 And dragged him out through the doorway  
 All the way to the court and the portico’s gates. 110  
 He propped him up against the courtyard’s wall,  
 Stuck his staff in his hand, and said to him:

“Sit there now and scare off the pigs and dogs,  
 And stop lording it over the other beggars,  
 You sorry bastard, or things could get worse.” 115

*[The rest of Book 18 (lines 116–466) is omitted. Melanthe, one of the maidservants, taunts Odysseus. Eurymachus, one of the suitors, mocks Odysseus. Odysseus stands up for himself, and Eurymachus throws a footstool at him. Telemachus rebukes the suitors, and they retire for the night.]*

## ODYSSEY 19

Odysseus was left alone in the hall,  
 Planning death for the suitors with Athena's aid.  
 He spoke winged words to Telemachus:

“Telemachus, get all the weapons out of the hall.  
 When the suitors miss them and ask you 5  
 Where they are, set their minds at ease, saying:  
 ‘Oh, I have stored them out of the smoke.  
 They’re nothing like they were when Odysseus  
 Went off to Troy, but are all grimed with soot.  
 Also, a god put this thought into my head, 10  
 That when you men are drinking, you might  
 Start quarreling and someone could get hurt,  
 Which would ruin your feasting and courting.  
 Steel has a way of drawing a man to it.”

Thus Odysseus. Telemachus nodded, 15  
 And calling Eurycleia he said to her:

“Nurse, shut the women inside their rooms  
 While I put my father's weapons away,  
 The beautiful weapons left out in the hall  
 And dulled by the smoke since he went off to war. 20  
 I was just a child then. But now I want  
 To store them away, safe from the smoke.”



And Eurycleia, his old nurse, said:

“Yes, child, you are right  
To care for the house and guard its wealth. 25  
But who will fetch a light and carry it for you,  
Since you won’t let any of the women do it?”

Telemachus coolly answered her:

“This stranger here. I won’t let anyone  
Who gets rations be idle, even a traveler 30  
From a distant land.”

Telemachus’ words sank in,  
And the nurse locked the doors of the great hall.  
Odysseus and his illustrious son sprang up  
And began storing away the helmets, bossed shields,  
And honed spears. And before them Pallas Athena, 35  
Bearing a golden lamp, made a beautiful light.  
Telemachus suddenly blurted out to his father:

“Father, this is a miracle I’m seeing!  
The walls of the house, the lovely panels,  
The beams of fir, and the high columns 40  
Are glowing like fire. Some god is inside,  
One of the gods from the open sky.”

Odysseus, his mind teeming, replied:

“Hush. Don’t be too curious about this.  
This is the way of the gods who hold high heaven. 45  
Go get some rest. I’ll remain behind here  
And draw out the maids—and your mother,  
Who in her grief will ask many questions.”

And Telemachus went out through the hall  
By the light of blazing torches. He came 50  
To his room, lay down, and waited for dawn.  
Odysseus again was alone in the hall,

Planning death for the suitors with Athena's aid.

Penelope, wary and thoughtful,  
 Now came from her bedroom, and she was like  
 Artemis or golden Aphrodite. 55  
 They set a chair for her by the fire  
 Where she always sat, a chair inlaid  
 With spiraling ivory and silver  
 Which the craftsman Icmalius had made long ago. 60  
 It had a footstool attached, covered now  
 With a thick fleece.

Penelope sat down,  
 Taking everything in. White-armed maids  
 Came out from the women's quarters  
 And started to take away all of the food, 65  
 Clearing the tables and picking up the cups  
 From which the men had been drinking.  
 They emptied the braziers, scattering the embers  
 Onto the floor, and then stocked them up  
 With loads of fresh wood for warmth and light. 70

Then Melantho started in on Odysseus again:

"Are we going to have to put up with you all night,  
 Roaming though the house and spying on the women?  
 Go on outside and be glad you had supper,  
 Or you'll soon stagger out struck with a torch." 75

And Odysseus answered from his teeming mind:

"What's wrong with you, woman? Are you mean to me  
 Because I'm dirty and dressed in rags  
 And beg through the land? I do it because I have to.  
 That's how it is with beggars and vagabonds. 80  
 You know, I too once lived in a house in a city,  
 A rich man in a wealthy house, and I often gave  
 Gifts to wanderers, whatever they needed.  
 I had servants, too, countless servants,  
 And plenty of everything else a man needs 85

To live the good life and be considered wealthy.  
 But Zeus crushed me. Who knows why?  
 So be careful, woman. Someday you may lose  
 That glowing beauty that makes you stand out now.  
 Or your mistress may become fed up with you. 90  
 Or Odysseus may come. We can still hope for that.  
 But even if, as seems likely, he is dead  
 And will never return, his son, Telemachus,  
 Is now very much like him, by Apollo's grace,  
 And if any of the women are behaving loosely 95  
 It won't get by him. He's no longer a child."

None of this was lost on Penelope,  
 And she scolded the maidservant, saying:

"Your outrageous conduct does not escape me,  
 Shameless whore that you are, and it will be 100  
 On your own head. You knew very well,  
 For you heard me say it, that I intended  
 To question the stranger here in my halls  
 About my husband; for I am sick with worry."

Then to Eurynome, the housekeeper, she said: 105

"Bring a chair here with a fleece upon it  
 So that the stranger can sit down and tell his tale  
 And listen to me. I have many questions for him."

So Eurynome brought up a polished chair  
 And threw a fleece over it, and upon it sat 110  
 Odysseus, patient and godlike.  
 Penelope, watchful, began with a question:

"First, stranger, let me ask you this:  
 Who are you and where are you from?"

Odysseus, his mind teeming, answered her: 115

"Lady, no one on earth could find fault with you,

For your fame reaches the heavens above,  
 Just like the fame of a blameless king,  
 A godfearing man who rules over thousands  
 Of valiant men, upholding justice. 120  
 His rich, black land bears barley and wheat,  
 The trees are laden with fruit, the flocks  
 Are always with young, and the sea teems with fish—  
 Because he rules well, and so his people prosper.  
 Ask me, therefore, about anything else, 125  
 But not about my birth or my native land.  
 That would fill my heart with painful memories.  
 I have many sorrows, and it wouldn't be right  
 To sit here weeping in another's house,  
 Nor is it good to be constantly grieving. 130  
 I don't want one of your maids, or you yourself,  
 To be upset with me and say I am awash with tears  
 Because the wine has gone to my head."

And Penelope, watching, answered him:

"Stranger, the gods destroyed my beauty 135  
 On the day when the Argives sailed for Ilion  
 And with them went my husband, Odysseus.  
 If he were to come back and be part of my life,  
 My fame would be greater and more resplendent so.  
 But now I ache, so many sorrows 140  
 Has some spirit showered upon me.  
 All of the nobles who rule the islands—  
 Dulichium, Samê, wooded Zacynthus—  
 And all those with power on rocky Ithaca  
 Are courting me and ruining this house. 145  
 So I pay no attention to strangers  
 Or to suppliants or public heralds. No,  
 I just waste away with longing for Odysseus.  
 My suitors press on, and I weave my wiles.  
 First some god breathed into me the thought 150  
 Of setting up a great loom in the main hall,  
 And I started weaving a vast fabric  
 With a very fine thread, and I said to them:

‘Young men—my suitors, since Odysseus is dead—  
 Eager as you are to marry me, you must wait 155  
 Until I finish this robe—it would be a shame  
 To waste my spinning—a shroud for the hero  
 Laertes, when death’s doom lays him low.  
 I fear the Achaean women would reproach me  
 If he should lie in death shroudless for all his wealth.’ 160

“So I spoke, and their proud hearts consented.  
 Every day I would weave at the great loom,  
 And every night unweave the web by torchlight.  
 I fooled them for three years with my craft.  
 But in the fourth year, as the seasons rolled by, 165  
 And the moons waned, and the days dragged on,  
 My shameless and headstrong serving women  
 Betrayed me. The men barged in and caught me at it,  
 And a howl went up. So I was forced to finish the shroud.  
 Now I can’t escape the marriage. I’m at my wit’s end. 170  
 My parents are pressing me to marry,  
 And my son agonizes over the fact  
 That these men are devouring his inheritance.  
 He is a man now, and able to preside  
 Over a household to which Zeus grants honor. 175  
 But tell me of your birth, for you are not sprung,  
 As the saying goes, from stock or stone.”

And Odysseus, from his mind’s teeming depths:

“Honored wife of Laertes’ son, Odysseus,  
 Will you never stop asking about my lineage? 180  
 All right, I will tell you, but bear in mind  
 You are only adding to the sorrows I have.  
 For so it is when a man has been away from home  
 As long as I have, wandering from city to city  
 And bearing hardships. Still, I will tell you. 185  
 Crete is an island that lies in the middle  
 Of the wine-dark sea, a fine, rich land  
 With ninety cities swarming with people  
 Who speak many different languages.

There are Achaeans there, and native Cretans, 190  
 Cydonians, Pelasgians, and three tribes of Dorians.  
 One of the cities is great Cnossus,  
 Where Minos ruled and every nine years  
 Conversed with great Zeus. He was the father  
 Of my father, the great hero Deucalion. 195  
 Deucalion had another son, Idomeneus,  
 Who sailed his beaked ships to Ilion  
 Following the sons of Atreus. I was the younger,  
 And he the better man. My name is Aethon.  
 It was in Crete that I saw Odysseus 200  
 And gave him gifts of hospitality.  
 He had been blown off course rounding Malea  
 On his way to Troy. He put in at Amnisus,  
 Where the cave of Eileithyia is found.  
 That is a difficult harbor, and he barely escaped 205  
 The teeth of the storm. He went up to the city  
 And asked for Idomeneus, claiming to be  
 An old and honored friend. But Idomeneus' ships  
 Had left for Troy ten days before, so I  
 Took him in and entertained him well, 210  
 Drawing on the ample supplies in the house.  
 I gathered his men and distributed to them  
 Barley meal, wine, and bulls for sacrifice  
 From the public supplies, to keep them happy.  
 They stayed for twelve days. A norther so strong 215  
 You could barely stand upright in it  
 Had them corralled—some evil spirit had roused it.  
 On the thirteenth day the wind dropped, and they left.”

All lies, but he made them seem like the truth,  
 And as she listened, her face melted with tears. 220

*Snow deposited high in the mountains by the wild West Wind  
 Slowly melts under the East Wind's breath,  
 And as it melts the rivers rise in their channels.*

So her lovely cheeks coursed with tears as she wept  
 For her husband, who was sitting before her. 225

Odysseus pitied her tears in his heart,  
 But his eyes were as steady between their lids  
 As if they were made of horn or iron  
 As he concealed his own tears through guile.  
 When Penelope had cried herself out, 230  
 She spoke to him again, saying:

“Now I feel I must test you, stranger,  
 To see if you really did entertain my husband  
 And his godlike companions, as you say you did.  
 Tell me what sort of clothes he wore, and tell me 235  
 What he was like, and what his men were like.”

And Odysseus, from his mind's teeming depths:

“Lady, it is difficult for me to speak  
 After we've been apart for so long. It has been 240  
 Twenty years since he left my country.  
 But I have an image of him in my mind.  
 Odysseus wore a fleecy purple cloak,  
 Folded over, and it had a brooch  
 With a double clasp, fashioned of gold,  
 And on the front was an intricate design: 245  
 A hound holding in his forepaws a dappled fawn  
 That writhed to get free. Everyone marveled  
 At how, though it was all made of gold,  
 The hound had his eye fixed on the fawn  
 As he was strangling it, and the fawn 250  
 Twisted and struggled to get to its feet.  
 And I remember the tunic he wore,  
 Glistening like onionskin, soft and shiny  
 And with a sheen like sunlight. There were 255  
 Quite a few women who admired it.  
 But remember, now, I do not know  
 Whether Odysseus wore this at home,  
 Or whether one of his men gave it to him  
 When he boarded ship, or someone else,  
 For Odysseus was a man with many friends. 260  
 He had few equals among the Achaeans.

I, too, gave him gifts—a bronze sword,  
A beautiful purple cloak, and a fringed tunic,  
And I gave him a ceremonious send-off  
In his benched ship. And one more thing: 265  
He had a herald, a little older than he was,  
And I will tell you what he looked like.  
He was slope-shouldered, with dark skin  
And curly hair. His name was Eurybates,  
And Odysseus held him in higher esteem 270  
Than his other men, because they thought alike.”

These words stirred up Penelope's grief.  
She recognized the unmistakable tokens  
Odysseus was giving her. She wept again,  
And then composed herself and said to him: 275

“You may have been pitied before, stranger,  
But now you will be loved and honored  
Here in my halls. I gave him those clothes.  
I folded them, brought them from the storeroom,  
And pinned on the gleaming brooch, 280  
To delight him. But I will never welcome him  
Home again, and so the fates were dark  
When Odysseus left in his hollow ship  
For Ilium, that curse of a city.”

And Odysseus, from his mind's teeming depths: 285

“Revered wife of Laertes' son, Odysseus,  
Do not mar your fair skin with tears any more,  
Or melt your heart with weeping for your husband.  
Not that I blame you. Any woman weeps  
When she has lost her husband, a man with whom 290  
She has made love and whose children she has borne—  
And the husband you've lost is Odysseus,  
Who they say is like the immortal gods.  
Stop weeping, though, and listen to my words,  
For what I am about to tell you is true. 295  
I have lately heard of Odysseus' return,



That he is near, in the rich land of Thesprotia,  
 Still alive. And he is bringing home treasures,  
 Seeking gifts, and getting them, throughout the land.  
 But he lost his trusty crew and his hollow ship 300  
 On the wine-dark sea. As he was sailing out  
 From the island of Thrinacia, Zeus and Helios  
 Hit him hard because his companions had killed  
 The cattle of the Sun. His men went under,  
 But he rode his ship's keel until the waves 305  
 Washed him ashore in the land of the Phaeacians,  
 Whose race is closely akin to the gods'.  
 They treated him as if he were a god,  
 Gave him many gifts, and were more than willing  
 To escort him home. And he would have been here 310  
 By now, but he thought it more profitable  
 To gather wealth by roaming the land.  
 No one is as good as Odysseus  
 At finding ways to gain an advantage.  
 I had all this from Pheidon, the Thesprotian king. 315  
 And he swore to me, as he poured libations  
 There in his house, that a ship was already launched,  
 And a crew standing by, to take him home.  
 He sent me off first, since a Thesprotian ship  
 Happened to be leaving for Dulichium, 320  
 But before I left, Pheidon showed me  
 All the treasure Odysseus had amassed,  
 Bronze, gold, and wrought iron, enough to feed  
 His children's children for ten generations,  
 All stored there for him in the halls of the king. 325  
 Odysseus, he said, had gone to Dodona  
 To consult the oak-tree oracle of Zeus  
 And ask how he should return to Ithaca—  
 Openly or in secret—after being gone so long.  
 So he is safe, and will come soon. 330  
 He is very near, and will not be away long  
 From his dear ones and his native land.  
 I will swear to this. Now Zeus on high  
 Be my witness, and this hospitable table,  
 And the hearth of flawless Odysseus himself— 335

That everything will happen just as I say:  
 Before this month is out Odysseus will come,  
 In the dark of the moon, before the new crescent.”

And Penelope, watching him carefully:

“Ah, stranger, may your words come true. 340  
 Then you would know my kindness, and my gifts  
 Would make you blessed in all men’s eyes.  
 But I know in my heart that Odysseus  
 Will never come home, and that you will never  
 Find passage elsewhere, since there is not now 345  
 Any master in the house like Odysseus—  
 If he ever existed—to send honored guests  
 Safely on their way, or to welcome them.  
 But still, wash our guest’s feet, maidens,  
 And prepare a bed for him. Set up a frame 350  
 And cover it with cloaks and lustrous blankets  
 To keep him cozy and warm. When golden Dawn  
 Shows her first light, bathe him and anoint him,  
 So he can sit side by side with Telemachus  
 And share in the feast here in the hall. 355  
 And anyone who causes this man any pain  
 Will regret it sorely and will accomplish nothing  
 Here in this house, however angry he gets.  
 For how would you ever find out, stranger,  
 Whether or not I surpass all other women 360  
 In presence of mind, if you sit down to dinner  
 Squalid and disheveled here in my hall?  
 Our lives are short. A hard-hearted man  
 Is cursed while he lives and reviled in death.  
 But a good-hearted man has his fame spread 365  
 Far and wide by the guests he has honored,  
 And men speak well of him all over the earth.”

And Odysseus, his mind teeming, answered her:

“Revered wife of Odysseus, Laertes’ son,  
 I lost all interest in cloaks and blankets 370

On the day I left the snowy mountains of Crete  
 In my long-oared ship. I will lie down tonight,  
 As I have through many a sleepless night,  
 On a poor bed, waiting for golden-throned Dawn.  
 Nor do I have any taste for foot-baths, 375  
 And none of the serving women here in your hall  
 Will touch my feet, unless there is some old,  
 Trustworthy woman who has suffered as I have.  
 I would not mind if she touched my feet.”

And Penelope, watching him carefully: 380

“Of all the travelers who have come to my house,  
 None, dear guest, have been as thoughtful as you  
 And none as welcome, so wise are your words.  
 I do have an old and trustworthy woman here,  
 Who nursed and raised my ill-starred husband, 385  
 Taking him in her arms the day he was born.  
 She will wash your feet, frail as she is.  
 Eurycleia, rise and wash your master’s—that is,  
 Wash the feet of this man who is your master’s age.  
 Odysseus’ feet and hands are no doubt like his now, 390  
 For men age quickly when life is hard.”

At this, the old woman hid her face in her hands.  
 Shedding warm tears, she spoke through her sobs:

“My lost child, I can do nothing for you.  
 Zeus must have hated you above all other men, 395  
 Although you were always godfearing. No one  
 Burned more offerings to the Lord of Lightning,  
 So many fat thighbones, bulls by the hundreds,  
 With prayers that you reach a sleek old age  
 And raise your glorious son. And now the god has 400  
 Deprived you alone of your day of return.

And I suppose, stranger, women mocked him, too,  
 When he came to some man’s gloried house  
 In a distant land, just as these cheeky bitches  
 All mock you here. It is to avoid their insults 405

That you will not allow them to wash your feet.  
 But Penelope, Icarus' wise daughter,  
 Has asked me to do it, and I will,  
 For her sake and for yours,  
 For my heart is throbbing with sorrow. 410  
 But listen now to what I have to say.  
 Many road-weary strangers have come here,  
 But I have never seen such a resemblance  
 As that between you and Odysseus,  
 In looks, voice—even the shape of your feet.” 415

And Odysseus, from his mind's teeming depths:

“Oh, everyone who has seen us both says that,  
 Old woman, that we are very much alike,  
 Just as you yourself have noticed.”

And the old woman took the shining basin 420  
 She used for washing feet, poured  
 Cold water into it, and then added the hot.  
 Odysseus, waiting, suddenly sat down at the hearth  
 And turned away toward the shadows. The scar!  
 It flashed through his mind that his old nurse 425  
 Would notice his scar as soon as she touched him,  
 And then everything would be out in the open.  
 She drew near and started to wash her master,  
 And knew at once the scar from the wound  
 He had gotten long ago from a boar's white tusk 430  
 When he had gone to Parnassus to visit Autolycus,  
 His mother's father, who was the best man on earth  
 At thieving and lying, skills he had learned  
 From Hermes. He had won the god's favor  
 With choice burnt offerings of lambs and kids. 435

Autolycus had visited Ithaca once  
 When his grandson was still a newborn baby.  
 After he finished supper, Eurycleia  
 Put the child in his lap and said to him:

“Autolycus, now name the child 440  
Of your own dear child. He has been much prayed for.”

Then Autolycus made this response:

“Daughter and son-in-law of mine,  
Give this child the name I now tell you.  
I come here as one who is odious, yes, 445  
Hateful to many for the pain I have caused  
All over the land. Let this child, therefore,  
Go by the name of Odysseus.  
For my part, when he is grown up  
And comes to the great house of his mother’s kin 450  
In Parnassus, where my possessions lie,  
I will give him a share and send him home happy.”

In due time, Odysseus came to get these gifts  
From Autolycus. His grandfather  
And his uncles all welcomed him warmly, 455  
And Amphithea, his mother’s mother,  
Embraced Odysseus and kissed his head  
And beautiful eyes. Autolycus told his sons  
To prepare a meal, and they obeyed at once,  
Leading in a bull, five years old, 460  
Which they flayed, dressed, and butchered.  
They skewered the meat, roasted it skillfully,  
And then served out portions to everyone.  
All day long until the sun went down  
They feasted to their hearts’ content. 465  
But when the sun set and darkness came on  
They went to bed and slept through the night.  
When Dawn brushed the early sky with rose,  
They went out to hunt—Autolycus’ sons  
Running their hounds—and with them went 470  
Godlike Odysseus. They climbed the steep wooded slopes  
Of Mount Parnassus and soon reached  
The windy hollows. The sun was up now,  
Rising from the damasked waters of Ocean  
And just striking the fields, when the beaters came 475

Into a glade. The dogs were out front,  
 Tracking the scent, and behind the dogs  
 Came Autolycus' sons and noble Odysseus,  
 His brandished spear casting a long shadow.  
 Nearby, a great boar was lying in his lair, 480  
 A thicket that was proof against the wild wet wind  
 And could not be pierced by the rays of the sun,  
 So dense it was. Dead leaves lay deep  
 Upon the ground there. The sound of men and dogs  
 Pressing on though the leaves reached the boar's ears, 485  
 And he charged out from his lair, back bristling  
 And his eyes spitting fire. He stood at bay  
 Right before them, and Odysseus rushed him,  
 Holding his spear high, eager to thrust.  
 The boar was too quick. Slashing in, 490  
 He got Odysseus in the thigh, right above the knee,  
 His white tusk tearing a long gash in the muscle  
 Just shy of the bone. Even so, Odysseus  
 Did not miss his mark, angling his spear  
 Into the boar's right shoulder. The gleaming point 495  
 Went all the way through, and with a loud grunt  
 The boar went down and gasped out his life.  
 Autolycus' sons took care of the carcass  
 And tended the wound of the flawless Odysseus,  
 Skillfully binding it and staunching the blood 500  
 By chanting a spell. Then they quickly returned  
 To their father's house. When Odysseus  
 Had regained his strength, Autolycus and his sons  
 Gave him glorious gifts and sent him home happy,  
 Home to Ithaca. His mother and father 505  
 Rejoiced at his return and asked him all about  
 How he got his scar; and he told them the story  
 Of how a boar had gashed him with his white tusk  
 As he hunted on Parnassus with Autolycus' sons.

This was the scar the old woman recognized 510  
 When the palm of her hand ran over it  
 As she held his leg. She let the leg fall,  
 And his foot clanged against the bronze basin,

Tipping it over and spilling the water  
 All over the floor. Eurycleia's heart 515  
 Trembled with mingled joy and grief,  
 Tears filled her eyes, and her voice  
 Was choked as she reached out  
 And touched Odysseus' chin and said:

"You are Odysseus, dear child. I did not know you 520  
 Until I laid my hands on my master's body."

She spoke, and turned her eyes toward Penelope,  
 Wanting to show her that her husband was home.  
 But Penelope could not return her gaze  
 Or understand her meaning, for Athena 525  
 Had diverted her mind. Odysseus reached  
 For the old woman's throat, seized it in his right hand  
 And drawing her closer with his other, he said:

"Do you want to destroy me? You yourself 530  
 Nursed me at your own breast, and now  
 After twenty hard years I've come back home.  
 Now that some god has let you in on the secret,  
 You keep it to yourself, you hear? If you don't,  
 I'll tell you this, and I swear I'll do it:  
 If, with heaven's help, I subdue the suitors, 535  
 I will not spare you—even if you are my nurse—  
 When I kill the other women in the hall."

And Eurycleia, the wise old woman:

"How can you say that, my child? You know 540  
 What I'm made of. You know I won't break.  
 I'll be as steady as solid stone or iron.  
 And I'll tell you this, and you remember it:  
 If, with heaven's help, you subdue the proud suitors,  
 I'll list for you all the women in the house,  
 Those who dishonor you and those who are true." 545

And Odysseus, his mind teeming:

“Nurse, you don’t have to tell me about them.  
I’ll keep an eye out and get to know each one.  
Don’t say a thing. Just leave it up to the gods.”

At this, the old woman went off for more water 550  
To wash his feet, since it had all been spilled.  
When she had washed him and rubbed on oil,  
Odysseus pulled his chair close to the fire again  
To keep warm, and hid the scar with his rags.

Penelope now resumed their talk: 555

“There’s one more thing I want to ask you about,  
And then it will be time to get some sleep—  
At least for those to whom sweet sleep comes  
Despite their cares. But some god has given me  
Immeasurable sorrow. By day 560  
I console myself with lamentation  
And see to my work and that of my women.  
But at night, when sleep takes hold of others,  
I lie in bed, smothered by my own anxiety,  
Mourning restlessly, my heart racing. 565  
Just as the daughter of Pandareus,  
The pale nightingale, sings sweetly  
In the greening of spring, perched in the leaves,  
And trills out her song of lament for her son,  
And her beloved Itylus, whom she killed unwittingly, 570  
Itylus, the son of Zethus her lord—  
So too my heart is torn with dismay.  
Should I stay here with my son  
And keep everything safe and just as it is,  
My goods, my slaves, my high-gabled house, 575  
Honoring my husband’s bed and public opinion—  
Or should I go with whoever is best  
Of all my suitors, and gives me gifts past counting?  
And then there’s my son. While he was young  
And not yet mature, he kept me from leaving 580  
My husband’s house and marrying another.  
But now that he’s grown and come into manhood,



He begs me to leave, worried because  
 These Achaean men are devouring his goods.

But listen now to a dream I had 585  
 And tell me what it means. In my dream  
 I have twenty geese at home. I love to watch them  
 Come out of the water and eat grains of wheat.  
 But a huge eagle with a hooked beak comes  
 Down from the mountain and breaks their necks, 590  
 Killing them all. They lie strewn through the hall  
 While he rides the wind up to the bright sky.  
 I weep and wail, still in my dream,  
 And Achaean ladies gather around me  
 As I grieve because the eagle killed my geese. 595  
 Then the eagle comes back and perches upon  
 A jutting roofbeam and speaks to me  
 In a human voice, telling me not to cry:

“Take heart, daughter of famed Icarus.  
 This is no dream, but a true vision 600  
 That you can trust. The geese are the suitors,  
 And I, who was once an eagle, am now  
 Your husband come back, and I will deal out doom,  
 A grisly death for all of the suitors.’

“So he spoke, and I woke up refreshed. 605  
 Looking around I saw the geese in the house,  
 Feeding on wheat by the trough, as before.”

And Odysseus, his mind teeming:

“Lady, there is no way to give this dream  
 Another slant. Odysseus himself has shown you 610  
 How he will finish this business. The suitors’ doom  
 Is clear. Not one will escape death’s black birds.”

And Penelope, in her circumspect way:

“Stranger, you should know that dreams 615  
 Are hard to interpret, and don’t always come true.”

There are two gates for dreams to drift through,  
 One made of horn and the other of ivory.  
 Dreams that pass through the gate of ivory  
 Are deceptive dreams and will not come true,  
 But when someone has a dream that has passed 620  
 Through the gate of polished horn, that dream  
 Will come true. My strange dream, though,  
 Did not come from there. If it had,  
 It would have been welcome to me and my child.

One more thing, and, please, take it to heart. 625  
 Dawn is coming, the accursed dawn of the day  
 Which will sever me from the house of Odysseus.  
 I will announce a contest. Odysseus  
 Used to line up axes inside his hall,  
 Twelve of them, like the curved chocks 630  
 That prop up a ship when it is being built,  
 And he would stand far off and send an arrow  
 Whizzing through them all. I will propose  
 This contest to my suitors, and whoever 635  
 Can bend that bow and slip the string on its notch  
 And shoot an arrow through all twelve axes,  
 With him will I go, leaving behind this house  
 I was married in, this beautiful, prosperous house,  
 Which I will remember always, even in my dreams.”

And Odysseus, from the depths of his teeming mind: 640

“Revered wife of Laertes’ son, Odysseus,  
 Do not put off this contest any longer,  
 For Odysseus will be here, with all his cunning,  
 Handling that polished bow, before these men  
 Could ever string it and shoot through the iron.” 645

Then Penelope, still watching him:

“If you were willing, stranger, to sit here  
 Beside me in my halls and give me joy,  
 Sleep would never settle upon my eyes.  
 But we cannot always be sleepless, 650

For every thing there is a season, and a time  
 For all we do on the life-giving earth.  
 I will go now to my room upstairs  
 And lie on my bed, which has become  
 A sorrowful bed, wet with my tears 655  
 Since the day Odysseus left  
 For Ilion, that accursed city.  
 I will lie there, but you can lie here  
 In the hall. Spread some blankets on the floor,  
 Or have the maids make up a bed for you.” 660

Saying this, Penelope went upstairs  
 To her softly lit room, not alone,  
 For her women went up with her.  
 Once in her room she wept for Odysseus,  
 Her beloved husband, wept until Athena 665  
 Let sweet sleep settle upon her eyelids.

*[Book 20 is omitted. Odysseus wakes from a restless sleep and hears Penelope weeping. Servants prepare the house for another day of feasting. The herdsmen bring animals from the fields. Philoetius, the cowherd, is sympathetic to Odysseus. Ctessipus, one of the suitors, throws an ox's hoof at Odysseus, who dodges it. Theoclymenus, a seer, to whom Telemachus is showing hospitality, foretells the suitors' doom.]*

## ODYSSEY 21

Owl-eyed Athena now prompted Penelope  
 To set before the suitors Odysseus' bow  
 And the grey iron, implements of the contest  
 And of their death.

Penelope climbed

The steep stairs to her bedroom and picked up 5

A beautiful bronze key with an ivory handle  
And went with her maids to a remote storeroom  
Where her husband's treasures lay—bronze, gold,  
And wrought iron. And there lay the curved bow  
And the quiver, still loaded with arrows, 10  
Gifts which a friend of Odysseus had given him  
When they met in Lacedaemon long ago.  
This was Iphitus, Eurytus' son, a godlike man.  
They had met in Messene, in the house of Ortilochus.  
Odysseus had come to collect a debt 15  
The Messenians owed him: three hundred sheep  
They had taken from Ithaca in a sea raid,  
And the shepherds with them. Odysseus  
Had come to get them back, a long journey  
For a young man, sent by his father and elders. 20  
Iphitus had come to search for twelve mares  
He had lost, along with the mules they were nursing.  
These mares turned out to be the death of Iphitus  
When he came to the house of Heracles,  
Zeus' tough-hearted son, who killed him, 25  
Guest though he was, without any regard  
For the gods' wrath or the table they had shared—  
Killed the man and kept the strong-hoofed mares.  
It was while looking for these mares that Iphitus  
Met Odysseus and gave him the bow 30  
Which old Eurytus had carried and left to his son.  
Odysseus gave him a sword and spear  
To mark the beginning of their friendship  
But before they had a chance to entertain each other  
Zeus' son killed Iphitus, son of Eurytus, 35  
A man like the gods. Odysseus did not take  
The bow with him on his black ship to Troy.  
It lay at home as a memento of his friend,  
And Odysseus carried it only on Ithaca.

Penelope came to the storeroom 40  
And stepped onto the oak threshold  
Which a carpenter in the old days had planed,  
Leveled, and then fitted with doorposts

And polished doors. Lovely in the half-light,  
 She quickly loosened the thong from the hook, 45  
 Drove home the key and shot back the bolts.  
 The doors bellowed like a bull in a meadow  
 And flew open before her. Stepping through,  
 She climbed onto a high platform that held chests  
 Filled with fragrant clothes. She reached up 50  
 And took the bow, case and all, from its peg,  
 Then sat down and laid the gleaming case on her knees  
 Her eyes welling with tears. Then she opened the case  
 And took out her husband's bow. When she had her fill  
 Of weeping, she went back to the hall 55  
 And the lordly suitors, bearing in her hands  
 The curved bow and the quiver loaded  
 With whining arrows. Two maidservants  
 Walked beside her, carrying a wicker chest  
 Filled with the bronze and iron gear her husband 60  
 Once used for this contest. When the beautiful woman  
 Reached the crowded hall, she stood  
 In the doorway flanked by her maidservants.  
 Then, covering her face with her shining veil,  
 Penelope spoke to her suitors: 65

“Hear me, proud suitors. You have used this house  
 For an eternity now—to eat and drink  
 In its master's absence, nor could you offer  
 Any excuse except your lust to marry me.  
 Well, your prize is here, and this is the contest. 70  
 I set before you the great bow of godlike Odysseus.  
 Whoever bends this bow and slips the string on its notch  
 And shoots an arrow through all twelve axes,  
 With him will I go, leaving behind this house  
 I was married in, this beautiful, prosperous house, 75  
 Which I will remember always, even in my dreams.”

Penelope said this, and then ordered Eumaeus  
 To set out for the suitors the bow and grey iron.  
 All in tears, Eumaeus took them and laid them down,  
 And the cowherd wept, too, when he saw 80

His master's bow. Antinous scoffed at them both:

“You stupid yokels! You can't see farther than your own noses.  
 What a pair! Disturbing the lady with your bawling.  
 She's sad enough already because she's lost her husband.  
 Either sit here in silence or go outside to weep, 85  
 And leave the bow behind for us suitors. This contest  
 Will separate the men from the boys. It won't be easy  
 To string that polished bow. There is no man here  
 Such as Odysseus was. I know. I saw him myself  
 And remember him well, though I was still a child.” 90

So Antinous said, hoping in his heart  
 That he would string the bow first and shoot an arrow  
 Through the iron. But the only arrow  
 He would touch first would be the one shot  
 Into his throat from the hands of Odysseus, 95  
 The man he himself was dishonoring  
 While inciting his comrades to do the same.

And then Telemachus, with a sigh of disgust:

“Look at me! Zeus must have robbed me of my wits.  
 My dear mother declares, for all her good sense, 100  
 That she will marry another and abandon this house,  
 And all I do is laugh and think it is funny.  
 Well, come on, you suitors, here's your prize,  
 A woman the likes of whom does not exist  
 In all Achaea, or in sacred Pylos, 105  
 Nowhere in Argos or in Mycenae,  
 Or on Ithaca itself or on the dark mainland.  
 You all know this. Why should I praise my mother?  
 Let's get going. Don't start making excuses  
 To put off stringing the bow. We'll see what happens. 110  
 And I might give that bow a try myself.  
 If I string it and shoot an arrow through the axeheads,  
 It won't bother me so much that my honored mother  
 Is leaving this house and going off with another,  
 Because I would at least be left here as someone 115

Capable of matching his father's prowess."

With that he took off his scarlet cloak, stood up,  
 And unstrapped his sword from his shoulders.  
 Then he went to work setting up the axeheads,  
 First digging a long trench true to the line 120  
 To hold them in a row, and then tamping the earth  
 Around each one. Everyone was amazed  
 That he made such a neat job of it  
 When he had never seen it done before.  
 Then he went and took his stance on the threshold 125  
 And began to try the bow. Three times  
 He made it quiver as he strained to string it,  
 And three times he eased off, although in his heart  
 He yearned to draw that bow and shoot an arrow  
 Through the iron axeheads. And on his fourth try 130  
 He would have succeeded in muscling the string  
 Onto its notch, but Odysseus reined him in,  
 Signaling him to stop with an upward nod.  
 So Telemachus said for all to hear:

"I guess I'm going to be a weakling forever! 135  
 Or else I'm still too young and don't have the strength  
 To defend myself against an enemy.  
 But come on, all of you who are stronger than me—  
 Give the bow a try and let's settle this contest."

And he set the bow aside, propping it against 140  
 The polished, jointed door, and leaning the arrow  
 Against the beautiful latch. Then Telemachus  
 Sat down on the chair from which he had risen.

Antinous, Eupheithes' son, then said:

"All right. We go in order from left to right, 145  
 Starting from where the wine gets poured."

Everyone agreed with Antinous' idea.  
 First up was their soothsayer, Leodes,

Oenops' son. He always sat in the corner  
 By the wine-bowl, and he was the only one 150  
 Who loathed the way the suitors behaved.  
 He now carried the bow and the arrow  
 Onto the threshold, took his stance,  
 And tried to bend the bow and string it,  
 But his tender, unworn hands gave out, 155  
 And he said for all the suitors to hear:

"Friends, I'm not the man to string this bow.  
 Someone else can take it. I foresee it will rob  
 Many a young hero of the breath of life.  
 And that will be just as well, since it is far better 160  
 To die than live on and fall short of the goal  
 We gather here for, with high hopes day after day.  
 You might hope in your heart—you might yearn—  
 To marry Penelope, the wife of Odysseus,  
 But after you've tried this bow and seen what it's like, 165  
 Go woo some other Achaean woman  
 And try to win her with your gifts. And Penelope  
 Should just marry the highest bidder,  
 The man who is fated to be her husband."

And he set the bow aside, propping it against 170  
 The polished, jointed door, and leaning the arrow  
 Against the beautiful latch. Then  
 He sat down on the chair from which he had risen.  
 And Antinous heaped contempt upon him:

"What kind of thing is that to say, Leodes? 175  
 I'm not going to stand here and listen to this.  
 You think this bow is going to rob some young heroes  
 Of life, just because you can't string it?  
 The truth is your mother didn't bear a son  
 Strong enough to shoot arrows from bows. 180  
 But there are others who will string it soon enough."

Then Antinous called to Melanthius, the goatherd:



“Get over here and start a fire, Melanthius,  
 And set by it a bench with a fleece over it,  
 And bring out a tub of lard from the pantry, 185  
 So we can grease the bow, and warm it up.  
 Then maybe we can finish this contest.”

He spoke, and Melanthius quickly rekindled the fire  
 And placed by it a bench covered with a fleece  
 And brought out from the pantry a tub of lard 190  
 With which the young men limbered up the bow—  
 But they still didn’t have the strength to string it.

Only Antinous and godlike Eurymachus,  
 The suitors’ ringleaders—and their strongest—  
 Were still left in the contest.

M195eanwhile,  
 Two other men had risen and left the hall—  
 The cowherd and swineherd—and Odysseus himself  
 Went out, too. When the three of them  
 Were outside the gates, Odysseus said softly:

“Cowherd and swineherd, I’ve been wondering 200  
 If I should tell you what I’m about to tell you now.  
 Let me ask you this. What would you do  
 If Odysseus suddenly showed up here  
 Out of the blue, just like that?  
 Would you side with the suitors or Odysseus? 205  
 Tell me how you stand.”

And the cattle herder answered him:

“Father Zeus, if only this would come true!  
 Let him come back. Let some god guide him.  
 Then you would see what these hands could do.” 210

And Eumaeus prayed likewise to all the gods  
 That Odysseus would return.

## When Odysseus

Was sure of both these men, he spoke to them again:

“I am back, right here in front of you.  
 After twenty hard years I have returned to my home. 215  
 I know that only you two of all my slaves  
 Truly want me back. I have heard  
 None of the others pray for my return.  
 So this is my promise to you. If a god  
 Beats these proud suitors down for me, 220  
 I will give you each a wife, property,  
 And a house built near mine. You two shall be  
 Friends to me and brothers to Telemachus.  
 And look, so you can be sure of who I am,  
 Here’s a clear sign, that scar from the wound 225  
 I got from a boar’s tusk when I went long ago  
 To Parnassus with the sons of Autolycus.”

And he pulled his rags aside from the scar.  
 When the two men had examined it carefully,  
 They threw their arms around Odysseus and wept, 230  
 And kept kissing his head and shoulders in welcome.  
 Odysseus kissed their heads and hands,  
 And the sun would have gone down on their weeping,  
 Had not Odysseus stopped them, saying:

“No more weeping and wailing now. Someone might come 235  
 Out of the hall and see us and tell those inside.  
 We’ll go back in now—not together, one at a time.  
 I’ll go first, and then you. And here’s what to watch for.  
 None of the suitors will allow the bow and quiver  
 To be given to me. It’ll be up to you, Eumaeus, 240  
 To bring the bow over and place it in my hands.  
 Then tell the women to lock the doors to their hall,  
 And if they hear the sound of men groaning  
 Or being struck, tell them not to rush out  
 But to sit still and do their work in silence. 245  
 Philoetius, I want you to bar the courtyard gate  
 And secure it quickly with a piece of rope.”

With this, Odysseus entered his great hall  
 And sat down on the chair from which he had risen.  
 Then the two herdsmen entered separately. 250

Eurymachus was turning the bow  
 Over and over in his hands, warming it  
 On this side and that by the fire, but even so  
 He was unable to string it. His pride hurt,  
 Shoulders sagging, he groaned and then swore: 255

“Damn it! It’s not just myself I’m sorry for,  
 But for all of us—and not for the marriage either.  
 That hurts, but there are plenty of other women,  
 Some here in Ithaca, some in other cities.  
 No, it’s that we fall so short of Odysseus’ 260  
 Godlike strength. We can’t even string his bow!  
 We’ll be laughed at for generations to come!”

Antinous, son of Euepeithes, answered him:

“That’ll never happen, Eurymachus,  
 And you know it. Now look, today is a holiday 265  
 Throughout the land, a sacred feast  
 In honor of Apollo, the Archer God.  
 This is no time to be bending bows.  
 So just set it quietly aside for now.  
 As for the axes, why don’t we leave them 270  
 Just as they are? No one is going to come  
 Into Odysseus’ hall and steal those axes.  
 Now let’s have the cupbearer start us off  
 So we can forget about the bow  
 And pour libations. Come morning, 275  
 We’ll have Melanthius bring along  
 The best she-goats in all the herds,  
 So we can lay prime thigh-pieces  
 On the altar of Apollo, the Archer God,  
 And then finish this business with the bow.” 280

Antinous’ proposal carried the day.

The heralds poured water over everyone's hands,  
 And boys filled the mixing bowls up to the brim  
 And served out the wine, first pouring  
 A few drops into each cup for libation. 285  
 When they had poured out their libations  
 And drunk as much as they wanted, Odysseus  
 Spoke among them, his heart full of cunning:

“Hear me, suitors of the glorious queen—  
 And I address Eurymachus most of all, 290  
 And godlike Antinous, since his speech  
 Was right on the mark when he said that for now  
 You should stop the contest and leave everything  
 Up to the gods. Tomorrow the Archer God  
 Will give the victory to whomever he chooses. 295  
 But come, let me have the polished bow.  
 I want to see, here in this hall with you,  
 If my grip is still strong, and if I still have  
 Any power left in these gnarled arms of mine,  
 Or if my hard traveling has sapped all my strength.” 300

They seethed with anger when they heard this,  
 Afraid that he would string the polished bow,  
 And Antinous addressed him contemptuously:

“You don't have an ounce of sense in you,  
 You miserable tramp. Isn't it enough 305  
 That we let you hang around with us,  
 Undisturbed, with a full share of the feast?  
 You even get to listen to what we say,  
 Which no other stranger, much less beggar, can do.  
 It's wine that's screwing you up, as it does 310  
 Anyone who guzzles it down. It was wine  
 That deluded the great centaur, Eurytion,  
 In the hall of Peirithous, the Lapith hero.  
 Eurytion got blind-drunk and in his madness  
 Did a terrible thing in Peirithous' house. 315  
 The enraged Lapiths sliced off his nose and ears  
 And dragged him outside, and Eurytion

Went off in a stupor, mutilated and muddled.  
 Men and centaurs have been at odds ever since.  
 Eurytion hurt himself because he got drunk. 320  
 And you're going to get hurt, too, I predict,  
 Hurt badly, if you string the bow. No one  
 In all the land will show you any kindness.  
 We'll send you off in a black ship to Echetus,  
 Who maims them all. You'll never get out alive. 325  
 So just be quiet and keep on drinking,  
 And don't challenge men who are younger than you."

It was Penelope who answered Antinous:

"It is not good, or just, Antinous,  
 To cheat any of Telemachus' guests 330  
 Who come to this house. Do you think  
 That if this stranger proves strong enough  
 To string Odysseus' bow, he will then  
 Lead me to his home and make me his wife?  
 I can't imagine that he harbors this hope. 335  
 So do not ruin your feast on that account.  
 The very idea is preposterous."

Eurymachus responded to this:

"Daughter of Icarius, wise Penelope,  
 Of course it's preposterous that this man 340  
 Would marry you. That's not what we're worried about.  
 But we are embarrassed at what men—and women—will say:  
 'A bunch of weaklings were wooing the wife  
 Of a man they couldn't touch—they couldn't even string  
 His polished bow. Then along came a vagrant 345  
 Who strung it easily and shot through the iron.'  
 That's what they'll say, to our lasting shame."

And Penelope, her eyes narrowing:

"Eurymachus, men who gobble up  
 The house of a prince cannot expect 350

To have a good reputation anywhere.  
 So there isn't any point in bringing up honor.  
 This stranger is a very well-built man  
 And says he is the son of a noble father.  
 So give him the bow and let us see what happens. 355  
 And here is my promise to all of you.  
 If Apollo gives this man the glory  
 And he strings the bow, I will clothe him  
 In a fine cloak and tunic, and give him  
 A javelin to ward off dogs and men, 360  
 And a double-edged sword, and sandals  
 For his feet, and I will give him passage  
 To wherever his heart desires."

This time it was Telemachus who answered:

"As for the bow, Mother, no man alive 365  
 Has a stronger claim than I do to give it  
 To whomever I want, or to deny it—  
 No, none of the lords on rocky Ithaca  
 Nor on the islands over toward Elis,  
 None of them could force his will upon me, 370  
 Not even if I wanted to give this bow  
 Outright, case and arrows and all,  
 As a gift to the stranger.

Go to your rooms,  
 Mother, and take care of your work,  
 Spinning and weaving, and have the maids do theirs. 375  
 This bow is men's business, and my business  
 Especially, since I am the master of this house."

Penelope was stunned and turned to go,  
 Her son's masterful words pressed to her heart.  
 She went up the stairs to her room with her women 380  
 And wept for Odysseus, her beloved husband,  
 Until grey-eyed Athena cast sleep on her eyelids.

Downstairs, the noble swineherd was carrying  
 The curved bow across the hall. The suitors

Were in an uproar, and one of them called out: 385

“Where do you think you’re going with that bow,  
 You miserable swineherd? You’re out of line.  
 Go back to your pigsties, where your own dogs  
 Will wolf you down—a nice, lonely death—  
 If Apollo and the other gods smile upon us.” 390

Afraid, the swineherd stopped in his tracks  
 And set the bow down. Men were yelling at him  
 All through the hall, and now Telemachus weighed in:

“Keep going with the bow. You’ll regret it  
 If you try to obey everyone. I may be 395  
 Younger than you, but I’ll chase you back  
 Into the country with a shower of stones.  
 I am stronger than you. I wish I were as strong  
 When it came to the suitors. I’d throw more than one  
 Out of here in a sorry state. They’re all up to no good.” 400

This got the suitors laughing hilariously  
 At Telemachus. The tension in the room eased,  
 And the swineherd carried the bow  
 Across to Odysseus and put it in his hands.  
 Then he called Eurycleia aside and said: 405

“Telemachus says you should lock the doors to the hall,  
 And if the women hear the sound of men groaning  
 Or being struck, tell them not to rush out  
 But to sit still and do their work in silence.”

Eumaeus’ words sank in, and Eurycleia 410  
 Locked the doors to the crowded hall.

Meanwhile, Philoetius left without a word  
 And barred the gates to the fenced courtyard.  
 Beside the portico there lay a ship’s hawser  
 Made of papyrus. Philoetius used this 415  
 To secure the gates, and then he went back in,

Sat down on the chair from which he had risen,  
And kept his eyes on Odysseus.

He was handling the bow, turning it over and over  
And testing its flex to make sure that worms 420  
Had not eaten the horn in its master's absence.  
The suitors glanced at each other  
And started to make sarcastic remarks:

"Ha! A real connoisseur, an expert in bows!"

"He must have one just like it in a case at home." 425

"Or plans to make one just like it, to judge by the way  
The masterful tramp keeps turning it in his hands."

"May he have as much success in life  
As he'll have in trying to string that bow."

Thus the suitors, while Odysseus, deep in thought, 430  
Was looking over his bow. And then, effortlessly,

*Like a musician stretching a string  
Over a new peg on his lyre, and making  
The twisted sheep-gut fast at either end,*

Odysseus strung the great bow. Lifting it up, 435  
He plucked the string, and it sang beautifully  
Under his touch, with a note like a swallow's.

The suitors were aghast. The color drained  
From their faces, and Zeus thundered loud,  
Showing his portents and cheering the heart 440  
Of the long-enduring, godlike Odysseus.

One arrow lay bare on the table. The rest,  
Which the suitors were about to taste,  
Were still in the quiver. Odysseus picked up  
The arrow from the table and laid it upon 445  
The bridge of the bow, and, still in his chair,  
Drew the bowstring and the notched arrow back.



He took aim and let fly, and the bronze-tipped arrow  
 Passed clean through the holes of all twelve axeheads  
 From first to last. And he said to Telemachus: 450

“Well, Telemachus, the guest in your hall  
 Has not disgraced you. I did not miss my target,  
 Nor did I take all day in stringing the bow.  
 I still have my strength, and I’m not as the suitors  
 Make me out to be in their taunts and jeers. 455  
 But now it is time to cook these men’s supper,  
 While it is still light outside, and after that,  
 We’ll need some entertainment—music and song—  
 The finishing touches for a perfect banquet.”

He spoke, and lowered his brows. Telemachus, 460  
 The true son of godlike Odysseus, slung on  
 His sharp sword, seized his spear, and gleaming in bronze  
 Took his place by his father’s side.

## ODYSSEY 22

And now Odysseus’ cunning was revealed.  
 He stripped off his rags and leapt with his bow  
 To the great threshold. Spreading the arrows  
 Out before his feet, he spoke to the suitors:

“Now that we’ve separated the men from the boys, 5  
 I’ll see if I can hit a mark that no man  
 Has ever hit. Apollo grant me glory!”

As he spoke he took aim at Antinous,  
 Who at that moment was lifting to his lips  
 A golden cup—a fine, two-eared golden goblet— 10

And was just about to sip the wine. Bloodshed  
 Was the farthest thing from his mind.  
 They were at a banquet. Who would think  
 That one man, however strong, would take them all on  
 And so ensure his own death? Odysseus 15  
 Took dead aim at Antinous' throat and shot,  
 And the arrow punched all the way through  
 The soft neck tissue. Antinous fell to one side,  
 The cup dropped from his hands, and a jet  
 Of dark blood spurting from his nostrils. 20  
 He kicked the table as he went down,  
 Spilling the food on the floor, and the bread  
 And roast meat were fouled in the dust.

The crowd

Burst into an uproar when they saw  
 Antinous go down. They jumped from their seats 25  
 And ran in a panic through the hall,  
 Scanning the walls for weapons—  
 A spear, a shield. But there were none to be had.  
 Odysseus listened to their angry jeers:

“You think you can shoot at men, you tramp?” 30

“That’s your last contest—you’re as good as dead!”

“You’ve killed the best young man in Ithaca!”

“Vultures will eat you on this very spot!”

They all assumed he had not shot to kill,  
 And had no idea how tightly the net 35  
 Had been drawn around them. Odysseus  
 Scowled at the whole lot of them, and said:

“You dogs! You thought I would never  
 Come home from Troy. So you wasted my house,  
 Forced the women to sleep with you, 40  
 And while I was still alive you courted my wife  
 Without any fear of the gods in high heaven

Or of any retribution from the world of men.  
Now the net has been drawn tight around you.”

At these words the color drained from their faces, 45  
And they all looked around for a way to escape.  
Only Eurymachus had anything to say:

“If you are really Odysseus of Ithaca,  
Then what you say is just. The citizens  
Have done many foolish things in this house 50  
And many in the fields. But the man to blame  
Lies here dead, Antinous. He started it all,  
Not so much because he wanted a marriage  
Or needed one, but for another purpose,  
Which Zeus did not fulfill: he wanted to be king 55  
In Ithaca, and to kill your son in ambush.  
Now he’s been killed, and he deserved it.  
But spare your people. We will pay you back  
For all we have eaten and drunk in your house.  
We will make a collection; each man will put in 60  
The worth of twenty oxen; we will make restitution  
In bronze and gold until your heart is soothed.  
Until then no one could blame you for being angry.”

Odysseus fixed him with a stare and said:

“Eurymachus, not even if all of you 65  
Gave me your entire family fortunes,  
All that you have and ever will have,  
Would I stay my hands from killing.  
You courted my wife, and you will pay in full.  
Your only choice now is to fight like men 70  
Or run for it. Who knows, one or two of you  
Might live to see another day. But I doubt it.”

Their blood turned milky when they heard this.  
Eurymachus now turned to them and said:

“Friends, this man is not going to stop at anything. 75

He's got his arrows and bow, and he'll shoot  
 From the threshold until he's killed us all.  
 We've got to fight back. Draw your swords  
 And use the tables as shields. If we charge him  
 In a mass and push him from the doorway 80  
 We can get reinforcements from town in no time.  
 Then this man will have shot his last shot."

With that, he drew his honed bronze sword  
 And charged Odysseus with an ear-splitting cry.  
 Odysseus in the same instant let loose an arrow 85  
 That entered his chest just beside the nipple  
 And spiked down to his liver. The sword fell  
 From Eurymachus' hand. He spun around  
 And fell on a table, knocking off dishes and cups,  
 And rolled to the ground, his forehead banging 90  
 Up and down against it and his feet kicking a chair  
 In his death throes, until the world went dark.

Amphinomus went for Odysseus next,  
 Rushing at him with his sword drawn,  
 Hoping to drive him away from the door. 95  
 Telemachus got the jump on him, though,  
 Driving a bronze-tipped spear into his back  
 Square between his shoulder blades  
 And through to his chest. He fell with a thud,  
 His forehead hammering into the ground. 100  
 Telemachus sprang back, leaving the spear  
 Right where it was, stuck in Amphinomus,  
 Fearing that if he tried to pull it out  
 Someone would rush him and cut him down  
 As he bent over the corpse. So he ran over 105  
 To his father's side, and his words flew fast:

"I'll bring you a shield, Father, two spears  
 And a bronze helmet—I'll find one that fits.  
 When I come back I'll arm myself  
 And the cowherd and swineherd. Better armed than not." 110

And Odysseus, the great tactician:

“Bring me what you can while I still have arrows  
Or these men might drive me away from the door.”

And Telemachus was off to the room  
Where the weapons were stored. He took 115  
Four shields, eight spears, and four bronze helmets  
With thick horsehair plumes and brought them  
Quickly to his father. Telemachus armed himself,  
The two servants did likewise, and the three of them  
Took their stand alongside the cunning warrior, 120  
Odysseus. As long as the arrows held out  
He kept picking off the suitors one by one,  
And they fell thick as flies. But when the master archer  
Ran out of arrows, he leaned the bow  
Against the doorpost of the entrance hall 125  
And slung a four-ply shield over his shoulder,  
Put on his head a well-wrought helmet  
With a plume that made his every nod a threat,  
And took two spears tipped with heavy bronze.

Built into the higher wall of the main hall 130  
Was a back door reached by a short flight of stairs  
And leading to a passage closed by double doors.  
Odysseus posted the swineherd at this doorway,  
Which could be attacked by only one man at a time.  
It was just then that Agelaus called to the suitors: 135

“Let’s one of us get up to the back door  
And get word to the town. Act quickly  
And this man will have shot his last.”

But the goatherd Melanthius answered him:

“That won’t work, Agelaus. 140  
The door outside is too near the courtyard—  
An easy shot from where he is standing—  
And the passageway is dangerously narrow.

One good man could hold it against all of us.  
 Look, let me bring you weapons and armor  
 From the storeroom. That has to be where  
 Odysseus and his son have laid them away.” 145

So saying, Melanthius clambered up  
 To Odysseus’ storerooms. There he picked out  
 Twelve shields and as many spears and helmets  
 And brought them out quickly to give to the suitors. 150  
 Odysseus’ heart sank, and his knees grew weak  
 When he saw the suitors putting on armor  
 And brandishing spears. This wasn’t going to be easy.  
 His words flew out to Telemachus: 155

“One of the women in the halls must be  
 Waging war against us—unless it’s Melanthius.”

And Telemachus, cool-headed under fire:

“No, it’s my fault, Father, and no one else’s.  
 I must have left the storeroom door open,  
 And one of them spotted it. 160

Eumaeus!

Go close the door to the storeroom,  
 And see whether one of the women is behind this,  
 Or Melanthius, son of Dolius, as I suspect.”

As they were speaking, Melanthius the goatherd  
 Was making another trip to the storeroom  
 For more weapons. The swineherd spotted him  
 And was quick to point him out to Odysseus: 165

“There he goes, my lord Odysseus—  
 The sneak—just as we thought, on his way  
 To the storeroom! Tell me what to do.  
 Kill him if I prove to be the better man,  
 Or bring him to you, so he can pay in full  
 For all the wrongs he has done here in your house?” 170

Odysseus brought his mind to bear on this: 175

“Telemachus and I will keep the suitors busy  
 In the hall here. Don’t worry about that.  
 Tie him up. Bend his arms and legs behind him  
 And lash them to a board strapped onto his back.  
 Then hoist him up to the rafters in the store room 180  
 And leave him there to twist in the wind.”

This was just what Eumaeus and the cowherd  
 Wanted to hear. Off they went to the storeroom,  
 Unseen by Melanthius, who was inside  
 Rooting around for armor and weapons. 185  
 They lay in wait on either side of the door,  
 And when Melanthius crossed the threshold,  
 Carrying a beautiful helmet in one hand  
 And in the other a broad old shield,  
 Flecked with rust—a shield the hero Laertes 190  
 Had carried in his youth but that had long since  
 Been laid aside with its straps unstitched—  
 Eumaeus and the cowherd Philoetius  
 Jumped him and dragged him by the hair  
 Back into the storeroom. They threw him 195  
 Hard to the ground, knocking the wind out of him,  
 And tied his hands and feet behind his back,  
 Making it hurt, as Odysseus had ordered.  
 Then they attached a rope to his body  
 And hoisted him up along the tall pillar 200  
 Until he was up by the rafters, and you,  
 Swineherd Eumaeus, you mocked him:

“Now you’ll really be on watch, Melanthius,  
 The whole night through, lying on a feather bed—  
 Just your style—and you’re sure to see 205  
 The early dawn come up from Ocean’s streams,  
 Couched in gold, at the hour when you drive your goats  
 Up to the hall to make a feast for the suitors.”

So Melanthius was left there, racked with pain,

While Eumaeus and the cowherd put on their armor, 210  
Closed the polished door, and rejoined Odysseus,  
The cunning warrior. So they took their stand  
There on the threshold, breathing fury,  
Four of them against the many who stood in the hall.

And then Athena was with them, Zeus' daughter 215  
Looking just like Mentor and assuming his voice.  
Odysseus, glad to see her, spoke these words:

"Mentor, old friend, help me out here.  
Remember all the favors I've done for you.  
We go back a long way, you and I." 220

He figured it was Athena, the soldier's goddess.  
On the other side, the suitors yelled and shouted,  
Agelaus' voice rising to rebuke Athena:

"You there, Mentor, don't let Odysseus  
Talk you into helping him and fighting us. 225  
This is the way I see it turning out.  
When we have killed these men, father and son,  
We'll kill you next for what you mean to do  
In this hall. You'll pay with your life.  
And when we've taken care of all five of you, 230  
We'll take everything you have, Mentor,  
Everything in your house and in your fields,  
And add it to Odysseus' property.  
We won't let your sons stay in your house  
Or let your daughters or even your wife 235  
Go about freely in the town of Ithaca."

This made Athena all the more angry,  
And she turned on Odysseus and snapped at him:

"I can't believe, Odysseus, that you,  
Of all people, have lost the guts you had 240  
When you fought the Trojans for nine long years  
To get Helen back, killing so many in combat



And coming up with the plan that took wide Troy.  
 How is it that now, when you've come home,  
 You get all teary-eyed about showing your strength 245  
 To this pack of suitors? Get over here  
 Next to me and see what I can do. I'll show you  
 What sort of man Mentor, son of Alcimus, is,  
 And how he repays favors in the heat of battle."

Athena spoke these words, but she did not yet 250  
 Give Odysseus the strength to turn the tide.  
 She was still testing him, and his glorious son,  
 To see what they were made of. As for herself,  
 The goddess flew up to the roofbeam  
 Of the smoky hall, just like a swallow. 255

The suitors were now rallied by Agelaus  
 And by Damastor, Eurynomus, and Amphimedon,  
 As well as by Demoptolemus and Peisander,  
 Son of Polyctor, and the warrior Polybus.  
 These were the best of the suitors lucky enough 260  
 To still be fighting for their lives. The rest  
 Had been laid low by the showers of arrows.  
 Agelaus now made this speech to them:

"He's had it now. Mentor's abandoned him  
 After all that hot air, and the four of them 265  
 Are left alone at the outer doors.  
 All right, now. Don't throw your spears all at once.  
 You six go first, and hope that Zeus allows  
 Odysseus to be hit and gives us the glory.  
 The others won't matter once he goes down." 270

They took his advice and gave it their best,  
 But Athena made their shots all come to nothing,  
 One man hitting the doorpost, another the door,  
 Another's bronze-tipped ash spear sticking  
 Into the wall. Odysseus and his men 275  
 Weren't even nicked, and the great hero said to them:

“It’s our turn now. I say we throw our spears  
 Right into the crowd. These bastards mean to kill us  
 On top of everything else they’ve done to wrong me.”

He spoke, and they all threw their sharp spears 280  
 With deadly aim. Odysseus hit Demoptolemus;  
 Telemachus got Euryades; the swineherd, Elatus;  
 And the cattle herder took out Peisander.  
 They all bit the dirt at the same moment,  
 And the suitors retreated to the back of the hall, 285  
 Allowing Odysseus and his men to run out  
 And pull their spears from the dead men’s bodies.

The suitors rallied for another volley,  
 Throwing their sharp spears with all they had. 290  
 This time Athena made most of them miss,  
 One man hitting the doorpost, another the door,  
 Another’s bronze-tipped ash spear sticking  
 Into the wall. But Amphimedon’s spear  
 Grazed Telemachus’ wrist, breaking the skin,  
 And Ctessipus’ spear clipped Eumaeus’ shoulder 295  
 As it sailed over his shield and kept on going  
 Until it hit the ground. Then Odysseus and his men  
 Got off another round into the throng,  
 Odysseus, sacker of cities, hitting Eurydamas;  
 Telemachus getting Amphimedon; the swineherd, Polybus; 300  
 And lastly the cattle herder striking Ctessipus  
 Square in the chest. And he crowed over him:

“Always picking a fight, just like your father.  
 Well, you can stop all your big talk now.  
 We’ll let the gods have the last word this time. 305  
 Take this spear as your host’s gift, fair exchange  
 For the hoof you threw at godlike Odysseus  
 When he made his rounds begging in the hall.”

Thus the herder of the spiral-horned cattle.

Odysseus, meanwhile, had skewered Damastor’s son 310

With a hard spear-thrust in hand-to-hand fighting,  
 And Telemachus killed Leocritus, Evenor's son,  
 Piercing him in the groin and driving his bronze spear  
 All the way through. Leocritus pitched forward,  
 His forehead slamming onto the ground.

Only then

315

Did Athena hold up her overpowering aegis  
 From her high perch, and the minds of the suitors  
 Shriveled with fear, and they fled through the hall

*Like a herd of cattle that an iridescent gadfly  
 Goads along on a warm spring afternoon,*

320

With Odysseus and his men after them

*Like vultures with crooked talons and hooked beaks  
 Descending from the mountains upon a flock  
 Of smaller birds, who fly low under the clouds  
 And over the plain. The vultures swoop down  
 To pick them off; the smaller birds cannot escape,  
 And men thrill to see the chase in the sky.*

325

Odysseus and his cohorts were clubbing the suitors  
 Right and left all through the hall; horrible groans  
 Rose from their lips as their heads were smashed in,  
 And the floor of the great hall smoked with blood.

330

It was then that Leodes, the soothsayer, rushed forward,  
 Clasped Odysseus' knees, and begged for his life:

“By your knees, Odysseus, respect me  
 And pity me. I swear I have never said or done  
 Anything wrong to any woman in your house.  
 I tried to stop the suitors when they did such things,  
 But they wouldn't listen, wouldn't keep their hands clean,  
 And now they've paid a cruel price for their sins.  
 And I, their soothsayer, who have done no wrong,  
 Will be laid low with them. That's the gratitude I get.”

335

340

Odysseus scowled down at the man and said:

“If you are really their soothsayer, as you boast you are,  
 How many times must you have prayed in the halls  
 That my sweet homecoming would never come, 345  
 And that you would be the one my wife would go off with  
 And bear children to! You’re a dead man.”

As he spoke his strong hand reached for a sword  
 That lay nearby—a sword Agelaus had dropped  
 When he was killed. The soothsayer was struck 350  
 Full in the neck. His lips were still forming words  
 When his lopped head rolled in the dust.

All this while the bard, Phemius, was busy  
 Trying not to be killed. This man, Terpes’ son,  
 Sang for the suitors under compulsion. 355  
 He stood now with his pure-toned lyre  
 Near the high back door, trying to decide  
 Whether he should slip out from the hall  
 And crouch at the altar of Zeus of the Courtyard—  
 The great altar on which Laertes and Odysseus 360  
 Had burned many an ox’s thigh—  
 Or whether he should rush forward  
 And supplicate Odysseus by his knees.  
 Better to fall at the man’s knees, he thought.  
 So he laid the hollow lyre on the ground 365  
 Between the wine-bowl and silver-studded chair  
 And ran up to Odysseus and clasped his knees.  
 His words flew up to Odysseus like birds:

“By your knees, Odysseus, respect me  
 And pity me. You will regret it someday 370  
 If you kill a bard—me—who sings for gods and men.  
 I am self-taught, and a god has planted in my heart  
 All sorts of songs and stories, and I can sing to you  
 As to a god. So don’t be too eager  
 To slit my throat. Telemachus will tell you 375  
 That I didn’t come to your house by choice

To entertain the suitors at their feasts.  
There were too many of them; they made me come.”

Telemachus heard him and said to his father:

“He’s innocent; don’t kill him. 380  
And let’s spare the herald, Medon,  
Who used to take care of me when I was a child,  
If Philoetius hasn’t already killed him—  
Or the swineherd—or if he didn’t run into you  
As you were charging through the house.” 385

Medon heard what Telemachus said.  
He was under a chair, wrapped in an oxhide,  
Cowering from death. Now he jumped up,  
Stripped off the oxhide, ran to Telemachus  
And fell at his knees. His words rose on wings: 390

“I’m here, Telemachus! Hold back, and ask your father  
To hold back too, or he might kill me with cold bronze,  
Strong as he is and as mad as he is at the suitors,  
Who ate away his house and paid you no honor.”

Odysseus smiled at this and said to him: 395

“Don’t worry, he’s saved you. Now you know,  
And you can tell the world, how much better  
Good deeds are than evil. Go outside, now,  
You and the singer, and sit in the yard  
Away from the slaughter, until I finish 400  
Everything I have to do inside the house.”

So he spoke, and the two went out of the hall  
And sat down by the altar of great Zeus,  
Wide-eyed and expecting death at any moment.  
Odysseus, too, had his eyes wide open, 405  
Looking all through his house to see if anyone  
Was still alive and hiding from death.  
But everyone he saw lay in the blood and dust,

The whole lot of them,

*like fish that fishermen  
Have drawn up in nets from the grey sea  
Onto the curved shore. They lie all in heaps  
On the sand beach, longing for the salt waves,  
And the blazing sun drains their life away.*

410

So too the suitors, lying in heaps.

Then Odysseus called to Telemachus: 415

“Go call the nurse Eurycleia for me.  
I want to tell her something.”

So Telemachus went  
To Eurycleia’s room, rattled the door, and called:

“Get up and come out here, old woman—you  
Who are in charge of all our women servants. 420  
Come on. My father has something to say to you.”

Eurycleia’s response died on her lips.  
She opened the doors to the great hall,  
Came out, and followed Telemachus  
To where Odysseus, spattered with blood and grime  
Stood among the bodies of the slain. 425

*A lion that has just fed upon an ox in a field  
Has his chest and cheeks smeared with blood,  
And his face is terrible to look upon.*

So too Odysseus,  
Smeared with gore from head to foot.

When Eurycleia 430  
Saw all the corpses and the pools of blood,  
She lifted her head to cry out in triumph—  
But Odysseus stopped her cold,

Reining her in with these words:

“Rejoice in your heart, but do not cry aloud. 435  
 It is unholy to gloat over the slain. These men  
 Have been destroyed by divine destiny  
 And their own recklessness. They honored no one,  
 Rich or poor, high or low, who came to them.  
 And so by their folly they have brought upon themselves 440  
 An ugly fate.

Now tell me, which of the women  
 Dishonor me and which are innocent?”

And Eurycleia, the loyal nurse:

“Yes indeed, child, I will tell you all. 445  
 There are fifty women in your house,  
 Servants we have taught to do their work,  
 To card wool and bear all the drudgery.  
 Of these, twelve have shamed this house  
 And respect neither me nor Penelope herself. 450  
 Telemachus has only now become a man,  
 And his mother has not allowed him  
 To direct the women servants.

May I go now  
 To the upstairs room and tell your wife?  
 Some god has wrapped her up in sleep.”

Odysseus, his mind teeming, answered her: 455

“Don’t wake her yet. First bring those women  
 Who have acted so disgracefully.”

While the old woman went out through the hall  
 To tell the women the news—and to summon twelve—  
 Odysseus called Telemachus and the two herdsmen 460  
 And spoke to them words fletched like arrows:

“Start carrying out the bodies,  
 And have the women help you.

Then sponge down  
 All of the beautiful tables and chairs.  
 When you have set the whole house in order, 465  
 Take the women outside between the round house  
 And the courtyard fence. Slash them with swords  
 Until they have forgotten their secret lovemaking  
 With the suitors. Then finish them off.”

Thus Odysseus, and the women came in, 470  
 Huddled together and shedding salt tears.  
 First they carried out the dead bodies  
 And set them down under the courtyard's portico,  
 Propping them against each other. Odysseus himself  
 Kept them at it. Then he had them sponge down 475  
 All of the beautiful tables and chairs.  
 Telemachus, the swineherd, and the cowherd  
 Scraped the floor with hoes, and the women  
 Carried out the scrapings and threw them away.  
 When they had set the whole house in order, 480  
 They took the women out between the round house  
 And the courtyard fence, penning them in  
 With no way to escape. And Telemachus,  
 In his cool-headed way, said to the others:

“I won't allow a clean death for these women— 485  
 The suitors' sluts—who have heaped reproaches  
 Upon my own head and upon my mother's.”

He spoke, and tied the cable of a dark-prowed ship  
 To a great pillar and pulled it about the round house,  
 Stretching it high so their feet couldn't touch the ground. 490

*Long-winged thrushes, or doves, making their way  
 To their roosts, fall into a snare set in a thicket,  
 And the bed that receives them is far from welcome.*

So too these women, their heads hanging in a row,  
 The cable looped around each of their necks. 495  
 It was a most piteous death. Their feet fluttered





And as they kissed his head and shoulders and hands  
 He felt a sudden, sweet urge to weep,  
 For in his heart he knew them all.

525

## ODYSSEY 23

The old woman laughed as she went upstairs  
 To tell her mistress that her husband was home.  
 She ran up the steps, lifting her knees high,  
 And, bending over Penelope, she said:

“Wake up, dear child, so you can see for yourself  
 What you have yearned for day in and day out.  
 Odysseus has come home, after all this time,  
 And has killed those men who tried to marry you  
 And who ravaged your house and bullied your son.”

5

And Penelope, alert now and wary:

10

“Dear nurse, the gods have driven you crazy.  
 The gods can make even the wise mad,  
 Just as they often make the foolish wise.  
 Now they have wrecked your usually sound mind.  
 Why do you mock me and my sorrowful heart,  
 Waking me from sleep to tell me this nonsense—  
 And such a sweet sleep. It sealed my eyelids.  
 I haven’t slept like that since the day Odysseus  
 Left for Ilion—that accursed city.  
 Now go back down to the hall.  
 If any of the others had told me this  
 And wakened me from sleep, I would have  
 Sent her back with something to be sorry about!  
 You can thank your old age for this at least.”

15

20

And Eurycleia, the loyal nurse:

25

“I am not mocking you, child. Odysseus  
Really is here. He’s come home, just as I say.  
He’s the stranger they all insulted in the great hall.  
Telemachus has known all along, but had  
The self-control to hide his father’s plans  
Until he could pay the arrogant bastards back.”

30

Penelope felt a sudden pang of joy. She leapt  
From her bed and flung her arms around the old woman,  
And with tears in her eyes she said to her:

“Dear nurse, if it is true, if he really has  
Come back to his house, tell me how  
He laid his hands on the shameless suitors,  
One man alone against all of that mob.”

35

Eurycleia answered her:

“I didn’t see and didn’t ask. I only heard the groaning  
Of men being killed. We women sat  
In the far corner of our quarters, trembling,  
With the good solid doors bolted shut  
Until your son came from the hall to call me,  
Telemachus. His father had sent him to call me.  
And there he was, Odysseus, standing  
In a sea of dead bodies, all piled  
On top of each other on the hard-packed floor.  
It would have warmed your heart to see him,  
Spattered with blood and filth like a lion.  
And now the bodies are all gathered together  
At the gates, and he is purifying the house  
With sulfur, and has built a great fire,  
And has sent me to call you. Come with me now  
So that both your hearts can be happy again.  
You have suffered so much, but now  
Your long desire has been fulfilled.  
He has come himself, alive, to his own hearth,

40

45

50

55

And has found you and his son in the hall.  
 As for the suitors, who did him wrong, 60  
 He's taken his revenge on every last man."

And Penelope, ever cautious:

"Dear nurse, don't gloat over them yet.  
 You know how welcome the sight of him  
 Would be to us all, and especially to me 65  
 And the son he and I bore. But this story  
 Can't be true, not the way you tell it.  
 One of the immortals must have killed the suitors,  
 Angry at their arrogance and evil deeds.  
 They respected no man, good or bad, 70  
 So their blind folly has killed them. But Odysseus  
 Is lost, lost to us here, and gone forever."

And Eurycleia, the faithful nurse:

"Child, how can you say this? Your husband  
 Is here at his own fireside, and yet you are sure 75  
 He will never come home! Always on guard!  
 But here's something else, clear proof:  
 The scar he got from the tusk of that boar.  
 I noticed it when I was washing his feet  
 And wanted to tell you, but he shrewdly clamped 80  
 His hand on my mouth and wouldn't let me speak.  
 Just come with me, and I will stake my life on it.  
 If I am lying you can torture me to death."

Still wary, Penelope replied:

"Dear nurse, it is hard for you to comprehend 85  
 The ways of the eternal gods, wise as you are.  
 Still, let us go to my son, so that I may see  
 The suitors dead and the man who killed them."

And Penelope descended the stairs, her heart  
 In turmoil. Should she hold back and question 90

Her husband? Or should she go up to him,  
 Embrace him, and kiss his hands and head?  
 She entered the hall, crossing the stone threshold,  
 And sat opposite Odysseus, in the firelight  
 Beside the farther wall. He sat by a column, 95  
 Looking down, waiting to see if his incomparable wife  
 Would say anything to him when she saw him.  
 She sat a long time in silence, wondering.  
 She would look at his face and see her husband,  
 But then fail to know him in his dirty rags. 100  
 Telemachus couldn't take it any more:

"Mother, how can you be so hard,  
 Holding back like that? Why don't you sit  
 Next to father and talk to him, ask him things?  
 No other woman would have the heart 105  
 To stand off from her husband who has come back  
 After twenty hard years to his country and home.  
 But your heart is always colder than stone."

And Penelope, cautious as ever:

"My child, I am lost in wonder 110  
 And unable to speak or ask a question  
 Or look him in the eyes. If he really is  
 Odysseus come home, the two of us  
 Will be sure of each other, very sure.  
 There are secrets between us no one else knows." 115

Odysseus, who had borne much, smiled,  
 And his words flew to his son on wings:

"Telemachus, let your mother test me  
 In our hall. She will soon see more clearly.  
 Now, because I am dirty and wearing rags, 120  
 She is not ready to acknowledge who I am.  
 But you and I have to devise a plan.  
 When someone kills just one man,  
 Even a man who has few to avenge him,

He goes into exile, leaving country and kin. 125  
Well, we have killed a city of young men,  
The flower of Ithaca. Think about that.”

And Telemachus, in his clear-headed way:

“You should think about it, Father. They say 130  
No man alive can match you for cunning.  
We’ll follow you for all we are worth,  
And I don’t think we’ll fail for lack of courage.”

And Odysseus, the master strategist:

“Well, this is what I think we should do. 135  
First, bathe yourselves and put on clean tunics  
And tell the women to choose their clothes well.  
Then have the singer pick up his lyre  
And lead everyone in a lively dance tune,  
Loud and clear. Anyone who hears the sound,  
A passerby or neighbor, will think it’s a wedding, 140  
And so word of the suitors’ killing won’t spread  
Down through the town before we can reach  
Our woodland farm. Once there we’ll see  
What kind of luck the Olympian gives us.”

They did as he said. The men bathed 145  
And put on tunics, and the women dressed up.  
The godlike singer, sweeping his hollow lyre,  
Put a song in their hearts and made their feet move,  
And the great hall resounded under the tread  
Of men and silken-waisted women dancing. 150  
And people outside would hear it and say:

“Well, someone has finally married the queen,  
Fickle woman. Couldn’t bear to keep the house  
For her true husband until he came back.”

But they had no idea how things actually stood. 155

Odysseus, meanwhile, was being bathed  
 By the housekeeper, Eurynome. She  
 Rubbed him with olive oil and threw about him  
 A beautiful cloak and tunic. And Athena  
 Shed beauty upon him, and made him look 160  
 Taller and more muscled, and made his hair  
 Tumble down his head like hyacinth flowers.

*Imagine a craftsman overlaying silver  
 With pure gold. He has learned his art  
 From Pallas Athena and Lord Hephaestus, 165  
 And creates works of breathtaking beauty.*

So Athena herself made his head and shoulders  
 Shimmer with grace. He came from the bath  
 Like a god, and sat down on the chair again  
 Opposite his wife, and spoke to her and said: 170

“You’re a mysterious woman.

The gods

Have given to you, more than to any  
 Other woman, an unyielding heart.  
 No other woman would be able to endure  
 Standing off from her husband, come back 175  
 After twenty hard years to his country and home.  
 Nurse, make up a bed for me so I can lie down  
 Alone, since her heart is a cold lump of iron.”

And Penelope, cautious and wary:

“You’re a mysterious man.

I am not being proud 180

Or scornful, nor am I bewildered—not at all.  
 I know very well what you looked like  
 When you left Ithaca on your long-oared ship.  
 Nurse, bring the bed out from the master bedroom,  
 The bedstead he made himself, and spread it for him 185  
 With fleeces and blankets and silky coverlets.”

She was testing her husband.

Odysseus

Could bear no more, and he cried out to his wife:

“By God, woman, now you’ve cut deep.  
 Who moved my bed? It would be hard 190  
 For anyone, no matter how skilled, to move it.  
 A god could come down and move it easily,  
 But not a man alive, however young and strong,  
 Could ever pry it up. There’s something telling  
 About how that bed’s built, and no one else 195  
 Built it but me.

There was an olive tree  
 Growing on the site, long-leaved and full,  
 Its trunk thick as a post. I built my bedroom  
 Around that tree, and when I had finished  
 The masonry walls and done the roofing 200  
 And set in the jointed, close-fitting doors,  
 I lopped off all of the olive’s branches,  
 Trimmed the trunk from the root on up,  
 And rounded it and trued it with an adze until  
 I had myself a bedpost. I bored it with an auger, 205  
 And starting from this I framed up the whole bed,  
 Inlaying it with gold and silver and ivory  
 And stretching across it oxhide thongs dyed purple.  
 So there’s our secret. But I do not know, woman,  
 Whether my bed is still firmly in place, or if 210  
 Some other man has cut through the olive’s trunk.”

At this, Penelope finally let go.

Odysseus had shown he knew their old secret.

In tears, she ran straight to him, threw her arms

Around him, kissed his face, and said: 215

“Don’t be angry with me, Odysseus. You,  
 Of all men, know how the world goes.  
 It is the gods who gave us sorrow, the gods  
 Who begrudged us a life together, enjoying  
 Our youth and arriving side by side 220



To the threshold of old age. Don't hold it against me  
 That when I first saw you I didn't welcome you  
 As I do now. My heart has been cold with fear  
 That an imposter would come and deceive me.  
 There are many who scheme for ill-gotten gains. 225  
 Not even Helen, daughter of Zeus,  
 Would have slept with a foreigner had she known  
 The Greeks would go to war to bring her back home.  
 It was a god who drove her to that dreadful act,  
 Or she never would have thought of doing what she did, 230  
 The horror that brought suffering to us as well.  
 But now, since you have confirmed the secret  
 Of our marriage bed, which no one has ever seen—  
 Only you and I and a single servant, Actor's daughter,  
 Whom my father gave me before I ever came here 235  
 And who kept the doors of our bridal chamber—  
 You have persuaded even my stubborn heart."

This brought tears from deep within him,  
 And as he wept he clung to his beloved wife.

*Land is a welcome sight to men swimming* 240  
*For their lives, after Poseidon has smashed their ship*  
*In heavy seas. Only a few of them escape*  
*And make it to shore. They come out*  
*Of the grey water crusted with brine, glad*  
*To be alive and set foot on dry land.* 245

So welcome a sight was her husband to her.  
 She would not loosen her white arms from his neck,  
 And rose-fingered Dawn would have risen  
 On their weeping, had not Athena stepped in  
 And held back the long night at the end of its course 250  
 And stopped gold-stitched Dawn at Ocean's shores  
 From yoking the horses that bring light to men,  
 Lampus and Phaethon, the colts of Dawn.

Then Odysseus said to his wife:

“We have not yet come to the end of our trials. 255  
 There is still a long, hard task for me to complete,  
 As the spirit of Tiresias foretold to me  
 On the day I went down to the house of Hades  
 To ask him about my companions’ return  
 And my own. But come to bed now, 260  
 And we’ll close our eyes in the pleasure of sleep.”

And Penelope calmly answered him:

“Your bed is ready for you whenever  
 You want it, now that the gods have brought you  
 Home to your family and native land. 265  
 But since you’ve brought it up, tell me  
 About this trial. I’ll learn about it soon enough,  
 And it won’t be any worse to hear it now.”

And Odysseus, his mind teeming:

“You are a mystery to me. Why do you insist 270  
 I tell you now? Well, here’s the whole story.  
 It’s not a tale you will enjoy, and I have no joy  
 In telling it.

Tiresias told me that I must go  
 To city after city carrying a broad-bladed oar,  
 Until I come to men who know nothing of the sea, 275  
 Who eat their food unsalted, and have never seen  
 Red-prowed ships or the oars that wing them along.  
 And he told me that I would know I had found them  
 When I met another traveler who thought  
 The oar I was carrying was a winnowing fan. 280  
 Then I must fix my oar in the earth  
 And offer sacrifice to Lord Poseidon,  
 A ram, a bull, and a boar in its prime.  
 Then at last I am to come home and offer  
 Grand sacrifice to the immortal gods 285  
 Who hold high heaven, to each in turn.  
 And death shall come to me from the sea,  
 As gentle as this touch, and take me off

When I am worn out in sleek old age,  
 With my people prosperous around me. 290  
 All this Tiresias said would come true.”

Then Penelope, watching him, answered:

“If the gods are going to grant you a happy old age,  
 There is hope your troubles will someday be over.”

While they spoke to one another, 295  
 Eurynome and the nurse made the bed  
 By torchlight, spreading it with soft coverlets.  
 Then the old nurse went to her room to lie down,  
 And Eurynome, who kept the bedroom,  
 Led the couple to their bed, lighting the way. 300  
 When she had led them in, she withdrew,  
 And they went with joy to their bed  
 And to their rituals of old.

Telemachus and his men

Stopped dancing, stopped the women’s dance,  
 And lay down to sleep in the shadowy halls. 305

**A**fter Odysseus and Penelope  
 Had made sweet love, they took turns  
 Telling stories to each other. She told him  
 All that she had to endure as the fair lady  
 In the palace, looking upon the loathsome throng 310  
 Of suitors, who used her as an excuse  
 To kill many cattle, whole flocks of sheep,  
 And to empty the cellar of much of its wine.  
 Odysseus told her of all the suffering  
 He had brought upon others, and of all the pain 315  
 He endured himself. She loved listening to him  
 And did not fall asleep until he had told the whole tale.

He began with how he overcame the Cicones  
 And then came to the land of the Lotus-Eaters,  
 And all that the Cyclops did, and how he 320

Paid him back for eating his comrades.  
 Then how he came to Aeolus,  
 Who welcomed him and sent him on his way,  
 But since it was not his destiny to return home then,  
 The stormwinds grabbed him and swept him off 325  
 Groaning deeply over the teeming saltwater.  
 Then how he came to the Laestrygonians,  
 Who destroyed his ships and all their crews,  
 Leaving him with only one black-tarred hull.  
 Then all of Circe's tricks and wiles, 330  
 And how he sailed to the dank house of Hades  
 To consult the spirit of Theban Tiresias  
 And saw his old comrades there  
 And his aged mother who nursed him as a child.  
 Then how he heard the Sirens' eternal song, 335  
 And came to the Clashing Rocks,  
 And dread Charybdis and Scylla,  
 Whom no man had ever escaped before.  
 Then how his crew killed the cattle of the Sun,  
 And how Zeus, the high lord of thunder, 340  
 Slivered his ship with lightning, and all his men  
 Went down, and he alone survived.  
 And he told her how he came to Ogygia,  
 The island of the nymph Calypso,  
 Who kept him there in her scalloped caves, 345  
 Yearning for him to be her husband,  
 And how she took care of him, and promised  
 To make him immortal and ageless all his days  
 But did not persuade the heart in his breast.  
 Then how he crawled out of the sea in Phaeacia, 350  
 And how the Phaeacians honored him like a god  
 And sent him on a ship to his own native land  
 With gifts of bronze and clothing and gold.  
  
 He told the story all the way through,  
 And then sleep, which slackens our bodies, 355  
 Fell upon him and released him from care.

The Grey-eyed One knew what to do next.

When she felt that Odysseus was satisfied  
 With sleep and with lying next to his wife,  
 She roused the slumbering, golden Dawn, 360  
 Who climbed from Ocean with light for the world.  
 Odysseus got up from his rose-shadowed bed  
 And turned to Penelope with these instructions:

“My wife, we’ve had our fill of trials now,  
 You here, weeping over all the troubles 365  
 My absence caused, and I, bound by Zeus  
 To suffer far from the home I yearned for.  
 Now that we have both come to the bed  
 We have long desired, you must take charge  
 Of all that is mine in the house, while I 370  
 See to replenishing the flocks and herds  
 The insolent suitors have depleted.  
 I’ll get some back on raids, some as tribute,  
 Until the pens are full again. But now,  
 I want you to know I am going to our farm 375  
 To see my father, who has suffered terribly  
 On my account. You don’t need me to tell you  
 That when the sun rises the news will spread  
 That I have killed the suitors in our hall. So,  
 Go upstairs with your women and sit quietly. 380  
 Don’t look outside or speak to anyone.”

Odysseus spoke and put on his beautiful armor.  
 He woke Telemachus, and the cowherd  
 And swineherd, and had them arm also.  
 They strapped on their bronze, opened the doors 385  
 And went out, Odysseus leading the way.  
 It was light by now, but Athena hid them  
 In darkness, and spirited them out of the city.

# ODYSSEY 24

Hermes, meanwhile, was calling forth  
 The ghosts of the suitors. He held the wand  
 He uses to charm mortal eyes to sleep  
 And make sleepers awake; and with this beautiful,  
 Golden wand he marshaled the ghosts, 5  
 Who followed along squeaking and gibbering.

*Bats deep inside an eerie cave  
 Flit and gibber when one of them falls  
 From the cluster clinging to the rock overhead.*

So too these ghosts, as Hermes led them 10  
 Down the cold, dank ways, past  
 The streams of Ocean, past the White Rock,  
 Past the Gates of the Sun and the Land of Dreams,  
 Until they came to the Meadow of Asphodel,  
 Where the spirits of the dead dwell, phantoms 15  
 Of men outworn.

Here was the ghost of Achilles,  
 And those of Patroclus, of flawless Antilochus,  
 And of Ajax, the best of the Achaeans  
 After Achilles, Peleus' incomparable son.  
 These ghosts gathered around Achilles 20  
 And were joined by the ghost of Agamemnon,  
 Son of Atreus, grieving, he himself surrounded  
 By the ghosts of those who had died with him  
 And met their fate in the house of Aegisthus.  
 The son of Peleus was the first to greet him: 25

“Son of Atreus, we believed that you of all heroes  
 Were dear to thundering Zeus your whole life through,  
 For you were the lord of the great army at Troy,  
 Where we Greeks endured a bitter campaign.

But you too had an early rendezvous with death, 30  
 Which no man can escape once he is born.  
 How much better to have died at Troy  
 With all the honor you commanded there!  
 The entire Greek army would have raised you a tomb,  
 And you would have won glory for your son as well. 35  
 As it was, you were doomed to a most pitiable death.”

And the ghost of Agamemnon answered:

“Godlike Achilles, you did have the good fortune  
 To die in Troy, far from Argos. Around you fell  
 Some of the best Greeks and Trojans of their time, 40  
 Fighting for your body, as you lay there  
 In the howling dust of war, one of the great,  
 Your horsemanship forgotten. We fought all day  
 And would never have stopped, had not Zeus  
 Halted us with a great storm. Then we bore your body 45  
 Back to the ships and laid it on a bier, and cleansed  
 Your beautiful flesh with warm water and ointments,  
 And the men shed many hot tears and cut their hair.  
 Then your mother heard, and she came from the sea  
 With her saltwater women, and an eerie cry 50  
 Rose over the deep. The troops panicked,  
 And they would have run for the ships, had not  
 A man who was wise in the old ways stopped them,  
 Nestor, whose counsel had prevailed before.  
 Full of concern, he called out to the troops: 55

‘Argives and Achaeans, halt! This is no time to flee.  
 It is his mother, with her immortal nymphs,  
 Come from the sea to mourn her dead son.’

“When he said that the troops settled down.  
 Then the daughters of the Old Man of the Sea 60  
 Stood all around you and wailed piteously,  
 And they dressed you in immortal clothing.  
 And the Muses, all nine, chanted the dirge,  
 Singing responsively in beautiful voices.

You couldn't have seen a dry eye in the army, 65  
 So poignant was the song of the Muses.  
 For seventeen days we mourned you like that,  
 Men and gods together. On the eighteenth day  
 We gave you to the fire, slaughtering sheep  
 And horned cattle around you. You were burned 70  
 In the clothing of the gods, with rich unguents  
 And sweet honey, and many Greek heroes  
 Paraded in arms around your burning pyre,  
 Both infantry and charioteers,  
 And the sound of their marching rose to heaven. 75  
 When the fire had consumed you,  
 We gathered your white bones at dawn, Achilles,  
 And laid them in unmixed wine and unguents.  
 Your mother had given us a golden urn,  
 A gift of Dionysus, she said, made by Hephaestus. 80  
 In this urn lie your white bones, Achilles,  
 Mingled with those of the dead Patroclus.  
 Just apart lie the bones of Antilochus  
 Whom you honored most after Patroclus died.  
 Over them all we spearmen of the great army 85  
 Heaped an immense and perfect barrow  
 On a headland beside the broad Hellespont  
 So that it might be seen from far out at sea  
 By men now and men to come.

Your mother, Thetis,

Had collected beautiful prizes from the gods 90  
 And now set them down in the middle of the field  
 To honor the best of the Achaean athletes.  
 You have been to many heroes' funeral games  
 Where young men contend for prizes,  
 But you would have marveled at the sight 95  
 Of the beautiful prizes silver-footed Thetis  
 Set out for you. You were very dear to the gods.  
 Not even in death have you lost your name,  
 Achilles, nor your honor among men.  
 But what did I get for winding up the war? 100  
 Zeus worked out for me a ghastly death  
 At the hands of Aegisthus and my murderous wife."



As these two heroes talked with each other,  
 Quicksilver Hermes was leading down  
 The ghosts of the suitors killed by Odysseus. 105  
 When Hermes and these ghosts drew near,  
 The two heroes were amazed and went up to see  
 Who they were. The ghost of Agamemnon  
 Recognized one of them, Amphimedon,  
 Who had been his host in Ithaca, and called out: 110

“Amphimedon! Why have you come down  
 Beneath the dark earth, you and your company,  
 All men of rank, all the same age? It’s as if  
 Someone had hand-picked the city’s best men.  
 Did Poseidon sink your ships and drown you 115  
 In the wind-whipped waves? Was it that, or  
 Did an enemy destroy you on land  
 As you cut off their cattle and flocks of sheep—  
 Or as they fought for their city and women?  
 Tell me. Remember who is asking— 120  
 An old friend of your house. I came there  
 With godlike Menelaus to urge Odysseus  
 To sail with the fleet to Ilion. A full month  
 That journey to Ithaca took us—hard work  
 Persuading Odysseus, destroyer of cities.” 125

The ghost of Amphimedon responded:

“Son of Atreus, most glorious Agamemnon,  
 I remember all that, just as you tell it,  
 And I will tell you exactly what happened to us,  
 And how it ended in our bitter death. 130  
 We were courting the wife of Odysseus,  
 Long gone by then. She loathed the thought  
 Of remarrying, but she wouldn’t give us a yes or no.  
 Her mind was bent on death and darkness for us.  
 Here is one of the tricks she dreamed up: 135  
 She set up a loom in the hall and started weaving—  
 A huge, fine-threaded piece—and then came out and said:

'Young men—my suitors, since Odysseus is dead—  
 Eager as you are to marry me, you must wait  
 Until I finish this robe—it would be a shame 140  
 To waste my spinning—a shroud for the hero  
 Laertes, when death's doom lays him low.  
 I fear the Achaean women would reproach me  
 If he should lie shroudless for all his wealth.'

"We went along with this appeal to our honor. 145  
 Every day she would weave at the great loom,  
 And every night she would unweave by torchlight.  
 She fooled us for three years with her craft.  
 But in the fourth year, as the seasons rolled by,  
 And the moons waned, and the days dragged on, 150  
 One of her women who knew all about it  
 Told us, and we caught her unweaving  
 The gloried shroud. Then we forced her to finish it.  
 When it was done she washed it and showed it to us,  
 And it shone like the sun or the moon.

It was then 155

That some evil spirit brought Odysseus  
 From who knows where to the border of his land,  
 Where the swineherd lived. Odysseus' son  
 Put in from Pylos in his black ship and joined him.  
 These two, after they had plotted an ugly death 160  
 For the suitors, came up to the town, first Telemachus  
 And then later Odysseus, led by the swineherd,  
 Who brought his master wearing tattered clothes,  
 Looking for all the world like a miserable old beggar,  
 Leaning on a staff, his rags hanging off him. 165  
 None of us could know who he was, not even  
 The older men, when he showed up like that.  
 We threw things at him and gave him a hard time.  
 He just took it, pelted and taunted in his own house,  
 Until, prompted by Zeus, he and Telemachus 170  
 Removed all the weapons from the hall  
 And locked them away in a storeroom.  
 Then he showed all his cunning. He told his wife  
 To set before the suitors his bow and grey iron—

Implements for a contest, and for our ill-fated death. 175  
 None of us were able to string that bow.  
 We couldn't even come close. When it came  
 Around to Odysseus, we cried out and objected,  
 'Don't give the bow to that beggar,  
 No matter what he says!' Telemachus alone 180  
 Urged him on and encouraged him to take it.  
 And he did. The great Odysseus  
 Took the bow, strung it easily, and shot an arrow  
 Straight through the iron. Then he stood on the threshold,  
 Poured the arrows out, and glaring around him 185  
 He shot Lord Antinous. And then he shot others,  
 With perfect aim, and we fell thick and fast.  
 You could see that some god was helping them,  
 The way they raged through the hall, cutting us down  
 Right and left; and you could hear 190  
 The hideous groans of men as their heads  
 Were bashed in. The floor smoked with blood.  
 That's how we died, Agamemnon. Our bodies  
 Still lie uncared for in Odysseus' halls.  
 Word has not yet reached our friends and family, 195  
 Who could wash the black blood from our wounds  
 And lay us out with wailing, as is due the dead."

And the ghost of Agamemnon responded:

"Well done, Odysseus, Laertes' wily son!  
 You won a wife of great character 200  
 In Icarus' daughter. What a mind she has,  
 A woman beyond reproach! How well Penelope  
 Kept in her heart her husband, Odysseus.  
 And so her virtue's fame will never perish,  
 And the gods will make among men on earth 205  
 A song of praise for steadfast Penelope.  
 But Tyndareus' daughter was evil to the core,  
 Killing her own husband, and her song will be  
 A song of scorn, bringing ill-repute  
 To all women, even the virtuous." 210

That was the drift of their talk as they stood  
In the Dark Lord's halls deep under the earth.

Odysseus and the others went from the town  
And made good time getting down to Laertes'  
Well-kept fields. The old man had worked hard 215  
Reclaiming the land from the wilderness.  
His farmhouse was there with a row of huts around it  
Where the field hands ate and rested and slept.  
These were his slaves, and they did as he wished.  
There was an old Sicilian woman, too, 220  
Who took good care of the old man out in the country.

Odysseus had a word with the herdsmen and his son:

"Go into the farmhouse and make yourselves busy.  
Sacrifice the best pig and roast it for dinner.  
I am going to test my father. Will he recognize me? 225  
Will he know who I am after all these years?"

He disarmed and gave his weapons to the herdsmen.  
They hurried off indoors, leaving Odysseus  
To search through the rows of fruit trees and vines.  
He did not find Dolius, or any of his sons 230  
Anywhere in the orchard. Old Dolius had taken them  
To gather fieldstones for a garden wall.  
But he found his father, alone, on a well-banked plot,  
Spading a plant. He had on an old, dirty shirt,  
Mended and patched, and leather leggings 235  
Pieced together as protection from scratches.  
He wore gloves because of the bushes, and on his head  
He had a goatskin cap, crowning his sorrow.  
Odysseus, who had borne much, saw him like this,  
Worn with age and a grieving heart, 240  
And wept as he watched from a pear tree's shade.  
He thought it over. Should he just throw his arms  
Around his father, kiss him and tell him all he had done,  
And how he'd returned to his homeland again—  
Or should he question him and feel him out first? 245

Better that way, he thought, to feel him out first  
 With a few pointed remarks. With this in mind,  
 Godlike Odysseus walked up to his father,  
 Who kept his head down and went on digging.  
 His illustrious son stood close by him and said: 250

“Well, old-timer, you certainly know how to garden.  
 There’s not a plant, a fig tree, a vine or an olive,  
 Not a pear tree or leek in this whole garden untended.  
 But if I may say so without getting you angry,  
 You don’t take such good care of yourself. Old age 255  
 Is hard, yes. But unwashed, scruffy and dressed in rags?  
 It can’t be that your lord is too lax to care for you,

And anyway there’s nothing in your build or looks  
 To suggest you’re a slave. You look more like a king,  
 The sort of man who after he has bathed and eaten 260  
 Sleeps on a soft bed, as is only right for elders.

Come on now and give me a straight answer.  
 Whose slave are you? Whose orchard is this?  
 And tell me this, too, so that I can be sure:

Is this really Ithaca I’ve come to, as I was told 265  
 By that man I ran into on my way over here?  
 He wasn’t very polite, couldn’t be bothered  
 To tell me what I wanted, or even to hear me out.

I’ve been trying to find out about an old friend  
 I entertained at my house once, whether he’s still alive 270  
 Or is dead by now and gone down to Hades.  
 So I’ll ask you, if you’ll give me your attention.

I was host to a man once back in my own country,  
 A man who means more to me than anyone else  
 Who has ever visited my home from abroad. 275

He claimed his family was from Ithaca, and he said  
 His father was Laertes, son of Arcesius.  
 I took him into my home, and entertained him  
 In a style befitting the wealth in my house,

And gave him suitable gifts to seal our friendship: 280  
 Seven ingots of fine gold, a silver mixing bowl  
 Embossed with flowers, twelve cloaks, as many  
 Carpets, mantles and tunics, and his choice of four

Beautiful women superbly trained in handicrafts.”

A tear wet his father's cheek as he answered: 285

“You've come to the land you're looking for, stranger,  
But it's in the hands of haughty and violent men.  
You've given all those generous gifts in vain.  
If you were to find him alive here in Ithaca 290  
He would send you off with the beautiful gifts  
And fine hospitality you deserve as his friend.  
But tell me this now, and tell me the truth:

How many years has it been since you hosted  
Your ill-fated guest, my son—if I ever had a son?  
Born for sorrow he was, and now far from home, 295  
Far from his loved ones, his bones are picked clean  
By fish undersea; or on some wild shore  
His body is feeding the scavenging birds,  
Unburied, unmourned by his mother and me,

Who brought him into this world. Nor has his wife, 300  
Penelope, patient and wise, who brought him so much,  
Lamented her husband on a funeral bier  
Or closed his eyelids, as is due the dead.  
And tell me this, too, so that I will know.

Who are you? 305  
What city are you from? Who are your parents?  
And where have you moored the sailing ship  
That brought you and your crew of heroes here?  
Or did you come as a passenger on another's ship  
That put you ashore and went on its way?” 310

And Odysseus, his great mind teeming:

And Odysseus, his great mind teeming:

“I'll tell you everything point by point.  
I come from Alybas and have my home there.  
I'm the son of Apeidas and Polypemon's grandson.  
My name is Eperitus. Some storm spirit drove me 315  
Off course from Sicily and, as luck had it, here.  
My ship stands off wild country far from the town.  
As for Odysseus, it's been five years now

Since he left my land, ill-fated maybe,  
 But the birds were good when he sailed out— 320  
 On the right. This cheered me as I sent him off,  
 And he was cheered, too, our hearts full of hope  
 We would meet again and exchange splendid gifts.”

A black mist of pain shrouded Laertes.  
 He scooped up fistfuls of shimmering dust 325  
 And groaned as he poured it upon his grey head.  
 This wrung Odysseus' heart, and bitter longing  
 Stung his nostrils as he watched his father.  
 With a bound he embraced him, kissed him and said:

“I'm the one that you miss, Father, right here, 330  
 Back in my homeland after twenty years.  
 But don't cry now. Hold back your tears.  
 I'm telling you, we really have to hurry.  
 I've killed the suitors in our house and avenged  
 All of the wrongs that have grieved your heart.” 335

But Laertes' voice rang out in answer:

“If you are really Odysseus and my son come back,  
 Give me a sign, a clear sign I can trust.”

And Odysseus, the master strategist:

“First, here's the scar I got on Parnassus 340  
 From that boar's bright tusk. Mother and you  
 Had sent me to my grandfather Autolycus  
 To collect some presents he had promised me  
 When he had visited us here. And let me count off  
 All of the trees in the orchard rows 345  
 You gave me one day when I was still a boy.  
 You gave me thirteen pear trees, ten apple trees,  
 Forty fig trees, and fifty vine rows  
 That ripened one by one as the season went on  
 With heavy clusters of all sorts of grapes.” 350

He spoke, and the old man's knees went slack  
 As he recognized the signs Odysseus showed him.  
 He threw his arms around his beloved son  
 And gasped for breath. And godly Odysseus,  
 Who had borne much, embraced him. 355  
 When he had caught his breath and his spirit returned,  
 Laertes' voice rang out to the sky:

"Father Zeus, there are still gods on high Olympus,  
 If the suitors have really paid the price!  
 But now I have a terrible fear 360  
 That all of Ithaca will be upon us soon,  
 And word will have gone out to Cephallenia, too."

And Odysseus, his mind teeming:

"We don't have to worry about that right now.  
 Let's go to the cottage near the orchard. 365  
 I sent Telemachus there, and the cowherd  
 And swineherd, to prepare a meal for us."

And they went together to the house  
 With its comfortable rooms and found  
 Telemachus and the two herdsmen there 370  
 Carving huge roasts and mixing wine.  
 While they were busy with these tasks,  
 The old Sicilian woman bathed great Laertes  
 In his own house and rubbed him down  
 With olive oil and threw about his shoulders 375  
 A handsome cloak. And Athena came  
 And made the shepherd of the people  
 Taller than before and added muscle to his frame.  
 When he came from the bath, his son marveled  
 At his deathless, godlike appearance, 380  
 And his words rose to his father on wings:

"Father, surely one of the gods eternal  
 Has made you larger, and more handsome, too."



And Laertes, feeling the magic, answered him:

“I wish by Zeus and Athena and Apollo 385  
 That I could have stood at your side yesterday  
 In our house, armor on my shoulders,  
 As the man I was when I took Nericus,  
 The mainland town, commanding the Cephallenians!  
 I would have beaten the daylight out of them 390  
 There in our halls, and made your heart proud.”

While they were talking, the others  
 Had finished preparing the meal.  
 They all sat down on benches and chairs  
 And were just serving themselves food 395  
 When old Dolius came in with his sons,  
 Weary from their work in the fields.  
 Their mother, the old Sicilian woman,  
 Had gone out to call them. It was she  
 Who made their meals and took care 400  
 Of Dolius, now that old age had set in.  
 When they saw Odysseus, and realized  
 Who he was, they stood there dumbfounded.  
 Odysseus spoke to them gently and said:

“Old man, sit down to dinner, and all of you, 405  
 You can stop being amazed. Hungry as we are,  
 We’ve been waiting a long time for you.”

He spoke, and Dolius ran up to him  
 With arms outstretched, and clasped  
 Odysseus’ hand and kissed him on the wrist. 410  
 Trembling with excitement, the old man said:

“My dear Odysseus, you have come back home.  
 We missed you so much but never hoped  
 To see you again. The gods themselves  
 Have brought you back. Welcome, welcome, 415  
 And may the gods grant you happiness.  
 But tell me this—I have to know—

Does Penelope know that you have returned,  
Or should we send her a messenger?"

And Odysseus, his mind teeming: 420

"She knows, old man. You don't have to worry."

He spoke, and Dolius sat down in a polished chair.  
His sons then gathered around glorious Odysseus  
And greeted him and clasped his hands  
And then sat down in order next to their father. 425

While they were busy with their meal,  
Rumor, that swift messenger, flew  
All through the city, telling everyone  
About the grim fate the suitors had met.  
Before long a crowd had gathered 430  
Outside Odysseus' palace, and the sound  
Of their lamentation hung in the air.  
They carried their dead out of the hall  
And buried them. Those from other cities  
They put aboard ships to be brought home by sea. 435  
Then they all went to the meeting place,  
Sad at heart. When they were assembled,  
Eupeithes rose and spoke among them,  
Upon his heart an unbearable grief  
For his son Antinous, the first man 440  
Whom Odysseus killed. Weeping for him  
He addressed the assembly and said:

"My friends, it is truly monstrous—  
What this man has done to our city.  
First, he sailed off with many of our finest men 445  
And lost the ships and every man aboard.  
Now he has come back and killed many others,  
By far the best of the Cephalenians.  
We must act now, before he runs off to Pylos  
Or takes refuge with the Epean lords of Elis. 450  
We will be disgraced forever if we don't avenge

Our sons' and brothers' deaths, and if we don't,  
I see no point in living. I'd rather be dead.  
Let's move now, before they cross the sea!"

He wept as he spoke, and they all pitied him. 455  
Then up came Medon and the godlike bard  
From Odysseus' halls. They had just woken up  
From a long sleep and now stood in the midst  
Of the wondering crowd. Medon had this to say:

"Hear me, men of Ithaca. It was not without the will 460  
Of the deathless gods that Odysseus managed this.  
I myself saw one of the immortals  
Close to Odysseus. He looked just like Mentor  
But was a god, now appearing in front of Odysseus,  
Urging him on, then raging through the hall 465  
Terrifying the suitors, who fell thick and fast."

He spoke, and they all turned pale with fear.  
Then the old hero Halitherses, son of Mastor,  
Rose to speak. He alone looked ahead and behind,  
And spoke with the best of intentions to them: 470

"Now hear what I have to say, men of Ithaca.  
You have only yourselves to blame, my friends,  
For what has happened. You would not obey me  
Nor Mentor, shepherd of the people, when we told you  
To make your sons stop their foolishness. 475  
It was what your sons did that was truly monstrous,  
Wasting the wealth and dishonoring the wife  
Of a great man, who they said would never return.  
Now listen to me and keep your peace. Some of you  
Are asking for trouble—and you just might find it." 480

Less than half of them took his advice  
And stayed in their seats. Most of them  
Jumped up with a whoop and went with Eupheithes.  
They rushed to get weapons, and when the mob  
Had armed themselves in glowing bronze, 485

They put the city behind them, following Eupheithes,  
 Who in his folly thought he would avenge  
 His son's death, but met his own fate instead.  
 Eupheithes would never return home again.

Athena, meanwhile, was having a word with Zeus: 490

“Father of us all, Son of Cronus most high,  
 Tell me what is hidden in that mind of yours.  
 Will you let this grim struggle go on?  
 Or will you establish peace on Ithaca?”

And Zeus in his thunderhead responded: 495

“Why question me, Daughter? Wasn't this  
 Your plan, to have Odysseus pay them back  
 With a vengeance? Do as you will,  
 But I will tell you what would be fitting.  
 Now that Odysseus has paid the suitors back, 500  
 Let all parties swear a solemn oath,  
 That he will be king on Ithaca all of his days.  
 We, for our part, will have them forget  
 The killing of their sons and brothers.  
 Let them live in friendship as before, 505  
 And let peace and prosperity abound.”

This was all Athena needed to hear,  
 And she streaked down from Olympus' peaks.

The meal was over. Seeing that his company  
 Had satisfied their hunger, Odysseus said: 510

“Someone should go out to see if they're coming.”

One of Dolius' sons went to the doorway,  
 Looked out, and saw the mob closing in.  
 His words flew fast to Odysseus:

“They're almost here. We'd better arm quickly.” 515

They jumped up and put on their gear,  
 Odysseus and his three men and Dolius' six sons.  
 Laertes and Dolius armed themselves, too,  
 Warriors in a pinch despite their white hair.  
 When they had strapped on their bronze  
 They opened the doors and headed out  
 Behind Odysseus. 520

Athena joined them,  
 Looking for all the world like Mentor,  
 And Odysseus was glad to see her. He turned  
 To his son Telemachus and said: 525

“Telemachus, now you will see firsthand  
 What it means to distinguish yourself in war.  
 Don't shame your ancestors. We have been  
 Strong and brave in every generation.”

And Telemachus coolly answered him: 530

“The way I feel now, I don't think you'll see me  
 Shaming my ancestors, as you put it, Father.”

Laertes was delighted with this and exclaimed:

“What a day, dear gods! My son and grandson  
 Going head to head to see who is best.” 535

The Grey-eyed One stood next to him and said:

“Son of Arcesius, my dearest comrade,  
 Say a prayer to Zeus and his grey-eyed daughter,  
 And then cast your long-shadowed spear.”

Pallas Athena breathed great strength into him,  
 And with a prayer to Zeus' grey-eyed daughter,  
 Laertes cast his long-shadowed spear  
 And hit Eueithes square in the helmet.  
 Bronze bored through bronze, and Eueithes 540

Thudded to the ground, his armor clattering. 545  
 Odysseus and his glorious son  
 Charged the front lines, thrusting hard  
 With their swords and spears. They would have killed  
 Every last man—not one would have gone home—  
 Had not Athena, daughter of the Storm Cloud, 550  
 Given voice to a cry that stopped them all cold:

“ITHACANS!  
                   Lay down your arms now,  
 And go your ways with no more bloodshed.”

Thus Athena, and they turned pale with fear.  
 The weapons dropped from their trembling hands 555  
 And fell to the ground as the goddess' voice  
 Sent shock waves through them. They turned  
 Back toward the city and ran for their lives.  
 With a roar, the great, long-suffering Odysseus  
 Gathered himself and swept after them 560

*Like a soaring raptor:*

                                  At that moment  
 Zeus, Son of Cronus, hurled down  
 A flaming thunderbolt that landed at the feet  
 Of his owl-eyed daughter, who said:

“Son of Laertes in the line of Zeus, 565  
 Cunning Odysseus—restrain yourself.  
 End this quarrel and cease from fighting  
 Lest broad-browed Zeus frown upon you.”

Thus Athena. The man obeyed and was glad,  
 And the goddess made both sides swear binding oaths— 570  
 Pallas Athena, daughter of the Storm Cloud,  
 Who looked like Mentor and spoke with his voice.

# Glossary of Names

**Achaean** (A-kee'-unz): General term used by Homer to refer to Greeks.

**Acheron** (A'-ker-on): River in the Underworld, land of the dead.

**Achilles** (A-kil'-eez): Son of Peleus and Thetis. He is the heroic leader of the Myrmidons in the Trojan War and is slain by Paris. Odysseus consults him in the Underworld.

**Aeaea** (Ee-ee'-a): Island on which Circe lives.

**Aegisthus** (Ee-jis'-thus): Son of Thyestes and Pelopia. He seduces Clytemnestra, wife of Agamemnon, while Agamemnon is away fighting the Trojan War and helps her slay Agamemnon when he returns. Orestes avenges this action years later by murdering both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

**Aegyptus** (Ee-jip'-tus): The Nile River.

**Aeolus** (Ee'-oh-lus): King of the island Aeolia and keeper of the winds.

**Aeson** (Ee'-son): Son of Cretheus and Tyro; father of Jason, leader of the Argonauts.

**Aethon** (Ee'-thon): One of Odysseus' aliases used in his conversation with Penelope.

**Agamemnon** (Ag-a-mem'-non): Son of Atreus and Aerope; brother of Menelaus; husband of Clytemnestra. He commands the Greek forces in the Trojan War. He is killed by his wife and her lover when he returns home; his son, Orestes, avenges this murder.

**Agelaus** (A-je-lay'-us): One of Penelope's suitors; son of Damastor; killed by Odysseus.

**Ajax** (1) (Ay'-jax): Son of Telamon and Perioboea; also called Great Ajax or Telamonian Ajax. He contends with Odysseus for the prize of Achilles' arms, given in honor of service to the Greek cause in the Trojan War. When

Ajax loses, he temporarily takes leaves of his wits and commits suicide when he regains his senses.

**Ajax** (2) (Ay'-jax): Son of Oileus and Eriopes; also called Little Ajax or Oilean Ajax. He survives the Trojan War, but his boasting angers Poseidon, who kills Ajax on his return home.

**Alcinous** (Al-si'-no-us): Grandson of Poseidon; king of the Phaeacians; husband of Arete and father of Nausicaa. He graciously entertains Odysseus and gives him riches and safe transport to Ithaca.

**Alcmene** (Alk-mee'-nee): Wife of Amphitryon; mother of Heracles (by Zeus).

**Amphimedon** (Am-fi'-me-don): One of Penelope's suitors. He is killed by Telemachus. In the Underworld he tells Agamemnon about the slaughter of the suitors.

**Amphinomus** (Am-fi'-no-mus): Son of Nisus. A leader of Penelope's suitors, he convinces other suitors not to slay Telemachus on his return from Pylos unless the gods give a sign of favor. Although warned by Odysseus, Amphinomus is slain with the other suitors.

**Amphion** (Am-feye'-on): Son of Zeus and Antiope; husband of Niobe.

**Amphithea** (Am-fi'-the-a): Wife of Autolycus; grandmother of Odysseus.

**Amphitryon** (Am-fi'-tri-on): King of Tiryns; husband of Alcmene; mortal father of Heracles.

**Anticleia** (An-ti-klay'-a): Daughter of Autolycus; wife of Laertes and mother of Odysseus. She is able to speak to Odysseus when he visits her in the Underworld.

**Anticlus** (An'-ti-klus): One of the Greek warriors who hides in the wooden horse at Troy. Odysseus restrains him from responding when Helen imitates the voices of Greek wives.

**Antinous** (An-ti'-no-us): Son of Eupeithes; an Ithacan noble and the primary leader of Penelope's suitors. He is the first suitor slain by Odysseus.

**Antiphates** (An-ti'-fa-teez): King of the Laestrygonians.



**Antiphus** (An'-ti-fus): Name given to two of Odysseus' companions, one of whom is the son of Aegyptius, the last of Odysseus' companions eaten by the Cyclops.

**Aphrodite** (Af-ro-deye'-tee): Goddess of love and beauty. Daughter of Zeus and Dione; wife of Hephaestus. During a sexual liaison, Aphrodite and Ares are caught in a trap set by Hephaestus and exposed to the laughter of the gods.

**Apollo** (A-pol'-oh): Patron god of music and the arts. Son of Zeus and Leto; brother of Artemis. Also called Phoebus Apollo, he is associated with the lyre and archery. It is on the day of his festival that the suitors are murdered.

**Arcesius** (Ar-ke'-si-us): Father of Laertes and grandfather of Odysseus.

**Ares** (Ai'-reez): God of War. Son of Zeus and Hera; lover of Aphrodite.

**Arete** (A-ree'-tee): Wife of Alcinous; mother of Nausicaa. Queen of the Phaeacians, to whom Odysseus, shipwrecked on the island, kneels as a suppliant first, rather than to Alcinous.

**Argives** (Ar'-geyvz): The Greeks who fight at Troy under the leadership of Agamemnon.

**Argo** (Ar'-goh): The ship of the Argonauts.

**Argos** (Ar'-gos): City or district in the northeastern Peloponnese, Greek region of the Achaeans.

**Argus** (Ar'-gos): Odysseus' dog, the only creature to recognize Odysseus on his return to Ithaca. Argus dies almost immediately thereafter.

**Ariadne** (A-ri-ad'-nee): Daughter of Minos, king of Crete, and Pasiphae. She helps Theseus overcome the Minotaur, is killed by Artemis, and is seen by Odysseus in the Underworld.

**Artemis** (Ar'-te-mis): Goddess of the hunt and the moon. Daughter of Zeus and Leto; sister of Apollo. Like her brother, Artemis brings natural death to mortals, but she is the slaughterer of female mortals in particular.

**Athena** (A-thee'-na): Goddess of wisdom, crafts, and battle. Daughter of Zeus; usually said to have sprung from his head. She is also called Pallas

Athena and the Grey-eyed One. She frequently appears to Odysseus and helps him return home.

**Atlas** (At'-las): Titan who holds up the pillars of the sky; father of Calypso.

**Atrous** (Ay'-tryoos): Son of Pelops and Hippodameia; brother of Thyestes; father of Agamemnon and Menelaus.

**Autolycus** (Aw-to'-li-kus): Father of Anticleia; maternal grandfather of Odysseus. He gives Odysseus his name.

**Boreas** (Bo'-re-as): The North Wind. Husband of Oreithyia and father of Calais and Zetes.

**Cadmus** (Kad'-mus): Founder and king of Cadmea (Thebes). Married to Harmonia; father of Polydorus, Autonoe, Semele, Ino, and Agave.

**Calypso** (Ka-lip'-soh): Goddess, daughter of Atlas. Her name is a play on a Greek word meaning "to conceal." She detains Odysseus for seven years on her island, Ogygia, offering him immortality if he remains.

**Cassandra** (Ka-san'-dra): Trojan princess and prophetess, daughter of Priam and Hecuba. Taken as a war prize by Agamemnon, she is murdered with him by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus on his return home.

**Castor** (Kas'-tor): Son of Tyndareus and Leda; brother of Polydeuces, Clytemnestra, and Helen.

**Cephalenians** (Se-fa-lee'-ni-unz): Inhabitants of a much larger island near Ithaca under Odysseus' command.

**Charybdis** (Ka-rib'-dis): Whirlpool situated opposite Scylla.

**Cicones** (Si-koh'-nee): Allies of Troy, the first people Odysseus encounters (and raids) on his return home. Maron, the priest, gives Odysseus some excellent wine in return for sparing his and his family's lives.

**Circe** (Sir'-see): Goddess and sorceress; daughter of Helios and Perse. When Odysseus lands on her island, Aeaea, she turns many of his men into swine, but Odysseus (with Hermes' help) resists her magic and convinces her to undo her spell. He and his men remain on her island for one year.

**Clytemnestra** (Kleye-tem-nes'-tra): Daughter of Tyndareus and Leda; married first to Tantalus and then to Agamemnon, to whom she bore Iphigenia, Electra, Chrysothemis, and Orestes. She killed her husband and his concubine Cassandra with the aid of her lover, Aegisthus. Years later Orestes avenged his father's death by murdering his mother.

**Cnossus** (Knos'-os): Principal city on the island of Crete.

**Cocytus** (Ko-kee'-tos): River forming one of the boundaries of Hades.

**Crete:** Island in the Aegean Sea south of the Peloponnese, ruled by Idomeneus.

**Ctessipus** (Kte-si'-pus): Wealthy suitor of Penelope. He throws an ox's hoof at Odysseus' head when Odysseus is disguised as a beggar. He is killed by Philoetius.

**Ctimene** (Kti-mee'-nee): Daughter of Laertes and Anticleia; sister of Odysseus.

**Cyclopes** (Seye'-klops): One-eyed, man-eating giants. Their occupation of Hyperia forces the Phaeacians to relocate. The term in the singular (Cyclops) also refers to Polyphemus.

**Cyclops** (Seye'-klops): See Cyclopes.

**Cytherean** (Si-the-ree'-an): Epithet of Aphrodite, perhaps from the name of the island Cythera, where some claim the goddess was born.

**Danaans** (Da-nay'-unz): One of three general names Homer uses when referring to Greeks. The other two are Achaeans and Argives.

**Deiphobus** (Dee-i'-fo-bus): Prince of Troy, son of Priam and Hecuba. He marries Helen after Paris' death and is killed at Troy by Menelaus.

**Demeter** (Dee-mee'-tur): Goddess of crops and the harvest. Daughter of Cronus and Rhea; mother of Persephone.

**Demodocus** (Dee-mo'-do-kus): Blind singer of tales at Phaeacia.

**Demoptolemus** (Dee-mop-to'-le-mus): One of Penelope's suitors.

**Diocles** (Deye'-o-kleez): Inhabitant of Pherae who receives Telemachus on his trip to Sparta and on his return.

**Diomedes** (Deye-o-mee'-deez): Son of Tydeus and Deipyle; king of Argos. He accompanies Odysseus at night around the city and is one of the few Greeks to return home quickly after the destruction of Troy.

**Dodona** (Doh-doh'-na): City in northwestern Greece; home to a famous oracle of Zeus.

**Dolius** (Do'-li-us): Old servant of Odysseus who remains faithful during Odysseus' absence. He later defends Odysseus against the relatives of the slain suitors.

**Dorians** (Doh'-ri-unz): Greek-speaking inhabitants of Crete.

**Echephron** (E-ke'-fron): Son of Nestor.

**Echetus** (E'-ke-tus): King of Eperius who acquires a reputation for cruelty.

**Egypt** (Ee'-jipt): Country in Africa or its king.

**Eidothea** (Eye-do'-the-a): Daughter of Proteus who advises Menelaus on his journey home with Helen.

**Elatus** (E'-la-tus): One of Penelope's suitors; slain by Eumaeus.

**Elpenor** (El-pee'-nor): Member of Odysseus' crew who dies when he falls asleep on a roof on Circe's island and falls off. When Odysseus visits the Underworld, Elpenor's shade asks Odysseus for a proper funeral.

**Epeius** (E-pee'-us): Son of Panopeus. With Athena's help, he builds the Trojan Horse.

**Epicaste** (E-pi-kas'-tee): Also known as Jocasta. Daughter of Menoeceus; wife of Laius and mother of Oedipus.

**Erebus** (E'-re-bus): Another name for Hades; sometimes refers to an especially dark place within the Underworld.

**Eriphyle** (E-ri-feye'-lee): Daughter of Talauus and Lysimache; wife and betrayer of Amphiarauus. Her shade appears to Odysseus in the Underworld.

**Eumaeus** (Yoo-mee'-us): Odysseus' loyal swineherd who generously hosts Odysseus, disguised as a beggar upon his return to Ithaca. Eumaeus later assists Odysseus in the slaughter of the suitors.

**Eupeithes** (Yoo-pay'-theez): Father of Antinous. He rallies the relatives of the slain suitors against Odysseus and is killed by Laertes.

**Euryades** (Yoo-reye'-a-deez): One of Penelope's suitors. He is killed by Telemachus.

**Eurybates** (Yoo-ri'-ba-teez): Round-shouldered, swarthy, and curly-haired herald whom Odysseus values for his quick mind.

**Eurycleia** (Yoo-ri-klay'-a): Daughter of Ops; nurse to Odysseus and later to Telemachus. She recognizes Odysseus' scar on his thigh but at his request does not reveal his identity.

**Eurydamas** (Yoo-ri'-da-mas): One of Penelope's suitors killed by Odysseus.

**Eurylochus** (Yoo-ri'-lo-kus): Leading member of Odysseus' crew. He tells Odysseus that Circe transformed several crew members, and he incites the crew to slaughter Helios' cattle.

**Eurymachus** (Yoo-ri'-ma-kus): One of Penelope's suitors.

**Eurynome** (Yoo-ri'-no-mee): Penelope's housekeeper.

**Eurynomus** (Yoo-ri'-no-mus): Son of Antiphus; suitor to Penelope.

**Hades** (Hay'-deez): God of the Underworld. Son of Cronus and Rhea. His name probably means "Unseen One." Also refers to the dwelling place of the dead, named for its ruler.

**Halitherses** (Ha-li-thur'-seez): Son of Mastor; Ithacan soothsayer. He predicts Odysseus' return to Ithaca.

**Helen** (He'-len): Daughter of Leda and Zeus or Tyndareus; wife of Menelaus. She is the most beautiful woman in the world and is given to Paris by Aphrodite. Menelaus' efforts to regain Helen are the basis of the Trojan War.

**Helios** (Hee'-li-os): The Sun God.

**Hephaestus** (He-feyes'-tus): God of fire and patron of metalworkers and crafts. Son of Zeus and Hera. He marries Aphrodite, who is not always faithful. He forges Achilles' armor.

**Hera** (Hee'-ra): Queen of the Olympian gods. Daughter of Cronus and Rhea; Zeus' sister and wife. Goddess of childbirth and marriage.

**Heracles** (He'-ra-cleez): Son of Zeus and Alcmene. He lived in the generation before the Trojan War and is considered to be the greatest of the Greek heroes. He is renowned for his Twelve Labors.

**Hermes** (Hur'-meez): Divine messenger of the gods and guide to mortal travelers. Son of Zeus and Maia.

**Hermione** (Hur-meye'-o-nee): Daughter of Menelaus and Helen.

**Hypereia** (Hi-pe-reye'-a): First homeland of the Phaeacians whence they are driven by the Cyclopes.

**Icarius** (I-ka'-ri-us): Father of Penelope; brother of Menelaus.

**Ilion** (Il'-i-on): Troy.

**Ino** (Eye'-noh): Daughter of Cadmus and Harmonia. She disguises and rears her nephew Dionysus to protect him from Hera's wrath. She becomes a nereid and is renamed Leucothea, meaning "White Goddess."

**Iphitus** (I'-fi-tus): Son of Eurytus, king of Oechalia. He gives Odysseus his bow.

**Irus** (Eye'-rus): Ithacan beggar who frequents the gatherings of Penelope's suitors at the palace. He loses a boxing match to the disguised Odysseus.

**Ismarus** (Is'-ma-rus): Island near Troy.

**Ithaca** (Ith'-a-ka): Rocky island home of Odysseus.

**Jason** (Jay'-son): Son of Aeson and leader of the Argonauts.

**Lacedaemon** (La-ke-deye'-mon): Sparta. City and kingdom of Menelaus.

**Laertes** (Lay-er'-teez): Son of Arcesius; husband of Anticleia and father of Odysseus and Ctimene.

**Laestrygonians** (Leye-stri-goh'-ni-unz): Giant cannibals who eat part of Odysseus' crew and destroy all the ships but Odysseus'.

**Lampetië** (Lam-pe'-ti-ee): Daughter of Helios and Neaera. When Odysseus' men slaughter Helios' cattle, the nymph tells her father.

**Leda** (Lee'-da): Wife of Tyndareus; mother of Castor, Polydeuces, Clytemnestra, and Helen.

**Leocritus** (Lee-o'-kri-tus): Suitor killed by Telemachus.

**Leodes** (Lee-oh'-deez): Suitor with prophetic gifts, killed by Odysseus.

**Leto** (Lee'-toh): Titan goddess. Daughter of Coeus and Phoebe; mother of Artemis and Apollo.

**Leucothea** (Lew-ko-thee'-a): Literally, "White Goddess," another name for the sea-goddess Ino.

**Malea** (Ma-lay'-a): Cape on the southeast tip of the Peloponnese known for its difficulty in navigation.

**Marathon** (Ma'-ra-thon): Attic city northeast of Athens.

**Maron** (May'-ron): Priest of Apollo at Ismarus who gives Odysseus the wine that is used to intoxicate the Cyclops.

**Medon** (Mee'-don): Ithacan herald who remains faithful to his lord, Odysseus, and is spared when the suitors are killed.

**Megapenthes** (Me-ga-pen'-theez): Son of Menelaus by a slave woman. His name means "great sorrow," presumably because Menelaus was unable to have children with Helen after the birth of Hermione. He marries the daughter of Alector on the day that Telemachus arrives in Sparta.

**Megara** (Me'-ga-ra): Daughter of Creon and the wife of Heracles.

**Melanthius** (Me-lan'-thi-us): Odysseus' goatherd; son of Dolius. He aligns himself with the suitors while Odysseus is away and insults his master, who is disguised as a beggar. He is killed for his disloyalty.

**Melantho** (Me-lan'-thoh): Daughter of Dolius; sister of Melanthius; handmaid of Penelope. She becomes the mistress of Eurymachus during

Odysseus' absence and a deceitful antagonist. Telemachus hangs her for her betrayal.

**Memnon** (Mem'-non): Son of Dawn and Tithonus; nephew of Priam. He kills Nestor's son Antilochus and in turn is killed by Achilles. Zeus grants him immortality when he dies.

**Menelaus** (Me-ne-lay'-us): Son of Atreus and Aerope; brother of Agamemnon; ruler of Lacedaemon; husband of Helen.

**Mentes** (Men'-teez): Taphian captain, son of Anchialus, in whose form Athena first appears to Telemachus.

**Mentor** (Men'-tor): Close friend of Odysseus who is to look after the household during Odysseus' absence. Athena often appears in his form.

**Minos** (Meye'-nos): Son of Zeus and Europa; king of Crete; husband of Pasiphae; father of Ariadne, Phaëdra, and Deucalion; brother of Rhadamanthus. After his death he becomes a judge of the dead in Hades.

**Muses** (Mu'-zez): Goddesses of the arts who inspire poets and musicians. Daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne.

**Mycenae** (Meye-see'-nee): Ancient city in Argos ruled by Agamemnon.

**Mycene** (Meye-see'-neh): Legendary daughter of Inachus. The namesake of Mycenae.

**Myrmidons** (Mur'-mi-donz): A people inhabiting southern Thessaly. Achilles' crack troops in the *Iliad*.

**Nausicaa** (Naw-si'-kay-a): Phaeacian princess; daughter of Alcinous and Arete.

**Nausithous** (Naw-si'-tho-us): Son of Poseidon and Periboea; father of Alcinous. He leads the Phaeacians to Scheria where they find a peaceful existence.

**Neleus** (Neel'-yoos): Son of Poseidon and Tyro; brother of Pelias; father of Nestor.

**Neoptolemus** (Nee-op-to'-le-mus): Son of Achilles and Deidameia.



**Nericus** (Nee'-ri-cus): A coastal town in western Greece once conquered by Laertes.

**Neriton** (Nee'-ri-ton): A thickly forested mountain on Ithaca.

**Nestor** (Nes'-tor): Son of Neleus and Chloris; king of Pylos. He fights in the Trojan War, although already an old man, and is known for his valuable counsel. Father of Peisistratus, Thrasymedes, and Antilochus.

**Noemon** (No-ee'-mon): Wealthy Ithacan who, inspired by Athena, lends Telemachus a ship to sail to Pylos. His name means "thoughtful."

**Ocean**: The river encircling the earth. Son of Uranus and Earth; husband of Tethys.

**Odysseus** (O-dis'-yoos): Son of Laertes and Anticlea; husband of Penelope; father of Telemachus. *Odysseus* may mean either "giver of woe" or "woeful one."

**Oedipus** (Ee'-di-pus): Son of Laius and Epicaste who unknowingly kills his father and marries his mother.

**Ogygia** (Oh-gi'-ja): Mythical island where the nymph Calypso resides.

**Olympus** (O-lim'-pus): Mount Olympus, the tallest mountain in Greece, believed to be the abode of the gods.

**Ops** (Ops): Father of Eurycleia, nurse to Odysseus and Telemachus.

**Orestes** (O-res'-teez): Son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. He avenges his father's murder by killing his mother and her lover, Aegisthus.

**Orion** (O-reye'-on): Mythical hunter famed for his size and handsome looks. The goddess Dawn falls in love with him and bears him away to her island, Ortygia. The other gods become envious of the love affair and urge Artemis to slay the hunter.

**Pallas** (Pal'-as): Epithet of the goddess Athena that may mean "maiden" or "weapon-brandishing."

**Pandareus** (Pan-dar'-yoos): A king of Miletas in Crete; father of Aedon. He steals a golden dog from the temple of Zeus in Crete, and consequently both he and his wife are killed.

**Paphos** (Pa'-fos): A city on the southern coast of Cyprus and an important center for the cult of Aphrodite.

**Patroclus** (Pa-tro'-klus): Son of Menoetius. Greek warrior of the Myrmidon contingent at Troy and dear friend of Achilles. He rallies his Achaean comrades by donning Achilles' armor but is then killed by Hector.

**Peirithous** (Peye-ri'-tho-us): Son of Ixion and king of the Lapiths. The centaur Eurytion becomes drunk and attempts to abduct his fiancée Hippodamia during their wedding. This causes the war between the Lapiths and the Centaurs.

**Peisander** (Peye-sand'-er): One of Penelope's suitors.

**Peisistratus** (Peye-sis'-tra-tus): Youngest son of Nestor who accompanies Telemachus to Sparta.

**Peleus** (Pee'-li-as): Husband of the sea-goddess Thetis and father of the hero Achilles.

**Penelope** (Pe-ne'-lo-pee): Daughter of Icarius and Periboea; wife of Odysseus; mother of Telemachus.

**Perse** (Pur'-see): Daughter of Oceanus and mother of Circe by Helios.

**Persephone** (Pur-se'-fo-nee): Daughter of Demeter and Zeus; wife of Hades; queen of the Underworld.

**Perseus** (Purs'-yoos): A son of Nestor (not to be confused with the son of Zeus and Danae, the hero who beheads Medusa).

**Phaeacia** (Fee-ay'-sha): Island inhabited by the Phaeacians. Also called Scheria.

**Phaeacians** (Fee-ay'-shunz): The people who inhabit Phaeacia (sometimes called Scheria). As descendants of Poseidon they are loved by the gods and have remarkable seafaring abilities. According to legend, they have ships that move without the aid of rudder or sail.

**Phaedra** (Fay'-dra): Daughter of Minos and Pasiphae. Wife of Theseus but falls in love with his son Hippolytus and hangs herself. Odysseus is visited by her ghost in the Underworld.

**Pharos** (Fa'-ros): An island off the coast of Egypt where Proteus and his seals reside.

**Phemius** (Fee'-mi-us): Son of Terpius; a bard in Ithaca. Although he is forced to entertain the suitors, he remains faithful to the house of Laertes. Odysseus spares him because of his fidelity.

**Pherae** (Feh'-ree): Town between Pylos and Sparta where Telemachus and Peisistratus stay on their way to Sparta.

**Philoctetes** (Fi-lok-tee'-teez): Son of Poias and great archer hero. On his way to Troy a serpent bites him. The smell of the festering wound is so foul that the Greeks abandon him on the island of Lemnos. However, it was pre-determined that Troy would not fall without his help.

**Philoetius** (Fi-lee'-tee-us): Cowherd who remains faithful to Odysseus.

**Phoebus** (Fee'-bus): An epithet of Apollo meaning "bright," identifying him with the sun.

**Phoenicia** (Fee-ni'-sha): A country on the Mediterranean coast in Syria. The Phoenicians were known for being skilled seafarers and traders.

**Phorcys** (For'-kis): Sea-god; father of Thoösa; grandfather of Polyphemus.

**Pleiades** (Plee'-a-deez): A constellation of seven stars used by ancient seamen for nocturnal navigation. The Pleiades were originally the seven daughters of Atlas and Pleione.

**Polybus** (Pol'-i-bus): Father of Eurymachus; Theban man visited by Menelaus and Helen; Phaeacian craftsman; one of Penelope's suitors killed by Eumaeus.

**Polydamna** (Po-li-dam'-na): Egyptian wife of Thon who supplies Helen with herbal somnifers.

**Polydeuces** (Po-li-dyoo'-seez): Son of Leda and Tyndareus; brother of Helen; twin brother of Castor. He is known for his skill as a boxer.

**Polyphemus** (Po-li-fee'-mus): One of the Cyclopes, son of Poseidon and Thoösa. This one-eyed giant consumes some of Odysseus' men after he traps them in his cave. To escape from the cave, Odysseus and his men drive

a heated pole into Polyphemus' only eye. As punishment for his son's blinding, Poseidon torments Odysseus until he reaches Ithaca.

**Poseidon** (Po-seye'-don): God of the sea. Son of Cronus and Rhea; brother of Zeus, Hades, and Hera; father of the Cyclops Polyphemus.

**Priam** (Preye'-am): King of Troy; son of Laomedon and Strymo; husband of Hecuba; father of Hector and Paris. He is killed by Neoptolemus as Troy falls to the Greeks.

**Proteus** (Proh'-tyoos): A shape-shifting sea-god; son of Oceanus and Tethys; father of Eidothea. Also known as the "Old Man of the Sea." He is generally associated with the island of Pharos.

**Pylos** (Peye-los): City on the southwest coast of the Peloponnese ruled by Nestor.

**Pyriphlegethon** (Peye-ri-fle'-ge-thon): One of the three rivers near the entrance to Hades.

**Rhadamanthus** (Ra-da-man'-thus): A son of Europa and Zeus and brother of Minos. Because he is a fair king, he is granted eternal life in the Elysian fields.

**Rhexenor** (Rex-ee'-nor): Son of Nausithous; brother of Alcinous; father of Arete.

**Scheria** (Ske-ri'-a): The island inhabited by the Phaeacians.

**Scylla** (Sil'-a): The cave-dwelling monster possessing female attributes from the waist up but six dog heads and a dozen canine feet from the waist down. *Scylla* is Greek for "she-pup." She inhabits the cliff across the strait from Charybdis.

**Scyros** (Skeye'-ros): Island in the Aegean where Achilles is hidden to prevent him from going to the Trojan War.

**Sirens** (Seye'-rens): Singing creatures with female heads and breasts, and large birdlike bodies. They lure sailors to their island with an irresistible song.

**Sisyphus** (Si'-si-fus): Son of Aeolus, and a king of Corinth. He was condemned to spend eternity in Hades perpetually pushing a huge stone up a hill.

**Sparta** (Spar'-ta): City in the southwest Peloponnese that was ruled by Menelaus.

**Styx** (Stix): One of the rivers that flows near Hades. When gods swear by this river their oaths are irrevocable.

**Tantalus** (Tan'-ta-lus): Father of Pelops and Niobe; mythical king of Phrygia. He was forced to suffer in Hades with everlasting hunger and thirst for trying to serve the gods the mortal flesh of his son Pelops.

**Taphians** (Ta'-fi-unz): The inhabitants of Taphos, a seafaring people ruled by Mentos. Taphos is a city on the west coast of Greece.

**Telamon** (Tel'-a-mon): Father of the hero Ajax.

**Telemachus** (Te-lem'-a-kus): Son of Odysseus and Penelope. His name means "battle from afar."

**Telemos** (Te'-le-mus): A seer among the Cyclopes who had warned Polyphemus that he would lose his eye to a mortal named Odysseus.

**Telepylus** (Te-le'-pi-lus): The fortress of the Laestrygonians.

**Tenedos** (Te'-ne-dos): A small island off the coast of Asia Minor.

**Themis** (The'-mis): Titan goddess of law and order. Daughter of Uranus and Gaia.

**Theoclymenus** (Thee-oh-kleye'-me-nus): A seer in exile to whom Telemachus gives passage to Ithaca.

**Theseus** (Thees'-yoos): Athenian hero; son of Aegeus. He slays the Minotaur with the help of Minos' daughter Ariadne, who had fallen in love with Theseus.

**Thetis** (Thee'-tis): A sea-goddess, one of the Nereids. Daughter of Nereus and Doris; wife of Peleus; mother of Achilles.

**Thoösa** (Tho-oh'-sa): A nymph; mother of Polyphemus by Poseidon.

**Thyestes** (Theye-es'-teez): Father of Aegisthus and brother of Atreus.

**Tiresias** (Teye-ree'-si-as): The blind seer from Thebes whose shade counsels Odysseus in the Underworld.

**Tithonus** (Ti-thoh'-nus): Son of Laomedon and husband of Dawn.

**Tityus** (Ti'-ti-yus): A giant and son of Gaia. He attempted to rape Leto. He was killed and was eternally punished by two vultures that tore at his liver.

**Trinacia** (Tri-nay'-sha): Island where Helios' cattle pastured.

**Tritogeneia** (Tri-to-ge-nee'-a): Epithet of Athena meaning "third born."

**Trojans** (Troh'-junz): The inhabitants of Troy.

**Troy** (Troy): City in northwestern Asia Minor; ruled by Priam; conquered by the Greeks in the Trojan War. Site at which the *Iliad* takes place.

**Tyndareus** (Tin-da'-ri-us): Husband of Leda; father of Castor, Polydeuces, and Clytemnestra; foster father of Helen.

**Zeus** (Zyoos): The supreme god of Olympus, known as the father of gods and men. Son of Cronus and Rhea; husband and brother of Hera; father of Athena, Aphrodite, Ares, Apollo, Artemis, Hephaestus, and others.

# Suggestions for Further Reading

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## B. On the *Odyssey*

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This generous abridgment of Stanley Lombardo's translation of the *Odyssey* offers more than half of the epic, including all of its best-known episodes and finest poetry, while providing concise summaries for omitted books and passages. Sheila Murnaghan's Introduction, a shortened version of her essay for the unabridged edition, is ideal for readers new to this remarkable tale of the homecoming of Odysseus.

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